

CONTESTED MEMORIES



**POLES AND JEWS DURING THE
HOLOCAUST AND ITS AFTERMATH**

Edited by **JOSHUA D. ZIMMERMAN**

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To the late Jan Karski (1914–2000), courier for the Polish government-in-exile during the Second World War, who tried to alert the world to the tragedy of Polish Jewry. The light of his legacy will forever pierce the darkness of that era.

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PREFACE

This collection of essays, representing three generations of Polish and Jewish scholars, explores core controversies in the existing historiography of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War. The areas of contention are dealt within a chronological framework consisting of different parts. First, we address the period between the final years of the Second Polish Republic, which saw the deterioration of Polish-Jewish relations in the late 1930s, and the German-Soviet partition of Poland between September 1939 and June 1941. During this time, before the conceptualization and implementation of the Nazi Final Solution, Polish and Jewish historians agree that while the Poles saw both Nazis and Soviets as equal enemies, the Jews saw one enemy: the Nazis. In a time of national catastrophe for the Poles—that is, the destruction of the Polish state after twenty short years of independence—the widely held perception that Jews as a group welcomed the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland undoubtedly exacerbated relations between the two peoples. The precise nature of Jewish attitudes to the Soviet occupation remains a subject of scholarly debate and is treated in this volume.¹

Meanwhile, in German-occupied central and western Poland during the period 1939–1941, the Poles not only sustained massive losses during the September 1939 Campaign, but became the subject of brutal persecution. Poles were the first targets of the Nazi attempt to create an area for “German colonization” (*Lebensraum*); moreover, in the first seven months of occupation, the German occupying forces murdered—execution style—some ten thousand Polish priests, teachers, journalists, academics, and political leaders in their campaign to liquidate the Polish intelligentsia. They built a concentration camp in the south-western Polish town of Oświęcim, which the Germans renamed Auschwitz, specifically for Polish political prisoners, and they closed down Polish institutions of secondary and higher education.

Nazi Jewish policy during this time was also brutal. It saw thousands of Jewish deaths due to sporadic German violence, the extension of anti-Jewish laws into occupied Poland, including obligatory external markings, compulsory



Poland after the Second World War (From God's Playground, by Norman Davies © 1982, Columbia University Press. Reprinted with the permission of the publisher.)



Poland under the German Occupation (From God's Playground, by Norman Davies © 1982, Columbia University Press. Reprinted with the permission of the publisher.)

ghettoization, near starvation food-rationing, and the expropriation and considerable damage done to Jewish property, including the burning down of the Hakhmei Yeshiva in Lublin. And yet, the Nazis had not yet decided on mass murder as their solution to the “Jewish question.” For this reason, Poles did not adequately appreciate the long-term implications of Nazi Jewish policies. In this part, historians explore with scholarly rigor what the sources reveal about changing Polish attitudes to Jews during the first two years of the Second World War.

The second portion of the collection, which forms the core subject of this book and is the most delicate and sensitive area, explores Polish-Jewish relations between the German invasion of Soviet Russia in June 1941 and the liberation of the death camps in 1944 and 1945. Here, eminent scholars analyze three aspects of Polish-Jewish relations and mutual perceptions: (1) institutional Polish responses to Nazi Jewish policy, including that of the Polish government-in-exile in London, the Polish underground inside occupied Poland, and the Polish Catholic Church; (2) the destruction of Polish Jewry and Polish popular opinion, which touches on the question of Polish aid, Polish betrayal, and Polish inaction; and (3) contemporary Jewish perceptions of the Poles, a particularly important aspect of the book since popular Jewish perceptions of this period stem, in large part, from postwar survivor testimony rather than contemporary sources.

Finally, we conclude with new research on Polish-Jewish relations in the aftermath of the Holocaust, from 1945 to the present day. The period immediately following the war, which saw the outbreak of anti-Jewish violence, the mass emigration of Jews, and the consolidation of Communist rule, is treated in detail, as is the subject of Polish-Jewish relations in post-Communist Poland.

The fact that Polish and Jewish scholars in this volume agree upon the basic historical facts is a sign of significant progress over the preceding four and a half decades. For the first time, the dialogue between scholars is changing from one of emotionally charged exchanges to one of detached scholarly inquiry. Yet differences in approach are still apparent, particularly on the question of the relationship between Polish behavior and attitudes in the prewar, wartime, and postwar periods. Many Polish scholars maintain that Polish behavior toward Jews during the Second World War should be measured by the options available to them under the specific conditions of the German occupation, in which aid to Jews was punishable by death and in which Poles faced Nazi persecution. In contrast, Jewish scholars maintain that Polish wartime behavior cannot be viewed in isolation from the interwar and postwar periods, which saw the deterioration of the position of the Jews under Polish rule in general and the escalation of anti-Jewish violence in particular.

This volume represents a broad range of perspectives, both Jewish and Polish. Its contributions are highly original, make use of previously unused source material, and provide us with new perspectives on Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust. It is my hope that this collection will inspire further scholarly work and dialogue on this most difficult subject. A study by Polish-born

American scholar Anna Cienciala encapsulates the conceptual breakthrough in scholarly discourse that is now taking place: “In the present, new climate of searching for the truth, it is to be hoped that the old, negative Polish and Jewish stereotypes of each other will gradually fade away.” She continues:

Thus, the Polish perception of most Jews as communists before, during and after World War II, and especially as collaborators with Soviet authorities against the Poles in 1939–1941, should be abandoned. Poles should recognize the enormity of the Jewish Holocaust in Polish lands during the war, as well as the lack of concern and help on the part of the vast majority of the Polish population. At the same time, the general, Jewish perception of the vast majority of Poles as vicious anti-Semites who willingly aided the Germans in murdering Jews should be abandoned. It will hopefully be replaced by an understanding of the extreme conditions that Poles lived under during the German occupation—though nothing can compare with the scale and horror of the Jewish Holocaust.²

—J.D.Z.

Notes

1. For an important recent article on the topic, see Anna M. Cienciala, “Poles and Jews under German and Soviet Occupation, September 1, 1939–June 22, 1941,” *Polish Review* 4 (2001): 391–402.
2. *Ibid.*, 402.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAN	Archive of New Records, Warsaw
AK	Home Army
AURM	Archive of the Office of the Council of Ministers
AŻIH	Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw
BBWR	Non-Party Bloc of Cooperation with the Government
BŻIH	Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw
CAW	Central Military Archive
CKŻP	Central Committee of Jews in Poland
Delegatura	The government-in-exile's political directorate in Nazi-occupied Poland or National Party (Stronnictwo Narodowe)
Endecja	National Democratic Party
FOP	Front for the Rebirth of Poland
MAP	Ministry of Public Administration
MBP	Ministry of Public Security
MO	People's Militia
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (Soviet)
ONR	National Radical Camp
OZON	Camp of National Unity
PKWN	Polish Committee of National Liberation
PPS	Polish Socialist Party
PRM	Presidium of the Council of Ministers

PZPR	Polish United Workers' Party
ZboWiD	Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy
Żegota	Council for Aid to the Jews
ŻIH	Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw
ŻKN	Jewish National Committee
ŻOB	Jewish Fighting Organization
ZWZ	Union for Armed Struggle

Contested Memories

INTRODUCTION

*Changing Perceptions in the
Historiography of Polish-Jewish
Relations during the
Second World War*



JOSHUA D. ZIMMERMAN

The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which it is very hard to eradicate.

—E. H. Carr, *What Is History?*

For a half-century since the Second World War, Poles and Jews remained bitterly divided over the events that transpired during the German occupation. With little physical contact between the two peoples during the Cold War, and the imposition of ideological conformity inside Communist Poland, dialogue on the war years was severely hampered. In its place, knowledge about the Holocaust in postwar Poland was largely confined to oral histories and official narratives that emphasized shared Polish-Jewish suffering and Polish aid extended to Jews. Jewish perceptions during this time were similarly shaped by survivor testimonies that often spoke of widespread Polish antisemitism and indifference to the fate of European Jewry during the Holocaust.

Thus, for some forty-five years after the Holocaust, the literature on wartime Polish-Jewish relations was divided into two mutually exclusive camps: apologetics and condemnation. When referring to Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War, historians in the apologetics camp described Polish aid to Jews as well as Polish passivity due to Nazi reprisals as the principal Polish responses to the Nazi genocide carried out on Polish soil.¹ In stark contrast to the negative image of wartime Polish behavior abroad, a widely respected

Polish historian maintained, in a 1979 scholarly monograph, “The murder of Jews in Poland deeply shocked the Polish public, which condemned it in no uncertain terms. On this matter both the underground parties and individual persons expressed their feeling. . . . The Polish public was not satisfied with expressing its fury, but hastened, as much as its very modest opportunities allowed, to help the Jewish population in various ways, despite the danger involved. . . . Only a few individuals, from society’s dregs, agreed to collaborate, that is, only totally corrupt members of the underworld. The Polish public looked upon this with total abhorrence and disgust.”² Historians of the apologetics camp also argued that the Jewish characterization of Polish indifference, passivity, and even satisfaction in the face of Nazi genocidal policies constituted not history but merely the dissemination of anti-Polish stereotypes. By failing to inform readers of the severity of Polish suffering under German and Soviet rule, the annihilation of close to three million Catholic Poles during the war, or the enormous risks involved in aiding Jews, Jewish historians had failed to rise above their passions and present an impartial rendering of the facts. As the British historian Norman Davies concluded in his 1982 study:

Some Jewish writers . . . have spread the view that the Poles actually rejoiced at the fate of the Jews or at best were indifferent “bystanders.” . . . [Such views] overlook the realities of life under the Nazi Terror, which was so much fiercer and more protracted in Poland than anywhere in Europe. . . . In a world where immediate death awaited anyone who contravened Nazi regulations, the Nazis could always exact a measure of cooperation from the terrified populace. The Polish slave doctor in Auschwitz, the Polish partisan in the woods, the Polish peasant fearful of reprisals, cannot be judged by the morality of free men in normal times.³

During the same period, which saw a tremendous growth in Holocaust studies and Holocaust awareness in the West, historians in the condemnatory camp accused the Poles of downplaying the impact of antisemitism on wartime Polish attitudes and behavior, of falsifying the historical record by exaggerating the aid extended to Jews, and of failing to acknowledge any moral complicity for the widespread inaction and reported indifference of Poles as bystanders, or, even worse, as collaborators, in the mass extermination of European Jewry on occupied Polish soil. In their 1986 monograph on the subject, Israeli historians Israel Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski came to the following conclusion: “The over-all balance between the acts of crime and acts of help, as described in the available sources, is disproportionately negative. . . . To a significant extent, this negative balance is to be accounted for by the hostility towards the Jews on the part of large segments of the Polish underground, and, even more importantly, by the involvement of some armed units of that underground in murders of Jews.”⁴

An important aspect of the Jewish historiographical consensus was a general assumption that informed much of Holocaust literature. Namely, the no-

tion, put forward by Helen Fein in her important study, *Accounting for Genocide*, that there was a direct correlation between the success of prewar antisemitism among the various European nations and the scale of victimization under German rule.⁵ In the case of Poland, some Jewish historians argued that Polish responses were even central to the success of Nazi genocidal policies. Writing in the early 1970s, one Israeli scholar maintained that the attitude of the Polish population “decisively affected” the fate of Polish Jewry during the Holocaust. “Anybody acquainted with the relevant documents,” Shmuel Krakowski wrote, “must be aware of the contribution made by deep-rooted Polish antisemitism to the successful consummation of the Nazi extermination policies.”⁶ In his standard Holocaust history textbook, used widely throughout North American college campuses, Yehuda Bauer similarly argued that “the attitude of the surrounding Polish population was an important determining factor in the fate of the Jews.”⁷ This view was also articulated by Jewish writers and intellectuals. Some forty years ago, Elie Wiesel put forth the thesis that “only where the indigenous populations were themselves eager to become ‘Judenrein’ did the cattle trains with their suffocating human cargo roll swiftly into the night.”⁸ Rafael Scharf, a native of Cracow who emigrated to England in 1938 and who continues to write widely on Polish-Jewish affairs, reflected a broad consensus among Jews when he wrote:

The time has come to face the obstinate fact that the stage for the extermination of the Jews proved to be conveniently chosen. It is clear that the genocide could not have been carried out with the same implacable thoroughness and efficiency, down to the last child, if it had not been correctly assumed that the victims would be considered strangers in their own land, with whose fate their co-citizens would not identify. The searching out, the assembly, the transport . . . *would not have been possible* if the local population had felt that this was being done to their own flesh and blood. They would not have looked on, indifferently, or perhaps with a pious sigh, month after month, on the passing cattle trains and on the rising smoke of the ovens—but at whatever cost and risk would have disrupted the process.⁹

Jewish historiography thus tended to mirror popular memory about the degree of antisemitism in wartime Poland. But Jewish historians have also directly contradicted some aspects of Jewish popular memory relating to Poland and the Holocaust. Nowhere is the gap between Holocaust historiography and Jewish memory more pronounced than in the popular theory, still often heard, that Hitler built the death camps in Poland because of Polish antisemitism, a notion that Holocaust historians have consistently rejected. “The Germans used Poland as their gigantic laboratory for mass murder, not (as has sometimes been wrongly charged) because the Nazis counted on Polish anti-Semitism,” Lucy Dawidowicz maintained, “but because that was where most of Europe’s Jews

were concentrated and where the Germans expected to settle for a long time.”¹⁰ Yehuda Bauer similarly argued that “there is no evidence to support the theory that strong local traditions of antisemitism in the East were another factor in the location of the death camps. Direct control in an area where public opinion had no weight was an important factor, as was the accessibility of railroads.”¹¹ At the 1988 international conference on Polish Jewry in Jerusalem, Israel Gutman concurred: “I also do not agree with the thesis, which one often hears, that the Nazi authorities set up the death camps on Polish soil because of the anti-Jewish attitudes of Poles. No one asked the Poles if they wanted Treblinka and Birkenau in their country, and the occupation in Poland was one of the most brutal and arbitrary forms of oppression in Nazi-occupied Europe.”¹²

Polish historians and intellectuals continued to challenge basic assumptions underlying the condemnatory camp.¹³ First, they argued that the scale of anti-Jewish sentiment among the wartime Polish population had been exaggerated.¹⁴ Second, and more critically, they argued that the attitude of Poles under the conditions of the German occupation had little if any impact on the fate of Polish Jewry. W. Bartoszewski wrote in the 1960s, “It must be said clearly [that] there was no possibility of saving all, or even the majority, of the Jews imprisoned in the ghettos and the camps, just as it was not possible to save hundreds of thousands of Poles imprisoned and murdered in the center of Poland in Auschwitz.”¹⁵ In response to the depiction of Poles in Claude Lanzman’s landmark nine-hour documentary, *Shoah*, a major Polish intellectual figure similarly maintained in the mid-1980s, “[T]he conception and the execution of the ‘Final Solution’ was exclusively the doing of the Nazis, and I do not see why anybody else should be burdened with co-responsibility for it. . . . Polish anti-Semitism has nothing to do with the Holocaust.”¹⁶ Davies similarly argued that the destruction of Polish Jewry during the Holocaust was “in no way connected” to Polish attitudes before or during the war.¹⁷ In large part, the Polish historiographical consensus reflected popular views. In a 1989 editorial in the *Washington Post*, a Polish-American maintained that while no one could deny the existence of antisemitism in prewar Poland, “to allege a link between prewar Polish anti-Semitism and the German extermination of Jews is to indulge in the worst kind of . . . fallacy.”¹⁸ In short, the plight of Poles and Jews under German rule constituted two separate, mostly unconnected histories. This “narrative of denial,” as one scholar has recently called it, continued to shape Polish collective memory of the war years throughout the Communist period and into the 1990s.¹⁹

The last two decades, however, have seen a rapid breakdown of this divorce of Polish and Jewish memory. Several developments in the 1980s led to a greater spirit of reconciliation and openness in scholarly circles, and to a shift in Polish perceptions of Jews, Judaism, and Jewish culture. These included a succession of international conferences on Polish-Jewish studies, most notably in Oxford (1984), Boston (1986), and Jerusalem (1988); the appearance of *Gal-Ed* (Tel Aviv) and *Polin* (Oxford), scholarly journals devoted to Polish-Jewish

studies; and the foundation of four new research centers for Polish-Jewish studies (in Jerusalem, Oxford, Cracow, and Warsaw).²⁰

One of the most important aspects of the 1980s was the appearance of studies that for the first time subjected commonly held assumptions about wartime Polish behavior to detached scholarly inquiry. Particularly important in this regard were the works of Teresa Prekerowa, Nechama Tec, and Alina Cała, who laid to rest three popular notions: that a significant part of the Polish population aided Jews during the Second World War; that the primary obstacle to Polish aid was the imposition of the death penalty for such an act; and that anti-Jewish beliefs and stereotypes in Polish society were, and continue to be, marginal. Prekerowa sought to determine as scientifically as possible what proportion of the Polish population actively engaged in helping Jews. Estimating that between 160,000 to 360,000 Poles aided Jews, out of an adult Polish population of 15 million, she found that between 1.0 and 2.5 percent of the Polish population provided safe haven to Jews fleeing Nazi persecution.²¹ Even if recent studies reveal that Poland's record was typical for the whole of Nazi-occupied Europe,²² the findings of a respected Catholic Polish historian cannot be dismissed.

Nechama Tec's pioneering study of Christian aid to Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland—based on interviews with Polish rescuers, Jewish survivors, and Jews who survived, thanks to Poles, as well as published and archival materials—found two underlying impediments to aiding Jews. Besides the obvious German threat, Polish rescuers cited fear of denunciation by their neighbors as the second greatest obstacle. “The environment in which Polish rescuers lived was hostile to the Jews and unfavorable to their protection,” Tec found. “Not only did rescuers know that their protection of Jews would meet with Polish disapproval, but many feared that this Polish disapproval would come with actual reprisals.”²³ One rescuer, whose estranged husband threatened to denounce her for taking a young Jewish woman into her care, had the following observation: “My husband hated Jews. Maybe . . . because he did not know them. . . . Antisemitism was ingrained in him. Many Poles feel the way he did. I had to be careful of the Poles.”²⁴

The 1980s also saw the publication of Alina Cała's pioneering sociological study on the image of the Jew in Polish villages and small towns, the stereotypes they contain, and what light they shed on Polish behavior toward Jews during the Holocaust and the immediate postwar period. Based on 184 interviews conducted in the 1970s and early 1980s, Cała found the persistence of traditional Christian anti-Judaism in Polish folk culture, including a surprisingly widespread belief in the medieval blood-libel myth.²⁵

The appearance of important scholarly works in the early and mid-1980s was followed by a series of public debates on wartime Polish-Jewish relations. The first public challenge to the dominant Polish narrative of heroism and martyrology came in 1987 with the publication of Jan Błoński's seminal essay, “The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto.” Writing in the progressive Polish Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Błoński, a professor of literature at the Jagiellonian

University in Cracow, argued that the destruction of European Jewry, although not conceived of or implemented by the Polish nation, had tainted Polish soil forever. As witnesses to that event, Poles “shared responsibility” by failing to do more to prevent Nazi barbarism from achieving its aims. The only way to cleanse Poland and the Polish people from the terrible burden of this history was to “see ourselves in the light of truth.” Carrying out this process of critical self-examination, he wrote, would require nothing less than a “moral revolution.” Inspired by Czesław Miłosz’s wartime poems, “Campo di Fiori” and “A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto,” which had expressed horror at witnessing genocide as passive bystanders and fear for being counted “among the helpers of death,” Błoński boldly declared: “We must stop haggling, trying to defend and justify ourselves. To stop arguing about the things which were beyond our power to do, during the occupation and beforehand. Nor to place blame on political, social and economic conditions. But to say first of all—Yes, we are guilty.” Błoński further argued that Polish responses to the Holocaust could not be explained by the particular conditions of the German occupation alone, but by prewar attitudes to Jews, attitudes that had developed over centuries of Jewish-Polish coexistence:

We did take Jews into our home, but we made them live in the basement. When they wanted to come into the drawing-room, our response was—Yes, but only after you cease to be Jews, when you become “civilised.” This was the thinking of our most enlightened minds, such as Orzeszkowa and Prus. There were those among Jews who were ready to adhere to this advice. No sooner did they do this, when we started in turn talking of an invasion of Jews, of the danger of their infiltration of Polish society. . . . Eventually, when we lost our home, and when, in its premises, the invaders set to murdering Jews, did we show solidarity towards them? How many of us decided that it was none of our business? There were also those (and I leave out of [this] account common criminals) who were secretly pleased that Hitler had solved for us “the Jewish problem.”²⁶

It was precisely this inaction, according to Błoński, that made it extremely difficult to avoid some kind of “shared responsibility” for the fate of Jews. Participation and shared responsibility are not identical. Błoński wrote, “Our responsibility is for holding back, for insufficient effort to resist. Who of us could claim that there was sufficient resistance in Poland?” He probed the Polish readership, asking why resistance to Nazi genocidal policies was “so weak.” And here, Błoński challenged the underlying assumptions that had informed Polish memory of the Holocaust by maintaining that prewar Polish antipathy to Jews had shaped wartime Polish responses: “More significant is the fact that if only in the past we had behaved more humanely, had been wiser, more magnanimous, genocide would perhaps have been ‘less imaginable,’ would probably have been

considerably more difficult to carry out, and almost certainly would have met with much greater resistance than it did. To put it differently, it would not have met with the indifference and moral turpitude of the society in whose full view it took place."²⁷

Błoński's article sparked the first nationwide debate on wartime Polish-Jewish relations in postwar Poland. More than anything, it was the phrase "we are guilty" that proved most objectionable to the Polish public. The journal itself, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, received close to two hundred letters that, taken together, revealed for the first time a genuine sample of the varieties of Polish views outside of the official Communist interpretation. The longtime editor of the weekly newspaper, the late Jerzy Turowicz, commented that the reaction to Błoński's article "was greater than anything known in the course of the 42 years during which I have edited that paper."²⁸

While most responses were negative, respondents sympathetic to Błoński's views were as revealing about the varieties of Polish opinion as were those who fiercely opposed the new line of thinking. "In my view," a Polish woman observed, "antisemitism [during the war] played a role not only in the handing over of Jews but also in the appalling indifference of a large section of the society."²⁹ Equally revealing were negative responses, the most articulate of which defended the old narrative. "I am proud of my nation's stance in every respect during the period of occupation and in this I include the attitude towards the tragedy of the Jewish nation," wrote the late Władysław Siła-Nowicki, a prominent lawyer, wartime resistance fighter, and anti-Communist (in every respect a Polish patriot). "Obviously," he continued, "the attitudes towards the Jews during that period do not give us a particular reason to be proud, but neither are they any grounds for shame, and even less for ignominy. Simply, we could have done relatively little more than we actually did."³⁰

The Jewish encounter with Poland since the mid-1980s has similarly led to more positive attitudes toward Poles, Polish culture, and Polish history; and this, in turn, has led to an increased appreciation of the particularly harsh experience that the Poles endured during the Second World War. At an international conference on Polish-Jewish studies, held at Oxford University in 1984, Rafael Scharf, who earlier expressed great bitterness at wartime Polish behavior, now appeared more self-reflective. "It is the tragedy of the Poles," Scharf remarked, "that in the midst of the cruel visitations of fate, they were exposed to an unprecedented moral trial. They did not come through it victorious. It can be argued that nobody would have come through it any better, but that is little comfort for the Jews."³¹ Antony Polonsky, one of the conference organizers and an important figure in the revival of Polish-Jewish studies, similarly declared in Oxford, "[I]t does not seem to me really that the behavior of the Poles as a whole was significantly different from that in other European countries."³²

The most authoritative and direct challenge to the prevailing Jewish view came in 1988 at the international conference on the history and culture of Polish Jews held in Jerusalem. There, at an emotionally charged gathering of Polish

and Jewish scholars, the doyen of Holocaust studies, Israel Gutman, himself a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, made the following remarks:

Sometimes I hear Jews accusing the Poles of deliberately not helping them even though they could have done so. Such observations are expressions of pain, which eclipse a sensible attitude. *More could certainly have been done to save Jews, but the Poles in the conditions of the occupation could not have fundamentally changed the fate of the Jews.* . . . I shall permit myself to say more—there is no moral imperative which demands that a normal mortal should risk his life and that of his family to save his neighbor. Are we capable of imagining the agony of fear of an individual, a family, which selflessly and voluntarily, only due to an inner human impulse, bring into their home someone threatened with death? Are we capable of understanding the pressure of those fears . . . when all that was needed was one house search for both the hider and the hidden to have an end put to their lives? The Poles should be proud that they had so many just lights. . . . But by the force of events, *such willingness to sacrifice could have been only a marginal phenomenon.*³³

Gutman's statement represented one of the first revisions to the prevailing view in Jewish historiography, one that posited a direct correlation between the behavior and attitude of bystanders and the success of Nazi extermination policies. In particular, comparative studies have revealed a multiplicity of factors accounted for the fate of different Jewries during the Holocaust. The most formidable barrier to rescue was the type and character of German military and civilian rule (which varied from country to country). As Nechama Tec has argued, where German occupying forces had total control over government machinery, they used all the means at their disposal to exterminate the Jews without any toleration for individual or group opposition.³⁴ Other factors include the degree of Jewish acculturation in a particular country, the size of the Jewish community, the level of prewar antisemitism among the local population, and geography. Timing was also significant. In those countries where the Nazi Final Solution was applied prior to the formation of an effective underground resistance movement (Holland, in particular), the Jews were deprived of aid from the only anti-German force in the country.³⁵ All these factors reveal that the most optimal conditions for aiding Jews existed in countries such as Denmark and Italy, whose Jewish populations were highly acculturated and numerically small, where local antisemitism was weak, and where the government had either wide autonomy (Denmark) or only a relatively brief period of German occupation (Italy). Poland, on the other hand, suffered five continuous years of German occupation, became unwillingly the site for the Nazi Final Solution, contained Europe's largest and least acculturated Jewish community, had a high level of prewar antisemitism, and experienced direct German civilian and military rule without any semblance of autonomy. Unlike in Western Europe, where

the punishment for harboring Jews was not severe, Poles were subjected to the death penalty for the same act.³⁶ Acknowledgment of these additional factors in accounting for the fate of different European Jewries has had an impact on the specific debate over wartime Polish-Jewish relations

In an important and challenging recent essay, “Beyond Condemnation, Apologetics and Apologies,” Antony Polonsky called for a reevaluation of our understanding of Polish society and the Holocaust. While not discounting the importance of local attitudes to the Jews in various Nazi-occupied countries or the degree to which Polish antipathy toward Jews prevented a greater degree of wartime aid, Polonsky expressed serious reservations about what he called “counterfactual” history. “Discussing the actions of the ‘bystanders,’” Polonsky argued, “we are principally arguing not about what they did, which is well known and documented, but about ‘sins of omission’—what they did not do.” He continued:

Yet “counterfactual” history is highly problematic, and attempts to speculate on what might have been are open to serious question. More important is the tendency to shift the overwhelming responsibility for the genocide away from the Nazi leadership and its henchmen. There is a natural human inclination to search for “secondary responsibility.” Because the guilt of the Nazis is so clear and has been so strongly emphasized, explanations that stress this factor to the exclusion of all others come to seem banal and oversimplified. Nonetheless, much valuable research has been conducted on the role of the Germans in the last ten years . . . and it mostly sustains the thesis that the overwhelming responsibility indeed falls upon the Nazis.³⁷

Several academic studies among Jewish scholars in the 1990s reflected this softening of the Jewish camp. Michael Steinlauf’s important work, for example, stressed that Polish wartime responses to the destruction of Polish Jewry were “immensely varied,” a view that goes against the grain of popular Jewish perceptions.³⁸ While acknowledging that the majority of Poles remained passive in the face of Nazi genocidal policies, Steinlauf nonetheless insisted that such behavior was “no different, in this respect, from other non-Jews under Nazi occupation.”³⁹ In another study from the 1990s, Rabbi Byron L. Sherwin, a professor of Jewish philosophy in Chicago, argued that the historical record of Polish behavior toward Jews during the Holocaust often contradicts popular Jewish memory of those years. In reality, he maintained, the perceptions of both groups have been dominated by “selective stereotyping.” In a bold statement, Sherwin declared, “The popular perception among Jews that the Poles played a crucial role in the mass murder of Jews during the Holocaust must be unmasked as a fiction, as a revisionist history of the Holocaust, and should be discredited;” he continued, “The tendency among Jews to stereotype Poles as the perpetrators of the Holocaust not only distorts but obscures the enormous suffering of Poles during the Nazi occupation . . . [and this] should not be obfuscated nor ignored.”⁴⁰

While the Błoński debate and a softening of the Jewish camp represented

a major breakthrough, the majority of Polish society and scholars retained the old “narrative of denial” throughout most of the 1990s. Yet the 1990s constituted a critical transition period in Polish historiography, one that saw the appearance of a rich body of scholarly studies on the history and culture of Polish Jewry in general and on the subject of the Holocaust in particular.⁴¹ In particular, it saw the emergence of a new generation of Polish scholars, born in the 1960s and early 1970s, who have begun reevaluating the war years in the light of new archival source material and in the spirit of detached scholarly inquiry. Distant from the actual events and operating in a new democratic Poland, they are fearlessly challenging the narrative of denial. Nowhere is this better reflected than in the statement by a Polish journalist in the mid-1990s. He declared, “When, without fear of anyone’s hysterical reaction, will it be possible . . . to learn the whole truth about the *szmalcownicy* [blackmailers], about the trade called *pożydowski* [in abandoned Jewish possessions], and about the sometimes tragic fate of Jews already after the war?”⁴²

Polish historiography of the 1990s often addressed sensitive topics that were formerly taboo in Communist Poland. These included scholarly investigations into the scale of antisemitism in the periods 1918–1939 and 1945–1947 as well as the 1968 antisemitic campaign that led to the emigration of an estimated three-fourths of the remaining Jewish population in Poland. Pioneering works on the phenomenon of anti-Jewish violence in postwar Poland—the Kielce and Cracow pogroms in particular—appeared.⁴³ Moreover, several important studies on official and popular Polish attitudes to Jews in interwar Poland also appeared, including monographs on the Catholic Church and the emergence of anti-Jewish violence in the late 1930s.⁴⁴ This new body of historical material has led to a gradual reinterpretation of twentieth-century Polish-Jewish relations in general and of the war years in particular as a more clear picture emerges. Polish literary historian Maria Janion recently examined the character and dimension of anti-Jewish ideas in interwar Poland. Using Daniel Goldhagen’s idea of “eliminationist antisemitism” as a conceptual tool, she found that the majority of Polish society, in the late 1930s, had come to the conclusion that the only viable solution to the Jewish problem was voluntary emigration or compulsory removal.⁴⁵ Janion concluded that this only begged the question of what would have followed had Poland’s history not been interrupted in September 1939.

The transition period of the mid-1980s and 1990s, in which a small part of the Polish cultural and intellectual elite engaged in critical self-examination of the Polish past, entered an entirely new phase with the publication of Jan Gross’s revelatory book, *Neighbors*.⁴⁶ Based on court trials, archival documents, and Jewish and Polish testimonies, *Neighbors* chronicles the horrific events that took place in the eastern Polish town of Jedwabne when, in July 1941, two weeks following the Soviet withdrawal of the city, local Poles, encouraged but not forced by Nazi officials, went on a murderous rampage that left an estimated sixteen hundred Jews dead. In painstaking detail, Gross chronicles, through a body of

corroborating testimonies, the details of the bloody murders. His conclusion is that the pogrom in Jedwabne must be followed by a total reevaluation of Polish perceptions of the Second World War. “First and foremost,” Gross writes, “I consider this volume a challenge to standard historiography of the Second World War, which posits that there are two separate wartime histories—one pertaining to the Jews and the other to all the other citizens of a given European country subjected to Nazi rule.” He continues: “Conventional wisdom maintains that only ‘socially marginal’ individuals in Polish society—the so-called *szmalcownicy*, or ‘scum,’ who blackmailed Jews, and the heroes who lent them a helping hand—were involved with the Jews. . . . [O]ne certainly needs no great methodological sophistication to grasp instantly that when the Polish half of a town’s population murders its Jewish half, we have on our hands an event patently invalidating the view that these two ethnic groups’ histories are disengaged.”⁴⁷

Appearing first in Polish in the spring of 2000, *Neighbors* sparked the most wide-ranging debate in postwar Poland. What distinguished this public debate was the consensus in the mainstream Polish press on the basic accuracy of Gross’s findings, even if some details and Gross’s methodology continue to inspire scholarly dialogue.⁴⁸ The fallout has been tremendous and has led to what one figure has called the end of the “myth of Polish innocence.”⁴⁹ A former editorial board member of the Polish journal *Znak* drew the following conclusion: “The book by Jan Gross, *Neighbors*, calls into question a view I had so far held, and which could be put in a nutshell as follows: in Poland, antisemitism has existed and was commonly accepted; however, it has nothing to do with the extermination of Jews under Nazi occupation. This belief represented a paradigm, that is, a basic, unquestionable tenet of my understanding of Polish-Jewish relations and modern history. Now, this paradigm of innocence has crumbled.”⁵⁰

Father Stanisław Musiał, a longtime activist in Catholic-Jewish dialogue and an editor for *Tygodnik Powszechny*, wrote that *Neighbors* “created a shock in Polish public opinion like no other book in the last half-century.” The realization of Polish responsibility for the Jedwabne pogrom was so painful, Musiał continued, that it was undermining a commonly held Polish understanding of its modern history. “Poles have believed,” Musiał wrote, “in the myth that they have been solely victims . . . for the last two hundred or so years and that they themselves never wronged anyone. . . . The work of Professor Gross has shattered this myth.”⁵¹ In the February 2001 issue of *Znak*, devoted entirely to Jedwabne, a Polish professor of sociology and philosophy similarly wrote that *Neighbors* “refutes definitively the comfortable and calming conviction that Poles were only witnesses, that they were never responsible for the crime committed against Jews during the Second World War.”⁵² For other Poles, the revelation of the Polish massacre of sixteen hundred Jews during the Second World War has led to a broader rethinking of Poland’s place in the family of democratic European nations. As Agnieszka Magdziak-Miszewska, former deputy editor-in-chief of *Znak* and currently the Polish consul-general in New York City, concluded:

I am convinced that *Neighbors* is a book which had to be written and that is needed. Facing up to the painful truth of Jedwabne is, in my conviction, the most serious test that we Poles have had to confront in the last decade. How well we do on this test, will shape—and I do not hesitate in using these big words—our place in the family of free, democratic nations. Each of these nations has in its history dark or, at times, even black stains, but each of them, sooner or later, has been able to come to terms with these. . . . Many Poles helped Jews, and among them there were those who lost their own lives doing so. If I want to have a moral right to justified pride in the rescuers, then I must admit to a sense of shame over the killers.⁵³

The Jedwabne controversy has led to an extraordinary degree of national self-reflection. As the eminent Polish historian Marcin Król recently commented, shame for past wrongs is an important aspect of national memory. But in Poland today, “practically no one is ashamed for anything. The communists are not ashamed for communism. . . . Wartime collaborators are not ashamed for collaboration.” He continued: “And finally, who was ashamed that they did not help Jews during the war years? Naturally there was the threat of the death penalty and heroism can not be demanded of anyone. But did these people feel uneasy for not extending a helping hand when their neighbors were being deported? Poles were forced to be witnesses to different horrific things. . . . But as witnesses many, who were indifferent and passive during the war years, haven’t a trace of shame or doubt, nor has that experience led them to serious reflection.”⁵⁴

With regard to Jedwabne, Król revealed how *Neighbors* has divided Polish society into two camps, comparable, some argue, to the Dreyfus Affair in France one century ago: “I now want to have nothing in common not only with those who committed murder in Jedwabne, but also with those who have doubts when it is necessary to apologize and bow their heads in shame.”⁵⁵

There is no doubt that the dramatic developments of the 1990s and the appearance of *Neighbors* have had a concrete effect on Polish public opinion. Two opinion polls conducted in post-Communist Poland are revealing. Whereas, in 1992, 47 percent of Poles surveyed believed Auschwitz was a place primarily of Polish martyrdom, that number declined to 32 percent in 1995, while the percentage of Poles who believed Auschwitz was a place primarily of Jewish martyrdom more than doubled in the same period.⁵⁶ And in a recent survey gauging Polish public reactions to Gross’s book *Neighbors*, 68 percent of young Poles responded “yes” to the question of whether or not it is necessary “to expose the facts regarding the participation of Poles in the destruction of Jews during the Second World War.”⁵⁷

Notes

1. During Communist rule in Poland, the government censor allowed only publications highlighting Polish aid to Jews, works that, notwithstanding the intentions of the authors, conveniently fit into the official narrative of Polish wartime heroism and resistance. The first work, by T. Berenstein and A. Rutkowski of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, appeared in 1963. In the late 1960s, four works documenting Polish aid to Jews were published. See *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej*, 2 vols. (Cracow: Znak, 1966 and 1969), by W. Bartoszewski and S. Lewin, which appeared in English as *Righteous among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews, 1939–1945* (London: Earls Court Publications, 1969); and *The Samaritans: Heroes of the Holocaust* (New York: Twayne Publisher, 1970). Also see Szymon Datner's *Las sprawiedliwych* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1968); and *Kto ratuje jedno życie—Polacy i Żydzi, 1939–1945* (London: Orbis, 1968), by the Polish military historian Kazimierz Iranek-Osmiecki, which appeared in English as *He Who Saves One Life* (New York, Crown Publishers 1971).
2. Czesław Łuczak, *Polityka ludnościowa i ekonomiczna hitlerowskich Niemiec w okupowanej Polsce* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1979), 257, cited in Shmuel Krakowski, "Relations between Jews and Poles during the Holocaust: New and Old Approaches in Polish Historiography," in *Holocaust Literature*, ed. Saul S. Friedman (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 205.
3. Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2: 263.
4. Israel Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski, *Unequal Victims: Poles and Jews during the Second World War* (New York: Holocaust Publications, 1986), 246.
5. Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (New York: Free Press, 1979).
6. Shmuel Krakowski, "The Slaughter of Polish Jewry—a Polish 'Reassessment,'" *Wiener Library Bulletin* 28/29 (1972–1973): 13–14.
7. Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (Danbury, Conn.: Franklin Watts, 1982), 284.
8. Elie Wiesel, "Eichmann's Victims and the Unheard Testimony," *Commentary* 32 (December 1961): 511.
9. Rafael Scharf, "Janusz Korczak and His Time," *Jewish Quarterly* (summer 1977), reprinted in R. Scharf, *Poland, What Have I to Do with Thee . . . : Essays without Prejudice* (London and Portland, Oreg.: Vallentine Mitchell, 1998), 128–129, italics added.
10. Lucy Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 92–93.
11. Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*, 200–201.
12. Cited in Antony Polonsky, ed., "My Brother's Keeper?" *Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 202.
13. It should be noted, however, that in the first years after the war, when Poles enjoyed relative freedom of expression, as well as during the period of the post-Stalinist thaw in the late 1950s, a few Polish intellectuals produced self-critical accounts of wartime Polish behavior. These included the works of Jerzy Andrzejewski, Zofia Nałkowska, and Kazimierz Wyka.
14. Jerzy Turowicz, editor of the progressive Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*, wrote in the 1950s: "In a very large part of Polish society [during the Second World War],

- the last vestige of antisemitism disappeared to give way to a sense of solidarity. There came to the surface a will, very often effective, to help the persecuted." See Jerzy Turowicz, "Antysemitizm," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 24 March 1957, cited in Antony Polonsky, "Beyond Condemnation, Apologetics, and Apologies: On the Complexity of Polish Behavior towards the Jews during the Second World War," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 13 (1997): 195.
15. W. Bartoszewski, "On Both Sides of the Wall (Poles—Jews—the Occupation)," in *Righteous among the Nations*, by Bartoszewski and Lewin, lxxxvi.
 16. Jerzy Turowicz, "'Shoah' and Poland," *New York Review of Books* (8 May 1986), 52–53. One year later, Turowicz slightly qualified his view by arguing that "there is no *direct* connection between Polish anti-semitism and the Jewish Holocaust" (emphasis in the original). See *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 5 April 1987, reprinted in Polonsky, ed., "My Brother's Keeper?" *Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 140.
 17. Davies, *God's Playground*, 2: 263.
 18. Charles Chotkowski, "The Nuns at Auschwitz Are Not Intruders," *Washington Post*, 5 September 1989, A19.
 19. The term "narrative of denial" was recently used by Joanna Michnic-Coren in her "The Troubling Past: The Polish Collective Memory of the Holocaust," *East European Jewish Affairs* 29, nos. 1–2 (1999): 75–84.
 20. These conferences led to the publication of pioneering scholarly monographs: *The Jews in Poland*, ed. C. Abramsky, M. Jachimczyk, and A. Polonsky (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986); *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, ed. Y. Gutman, E. Mendelsohn, J. Reinharz, and C. Shmeruk (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 1989); and *The Jews in Old Poland, 1000–1795*, ed. A. Polonsky, J. Basista and A. Link-Lenczowski (London and New York: I. B. Tauris & Co., 1993). While *Gal-Ed* began publication in Hebrew in 1973, it did not become a bilingual English-Hebrew journal until the 1980s.
 21. Teresa Prekerowa, "'Sprawiedliwi' i 'bierni,'" *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 29 March 1987, reprinted in Polonsky, "My Brother's Keeper?" 73–74. The figures used are drawn from Prekerowa's earlier monograph on Żegota, the Council for Aid to the Jews, a Polish organization that operated inside occupied Poland. See Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie, 1942–1945* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982).
 22. One study estimates that rescuers as a whole constituted under 1 percent of the European populations under German occupation. See David P. Gushee, *The Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 10.
 23. Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 58.
 24. *Ibid.*, 54.
 25. Alina Cała, *The Image of the Jew in Polish Folk Culture* (Jerusalem: Magnus Press, 1995), originally published in 1987 by Warsaw University's Institute of Sociology as *Wizerunek Żyda w polskiej kulturze ludowej* (Warsaw, 1987; reprinted in 1992).
 26. Jan Błoński, "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto," *Polin* 2 (1987): 329–330. The article was first published on 11 January 1987 in *Tygodnik Powszechny*. For an important summary of Błoński's essay and its impact, see Antony Polonsky, "'Loving and Hating the Dead': Present-Day Polish Attitudes to the Jews," *Religion, State and Society* 20, no. 1 (1992): 69–79.

27. Błoński, "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto," 331.
28. Cited in Polonsky, "My Brother's Keeper?" 215.
29. Helena Balicka-Kozłowska, "Kto ratował i kogo ratowano," *Więź* 4 (1988), cited in Krakowski, "Relations between Jews and Poles during the Holocaust," 207–208.
30. W. Siła-Nowicki, "Jan Błoński w odpowiedzi," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 22 February 1987, reprinted in Polonsky, "My Brother's Keeper?" 62.
31. Scharf, *Poland, What Have I to Do with Thee*, 76–77.
32. "Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War: A Discussion," *Polin* 2 (1987): 350.
33. Cited in Polonsky, "My Brother's Keeper?" 203–204, italics added.
34. Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, 10.
35. *Ibid.*, 9.
36. Although precise figures are not known, at least two to three hundred Poles (and probably more) were murdered for harboring Jews. For a particularly horrible case of the public execution of one Polish family (along with the four Jews they were hiding), see Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, 63–64.
37. Polonsky, "Beyond Condemnation, Apologetics and Apologies," 193.
38. Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 30.
39. *Ibid.*, 41.
40. Byron L. Sherwin, *Sparks amidst the Ashes: The Spiritual Legacy of Polish Jewry* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 132–133.
41. For a summary of recent Polish scholarship on Jewish topics, see Antony Polonsky, "Oltre il filosemitismo e l'antisemitismo verso la normalizzazione: La "questione ebraica" in quindici anni di vita pubblica in Polonia (1985–2000)," *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 68, no. 1 (January–April 2002): 79–111; and Jerzy Tomaszewski, "Historiografia polska o zagładzie," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 2 (2000): 155–169.
42. Marcin Piasecki, "Odwaga sumienia," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 10 Feb. 1995, 16, cited in Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 128.
43. Bożena Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946* (Wrocław: Bellona, 1992); S. Meducki and Z. Wrona, *Antyżydowskie wydarzenia kieleckie 4 lipca 1946 roku: dokumenty i materiały*, 2 vols. (Kielce: Urząd Miasta Kielce, 1992–1994); Anna Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie 11 sierpnia 1945 roku* (Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 2000); and Julian Kwiek, "Wydarzenia antyżydowskie 11 sierpnia 1945 r. w Krakowie: Dokumenty," *BŻIH* 1 (2000): 77–89.
44. The most important study on the interwar Polish Catholic Church and the Jews is Anna Landau-Czajka's *W jednym stali domu: Koncepcje rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej w publicystyce polskiej lat 1933–1939* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton and Instytut Historii PAN, 1998), parts of which were presented in English as "The Jewish Question in Poland: Views Expressed in the Catholic Press between the Two World Wars," *Polin* 11 (1998): 263–280; also see Jan J. Lipski, *Katolickie Państwo narodu polskiego* (London: Aneks, 1994). For an important work on the subject in English, see Ronald Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism: Poland, 1933–1939* (Chur, Switzerland: Hardwood, 1994). On anti-Jewish violence between the wars, the most important study is Jolanta Żyndul's *Zajścia antyżydowskie w Polsce w latach 1935–1937* (Warsaw: Fundacja im. K. Kelles-Krauzy, 1994). Outside Poland, the subject was treated in Emanuel Melzer's *No Way Out: The Politics of Pol-*

- ish Jewry, 1935–1939* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997), 53–80; as well as in Joanna Michlic-Coren's "Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1918–1939 and 1945–1947," *Polin* 13 (2000): 34–61. On other aspects of antisemitism in interwar Poland, see Olaf Bergmann, *Narodowa Demokracja wobec problematyki żydowskiej w latach 1918–1929* (Poznań: Wydaw. Poznańskie, 1998); and Monika Natkowska, *Numerus clauses, getto ławkowe, Numerus nullus, "paragraf aryjski": antysemityzm na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim, 1931–1939* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1999)
45. Maria Janion, "Spór o antysemityzm: sprzeczności, wątpliwości i pytania," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 22 October 2000.
 46. Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).
 47. *Ibid.*, 8–9.
 48. For a sophisticated critique of *Neighbors*, see Piotr Wróbel, "Neighbors Reconsidered," *Polish Review* 4 (2001):419–129.
 49. Marta Petrusiewicz, in an interview by Ruth E. Gruber for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, in <http://www.jewsweek.com/society/055.htm>.
 50. Halina Bortnowska, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27–28 January 2001, reprinted in *Thou Shalt Not Kill: Poles on Jedwabne*, ed. William Brand (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 182.
 51. Ks. Stanisław Musiał, "Jedwabne to nowe imię holokaustu," *Rzeczpospolita*, 10 July 2001, A7.
 52. Z. Krasnodębski, *Znak* (February 2001), reprinted in *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, ed. Brand, 217.
 53. Agnieszka Magdziak-Miszewska, *Znak* (February 2001), reprinted in *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, ed. Brand, 310–311.
 54. "Akt skruchy i co dalej? W rozmowie redakcyjnej udział biorą: Marcin Król, Paweł Śpiewak i Marek Zaleski," *Res Publica Nowa* 7 (July 2001): 11–12.
 55. *Ibid.*, 6.
 56. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 142.
 57. Jerzy Sławomir Mac, "Homo jedwabicus," *Wprost*, 22 July 2001, 26.

PART I



The Prewar Legacy

CHAPTER 1

Emigration versus Emigrationism

ZIONISM IN POLAND AND THE TERRITORIALIST PROJECTS OF THE POLISH AUTHORITIES, 1936–1939



EMANUEL MELZER

The situation of Polish Jews deteriorated sharply following Marshal Józef Piłsudski's death in May 1935. As long as Piłsudski was in power many Jews believed he was the only figure capable of maintaining public order and restraining antisemitic currents flowing deep within Polish society at that time. The political organization BBWR (the Non-Party Bloc of Cooperation with the Government) was based on a wide spectrum that included divergent groups and social classes of the population, all pulling in different directions. Many Jews, especially those from assimilationist and orthodox circles, joined it as well. The purpose of Piłsudski and his so-called Sanacja camp was to weaken the political power of the radical antisemitic camp of Endecja (National Democrats), headed by Roman Dmowski. This was a historical clash between two conflicting concepts: Piłsudski's notion of the superiority of the multinational state over the nation and Dmowski's idea of the Polish nation as the supreme bearer of the sovereignty of the state. But already in the last years of Piłsudski's rule, Sanacja came closer ideologically to the basic Endek concept of a national state. This of course had repercussions on the official policy toward Jews and other minorities in the 1930s.

The years 1936–1939 were marked by the radicalization of antisemitism in the ruling Sanacja camp during the whole post-Piłsudskite period. Wishing to prevent the disintegration of their group, the Sanacja leaders officially sanctioned anti-Jewish activity, while expressing no more than mild disapproval of its

more extreme violent manifestations.¹ The radical change in the official attitude to the Jewish problem may be illustrated by comparing two official statements of the interwar period. General Felicjan Sławoj-Skądkowski, who was appointed prime minister in 1936, defined his government's anti-Jewish economic policy in a declaration in the Sejm: "An economic struggle—by all means but without causing any harm."² This declaration gave a green light to the low-level administration throughout the country to encourage anti-Jewish economic attempts in various forms. Skądkowski's statement was in complete contrast to the official declaration of Prof. Kazimierz Bartel, who became prime minister after Piłsudski's coup d'état in May 1926, about his government's strong opposition to any anti-Jewish economic discrimination.

Beginning in 1936, anti-Jewish economic policy intensified by means of a systematic and official campaign. The Polish authorities began subsidizing Polish merchants through low-interest credits obtained from state banks by encouraging them to transfer their businesses from the western to the eastern provinces of the country. Such a transfer would replace Jewish merchants. Various Sanacja circles were involved directly in the anti-Jewish economic boycott in Poland. At that time the policy of the Polish authorities was to discriminate against Jews by means of indirect parliamentary legislation or by administrative decrees. Examples include the 1936 law restricting ritual slaughter and official administrative instructions on separate seats for Jewish students in Polish academic institutions (the so-called "ghetto benches"). Government circles tried to convince Polish private opinion that the policy of systematic and controlled anti-Jewish discrimination was preferable and more effective than sporadic anti-Jewish outbreaks and excesses, such as the violent eruptions in Przytyk and Mińsk Mazowiecki in 1936 and Brześć and Częstochowa in 1937. Such incidences, the government argued, merely united the Jews in organizing assistance for the rehabilitation of the affected Jewish communities.

The radicalization of antisemitism within the ruling Sanacja governmental camp was soon practically expressed in the creation of OZON (Camp of National Unity) under the patronage of the president of the state, Ignacy Mościcki, and the new strongman, Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły. OZON, contrary to its predecessor BBWR, which had disbanded, exposed an anti-Jewish platform in its founding declaration of February 1937 and in its subsequent "13 articles on the Jewish problem in Poland" of May 1938.³ Thus, during the whole post-Piłsudski period (1935–1939), antisemitism became a central political issue in the inter-party struggle and especially in the confrontation between the two competing camps—the ruling Sanacja and the opposition Endecja. Meanwhile, under the leadership of Cardinal August Hlond, the official hierarchy of the Catholic clergy in Poland likewise adopted an anti-Jewish line when it supported the economic boycott while opposing acts of anti-Jewish violence. On the other hand, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) stood up against all forms of the government's antisemitic policy.

Polish Government Proposals for Mass Jewish Emigration

From 1936 until the outbreak of the Second World War, Polish authorities propagated the issue of Jewish mass emigration at home and abroad as the only viable solution to the Jewish problem in Poland. Moreover, the emigrationist idea was also presented as a solution to the main economic and social problems that were concurrently troubling Poland. The government occasionally used the problem of the urgent necessity of Jewish mass emigration in order to justify the demand for colonies and mandate territories.⁴

The government circles found it convenient in their domestic policy to divert the Polish public's attention from real problems, such as the immediate realization of agrarian reforms in the country, by focusing concern upon the "Jewish question." In this way, the regime was absolved from developing a constructive domestic socioeconomic policy according to the spirit of its constitution, which declared the equality of all its citizens, including the Jews. However, their so-called solution to the Jewish question was raised precisely during a period in which virtually all potential outlets for massive emigration were closed to the Jews.

By presenting the problem of Jewish emigration from the country as an international one which required the cooperation and intervention of the colonial powers, the League of Nations, and the United States, the Polish government deviated from its stable principle that the Jewish question in the country was an internal one in which no outside elements had the right to interfere. This principle was emphasized in September 1934 by Poland's official abrogation of the International Treaty for the Protection of National Minorities, signed in Versailles in 1919.⁵

The Polish Foreign Ministry and especially its consular division were charged with the task of formulating the emigration policy, investigating the various possibilities for Jewish emigration, and conducting negotiations with the appropriate bodies.⁶ With regards to the domestic front, the official emigrationist policy toward the Jews, which was clearly reflected in OZON's above-mentioned "13 articles on the Jewish problem," contained in itself quite a clear message to the Polish public: in the eyes of the ruling circles, the Jews in Poland were a superfluous, unproductive, alien, and even a destructive element.

Meanwhile, Poland was especially interested in the problem of Palestine, which, since almost all other avenues of immigration were barred to Jews, was relatively a major absorption center.⁷ The Polish foreign minister, Józef Beck, presented the issue of Mandatory Palestine to the League of Nations not only as a British or a Middle Eastern problem, but mainly as an East European and especially a Polish one.⁸ The Polish authorities thus supported Zionist demands during the deliberations of the British Peel Commission in 1936 and 1937 as well as in its subsequently published plan on the partition of Palestine. The Polish government even intervened actively on this issue in direct negotiations with the British Foreign and Colonial Offices.⁹ They also aided representatives of

the Hagana and the Irgun Tsvai Leumi (Etzel) by secretly selling them army equipment in Poland, by conducting army training courses in the “Hehalutz-Hachshara” camps in Poland, and by allowing the organization of “illegal Aliya” to Palestine.¹⁰

But after a short time, in view of the severe restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine as a result of the Arab uprising in that country (1936–1939), the Polish Foreign Office came to doubt the practical possibility of carrying out the Partition Plan of Palestine recommended by the Peel Commission. Therefore Polish diplomats were instructed to actively search for new and additional potential areas for concentrated Jewish settlement in South America, in the Middle East outside Palestine, and on the African continent. Polish representatives at the League of Nations spoke about the urgent need to locate these alternative territories for Jewish emigration from their country.¹¹

Among the various territorialist plans which were considered, and I am referring only to those which were initiated by official Polish circles and not by various Jewish persons or organizations,¹² two of them were very seriously scrutinized and analyzed by the parties concerned and on the highest level of governmental authority. The first proposed settling Polish Jews on the island of Madagascar, then under French rule. It was widely publicized in the press and discussed at conferences in Paris, *inter alia*, between Foreign Minister Beck and the French prime minister, Leon Blum, in October 1936, as well as during the visit of French foreign minister Delbos to Warsaw in December 1937. In the meantime, the Polish government sent a special commission of inquiry to Madagascar, but all the three members of this commission agreed, each of them in a separate report, that the practical possibilities of settling Polish Jews or any “white immigrants” there were very limited.¹³

The second plan, in contrast to the previous one, was secretive, more ambitious, and much more serious. It was a project initiated at the end of 1938 in talks between Jerzy Potocki, the Polish ambassador to the United States, and a group of influential American Jewish financiers, including Bernard Baruch, Edward M. Warburg, and Lewis L. Strauss. In the first stages they entertained the idea that Poland, with the help of Jewish financiers, would acquire Angola from Portugal, and use that territory to absorb Jewish mass emigration from Poland.¹⁴

Earlier that year, President Roosevelt disappointed the Polish government by organizing, in July 1938, an international conference on refugees in Evian, France. The conference dealt only with the emigration problem of Jewish refugees from Germany and not with the problem of Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe and especially from Poland. Wishing to compensate the Poles, President Roosevelt, after some modifications, subsequently adopted the Angola plan. In its initial stages, Roosevelt consulted with British prime minister Chamberlain and Foreign Minister Halifax. As previously mentioned, all these discussions about the Angola project were conducted in strict secrecy up to the outbreak of war and even until the spring of 1940, when Western Europe became an active theater of war. At that time, Roosevelt hoped that American neu-

trality still would make it possible to carry out the Angola plan. In the course of the secret conversations on Angola, Polish representatives pledged that they would raise neither political nor territorial demands with regard to this country.¹⁵ The deliberations on this important plan continued in London with the heads of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, which had been organized at the end of the Evian Conference.

Roosevelt instructed Myron Taylor, his delegate to this committee, to strongly support the Angola plan as a "Supplemental Jewish Homeland." In one of his instructions to Taylor, he wrote, "I cannot emphasize too strongly the importance I attach to the creation of a 'Supplemental Jewish Homeland' as a step essential to the solution of the Jewish problem, or my belief that Angola offers the most favorable facilities for its creation."¹⁶ It is quite possible that Roosevelt envisaged using the Angola project to divert pressures to open the gates of the United States to large-scale Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe at that time. He also thought that the British government would be interested in cooperating on this project in order to limit Zionist pressures on immigration to Palestine as a sole Jewish national home, especially at the end of 1938 and the beginning of 1939, when the Peel Commission's Partition Plan was practically abandoned.

Among the various Jewish emigration plans that the Polish authorities initiated and considered in the late 1930s, I would like to mention a rather interesting one to settle Polish Jews in the Sinai Peninsula. The Sinai plan was submitted in January 1938 by Alfons Kula, the Polish charge d'affaires in Cairo. This plan, if it had been realized, could have been very attractive to the Zionists because of the close proximity of this territory to Palestine.¹⁷ On the basis of personal contacts with the local Anglo-Egyptian administration and with the "rich and influential Jewish elements in Egypt," Kula indicated the favorable conditions for realizing his plan in reports to Warsaw.¹⁸ In the same year, the Polish consul in Tel Aviv, Tadeusz Piszczkowski, delivered to his government a written survey of the possibilities of Jewish emigration to Transjordan, Syria, and Iraq.¹⁹

In the spring of 1939, Poland's situation was seriously deteriorating in the wake of the immediate German menace. The Polish government was thus very anxious to obtain military guarantees from Britain in the event of a German invasion. Even in this atmosphere of imminent war, Polish foreign minister Beck, at his fateful meeting in April 1939 with British prime minister Chamberlain and British foreign minister Halifax in London, insisted that the problem of Jewish emigration from Poland be placed on the agenda. Under this pressure the British reluctantly agreed to devote some time to discussions on this issue at the conference.²⁰

Jewish Responses to the Polish Government's Territorialist Projects

The pressure for a mass Jewish emigration from Poland in the post-Piłsudski period provoked the resistance of a wide spectrum of Jewish circles in Poland, including Zionists, whose own policies were dubbed "emigrationism

without emigration.” The Jewish press condemned all the plans for emigration outside Palestine as utopian while arguing that they encouraged antisemitic feelings in Poland. Some local Zionist newspapers noted the discrepancy between the need for a free emigration and “emigrationism” as a political slogan which implied that the Jews in Poland were an alien and harmful element.

The internal Jewish debate in Poland—of whether Jewish organizations should oppose the government’s aim of encouraging Jewish emigration or if they should cooperate in finding suitable sites for a resettlement—was a furious one. In the beginning, the Marxist and anti-Zionist Bund, the orthodox Agudat Yisrael, the Folkspartay, and various assimilationist circles strongly opposed the government’s emigrationist slogans.²¹ On the other hand, the Zionist leadership in Poland was divided over how to respond to the government’s efforts to find possible territories outside Palestine or even in Palestine itself without a corresponding declaration that the status of the Jews as equal citizens of the Polish state would not be impaired. But the Polish authorities, under pressure from extremist circles who sought to use anti-Jewish discrimination as a means of imposing emigration on the Jews, were unwilling to make this simultaneous declaration.

Some of the Zionist parties in Poland worried as well that their collaboration with the government on an emigrationist policy in the absence of realistic possibilities for a Jewish mass emigration would lead only to a heightened antisemitic atmosphere in the country.²² As a result, many Zionist circles in the late 1930s adopted an anti-emigrationist attitude in order to avoid the appearance of cooperating with the government.²³

In March 1937 the Convention of the Zionist Federation, in former Congress Poland, enacted a resolution strongly opposing the government’s territorial plans.²⁴ Speaking at the convention, Zionist Sejm deputies Izaak Rubinsztein and Emil Sommerstein stressed their belief that the government was acting in an unconstitutional, unrealistic, and delusive way by using antisemitism as an incentive for Jewish mass emigration instead of dealing with the Jewish problem constructively.²⁵ But in practice, the Zionist leadership in Poland was ready to cooperate with the Poles on all matters concerning emigration to Palestine, despite the fact that the Polish government did not accept the Zionists’ previous conditions.

In comparison, the Palestinocentric World Zionist Organization, through the Jewish Agency, was ready to cooperate fully and without any hesitation with the Polish authorities on the Palestine issue. This cooperation, especially in the diplomatic arena, was very significant on the highest level. Chaim Weizmann, president of the Jewish Agency and of the World Zionist Organization, maintained direct contact with Polish foreign minister Beck and especially with the Polish ambassador in Britain, Edward Raczynski, in order to coordinate their common efforts to apply pressure on the British government during the deliberations on the Peel Commission’s plan for the partition of Palestine in 1937 and 1938.²⁶

The Jewish Agency's position was underscored by Yitzhak Gruenbaum, the former Sejm deputy and Polish-Jewish leader who had emigrated to Palestine in 1933 after he had been elected a member of the Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem. On a visit to Poland in August 1936, Gruenbaum announced that because of the antisemitic pressure upon Jewish sources of livelihood in Poland, the Jewish masses would have to leave this country sooner or later in order to vacate economic positions to the Poles.²⁷ Regarding emigration plans to new territorial sites, he stated officially to Beck that the Jewish Agency had no objection to them as long as their initiators did not approach Jewish institutions with requests for financial assistance in carrying them out.²⁸ The Jewish press in Poland, including some of the Zionist dailies, criticized Gruenbaum's statements, which suggested some objective justification for Polish antisemitism.²⁹ Despite his critics, Gruenbaum stuck to his position and insisted that the Jews acknowledge the necessity of emigration in full cooperation with the Polish authorities.³⁰ A prominent Zionist leader in Poland, Apolinary Hartglas, a follower of Gruenbaum, criticized his teacher's opinion that "superfluous Jews cause antisemitism." Rather, Hartglas claimed, "antisemitism causes superfluous Jews."³¹

Weizmann first learned of the Polish government's proposal to settle Jews in Madagascar in October 1936 while visiting unofficially his personal friend Leon Blum, then the prime minister of France.³² Weizmann responded that this plan was not practical and that Polish Jews would not agree to settle there. On the other hand, he proposed that Blum consider a plan to settle a significant number of Polish Jews on the Syrian coast and in Lebanon, which were at that time under the mandatory rule of France. Such a plan, according to Weizmann, might be especially attractive to the Maronites in Lebanon, on the one hand, and to the Jewish prospective emigrants from Poland, on the other hand, because of the closeness of this territory to Palestine. We do not know anything about Blum's immediate reaction to Weizmann's proposal.³³

The New Zionist Organization (NZO) of the Revisionist movement was even more eager to cooperate with Polish official circles on the Palestine issue than its rival World Zionist Organization.³⁴ Its leader, Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, kept very close relations with the Polish authorities. In one of his frequent visits to Poland in September 1936 he published his "Ten-Year ('Evacuation') Plan" in the Polish conservative daily, *Czas*. According to Jabotinsky's plan, of the 1.5 million Jews whose emigration he sought from Europe to Palestine "on both sides of the Jordan River," 750,000 were to come from Poland.³⁵ Asked by the Polish authorities about his attitude toward the territorialist projects outside Palestine, Jabotinsky's general response was similar to that of Gruenbaum's, but he added that he would support any plan for Jewish emigration to Sinai.³⁶ There were also some indications, from official Polish sources, that, in private conversations, Jabotinsky was not completely opposed to the idea of seeking alternative territories outside of Palestine.³⁷ The bulk of the Jewish press in

Poland attacked Jabotinsky's evacuation plan in spite of his assurances that he implied only voluntary and not forced Jewish emigration from Poland.³⁸

Toward the end of 1938 a major change took place in the manner in which all the parties concerned—the Polish Foreign Ministry, most of the Jewish organizations in Poland, and the international Jewish organizations—related to the problem of Jewish emigration. Not only did a drastic reduction take place in the number of Jewish emigrants from Poland at that time,³⁹ but in October 1938 Nazi authorities expelled about seventeen thousand Jewish Polish citizens, who had been living in Germany, to Poland, and they were added to Poland's Jewish population.⁴⁰

This was also the time when, in London, the British were preparing the Round Table Conference on Palestine, which would likely result in a further limitation of Jewish immigration to that country. The Polish authorities thus expected that the time was ripe for Polish Zionists to change their negative or even passive attitude toward non-Palestinian territorialist programs. They thus initiated the establishment of the Jewish Colonization Committee in Poland (November 1938) under the chairmanship of Rabbi Prof. Moshe Shorr, a historian, former Senate member, and non-party Zionist. Among the committee members were the former Sejm deputies, the Zionists Yehoshua Gottlieb and Henryk Rosmarin, as well as Rabbi Yitshak Meir Lewin of Agudat Yisrael and some assimilationists. Its task was, among others, to maintain contacts with foreign Jewish organizations, to promote Jewish emigration from Poland, and to launch a fund-raising campaign. The Jewish Colonization Committee was also asked to explore possibilities for Jewish emigration.⁴¹

This committee encountered severe criticism directed particularly against Zionist figures who had agreed to join it without authorization from any Zionist body. On 4 January 1939, a conference of representatives of various Zionist parties in Poland (except the right-wing Zionists) declared their strong opposition to the activities of the Jewish Colonization Committee, characterizing it as a tool in the hands of some Polish ruling circles who were aiming at forced Jewish mass emigration from Poland.⁴² The most vigorous opponent of the committee was Moshe Kleinbaum (Sneh), the young and talented successor of Gruenbaum in the Zionist camp in Poland. In a series of articles in the local Jewish press, Kleinbaum condemned the Jewish Colonization Committee, especially its Zionist members, for collaboration with the antisemites "in planning to get rid of the Jews from Poland to some strange and distant territories."⁴³

The comments on the formation of the Jewish Colonization Committee by an objective observer, the United States ambassador to Poland, A. J. Drexel Biddle, are very interesting. In his opinion, the Polish government "supported the establishment of the Committee for the purpose more of satisfying the man on the street than of performing any particularly tactical function. In other words, the Government envisages it is serving (a) on the one hand, as an agency for rallying the support of all factions amongst the Jewish community behind a large-

scale emigration movement and (b) on the other hand, as a tactical move to cushion the force of the anticipated intensification of the current wave of anti-Semitism, and in such light an organization whereto the Government might point as a body engaged in the search of a solution.”⁴⁴ An official delegation of this committee, composed of five members, including two Zionists, Prof. Shorr as chairman, and Rosmarin, was dispatched to London in January 1939 to meet Jewish leaders and representatives of various international organizations. During its stay in London, this delegation was under the strict control of the Polish Embassy and obtained detailed governmental instructions from the Polish Foreign Office concerning its activities there.⁴⁵ Anyhow, in the short period of its existence, the Jewish Colonization Committee did not achieve any positive result.

Conclusions

Summing up, we have to keep in mind that the late 1930s emigrationist dispute between Polish Zionists and the Polish authorities, between Zionists and other Jewish parties, and among Zionists themselves was conducted at a time when the Jewish community in Poland had great difficulty standing up to the offensive directed at it on all sides. This included the economic boycott, discriminating legislation, and hostile administrative decrees. It finally appeared that the so-called different solutions offered for solving the Jewish problem in Poland were to be recognized as self-delusions: the Zionist plan of mass emigration and, second, Bund’s formula, which opposed emigrationism and instead called on Jews to wage a common struggle with the Polish “progressive parties” for equality in the face of an ever increasing hostility.

But in the meantime, the readiness of certain Zionist leaders to cooperate with an antisemitic government to advance their emigrationist ideology negated any possible solution to the Jewish question within Poland. This, in turn, contributed substantially to the Bund’s successes in the late 1930s in the municipal and the Kehillot (Jewish Communities) elections at the expense of the Zionists and Agudat Yisrael.⁴⁶

Paradoxically, the intensification of practical cooperation between the Polish authorities and the Zionist organizations on all issues concerning emigration to Palestine coincided precisely with the radicalization of antisemitism in Polish society. The Bund claimed that Zionist emigrationism considerably strengthened the antisemitic forces in Poland and, in its election campaign propaganda, made use of the terms “antisemitic Zionists” and “Zionist antisemites.”

All these disputes took place in the shadow of further limitations on emigration to Palestine, reflected finally in the British White Paper of May 1939.⁴⁷ Therefore, the organized Zionists’ popularity among Polish Jewry was severely damaged by the eve of the Second World War. Much more important, it seems to me, is the fact that the Polish government’s approach to the Jewish problem in the late 1930s—one which implied that the Jews were superfluous, alien, and

even a destructive element, and therefore had to emigrate en masse from Poland—might have had its repercussions on a part of the Polish population's attitude toward the Jews during the war. I state this with the knowledge that the final catastrophe of Polish Jewry was not an outcome of the radicalization of Polish antisemitism in the years 1936 through 1939.

Notes

1. Among the books that deal with the problem of the radicalization of antisemitism in Poland and its various manifestations during the post-Piłsudski years, see Paweł Korzec, *Juifs en Pologne: La question juive pendant l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1980); Joseph Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland, 1919–1939* (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers, 1983); and Emanuel Melzer, *No Way Out: The Politics of Polish Jewry, 1935–1939* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997).
2. *Sprawozdanie Stenograficzne Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej*, 4 June 1936, col. 7.
3. See the full text of OZON's "13 articles on the Jewish problem in Poland" in *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 3 (1938): 278–279.
4. For details, see Emanuel Melzer, "Ha-diplomatiya ha-polanit u-va'ayat ha-hagira ha-yehudit ba-shanim, 1935–1939," *Gal-Ed* 4–5 (1973): 218–219, 238–241. See also Taras Hunczak, "Polish Colonial Ambitions in the Interwar Period," *Slavic Review* 26 (1967): 651.
5. Melzer, *No Way Out*, 9–10.
6. W. T. Drymmer, "Zagadnienie żydowskie w Polsce w latach, 1935–1939," *Zeszyty Historyczne* 13 (Paris, 1968): 56; and Jerzy Tomaszewski, "Rząd Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej wobec emigracji Żydów," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 4 (1994): 100–101.
7. The official figures on Jewish emigration from Poland (with emigration to Palestine in parenthesis) are as follows: 19,000 (12,700) in 1934; 30,700 (24,800) in 1935; 16,900 (10,600) in 1936; 8,900 (2,900) in 1937; 9,200 (2,500) in 1938. See *Maty Rocznik Statystyczny, 1939* (Warsaw: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1939), 10: 52 (a yearly publication of the Bureau of Statistics).
8. League of Nations, *Official Journal* 18 (Geneva, 1937): 887–903.
9. See "Rozmowa Pana Min. Becka z Min. Edenem w Londynie," November 1936, in the Archive of New Records, Warsaw, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych (hereafter cited as AAN-MSZ), 2293/119. On the conference between the Polish diplomats and the representatives of the British Colonial Office, Shuckburgh and Bennett, at Geneva on 16 April 1937, see AAN-MSZ, 2319/75–78.
10. For further details, see Melzer, *No Way Out*, 142, 147–149, 152–153.
11. See the report and the instructions of Polish deputy foreign minister Jan Szembek to Jerzy Potocki, Polish ambassador in the United States, from 8 January 1938 and 20 May 1938, in the Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford-Ambasada, Poland, box 65, file 4, and box 66, file 7.
12. Those other non-official territorial plans are surveyed in Eliyahu Biniamini, *Medinot la-yehudim* (Tel-Aviv: Sifriyat poalim, 1990).
13. On the Madagascar plan, see details: Leni Yahil, "Madagascar—Phantom of a Solu-

- tion for the Jewish Question,” in *Jews and Non-Jews in Eastern Europe*, ed. Bela Vago and Georg L. Mosse (New York: Wiley, 1974), 316–318; Melzer, “Ha-diplomatiya,” 213–215, 219–220.
14. See the full text of the two cables sent by Potocki to Beck in Melzer, “Poland, the United States, and the Emigration of East European Jewry—the Plan for a ‘Supplemental Jewish Homeland’ in Angola, 1938–1939,” *Gal-Ed* 11 (1989): 81–85.
 15. *Ibid.*, 65.
 16. Cable from Secretary of State Hull in the name of Roosevelt to Taylor in London, 14 January 1939, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1939* (Washington: GPO, 1954–1955), 66–69.
 17. It should be remembered that Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, on his visits to London and Cairo in 1902, seriously considered a similar plan to obtain a charter for a Jewish mass settlement in the El-Arish area on the Sinai Peninsula. He conferred about it with the British colonial secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, and the high commissioner of Egypt, Lord Cromer. See Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 120–122.
 18. “Raport Poselstwa R.P. w Kairze w sprawie projektu Kolonizacji Sinaia,” 28 January 1938, in AAN-MSZ, 9905/38–39.
 19. For Piszczkowski’s detailed report, see “W sprawie chłonności kolonizacyjnej krajów Bliskiego Wschodu,” AAN-MSZ, 9905/28–36.
 20. Melzer, “Ha-diplomatia,” 231.
 21. The alliance of Agudat Yisrael with the governmental camp Sanacja broke down gradually in the post-Piłsudski period. On this process see Gershon S. Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition: Agudat Yisrael in Poland, 1916–1939* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996), 276–280. It is interesting to note that at that time, Minister Beck had spoken at an internal meeting of his senior ministerial staff on the need to draw Agudat Yisrael, “loyal to the state into cooperation with us” on the emigration issue. See “Notatka z Konferencji u Pana Ministra Becka,” 13 November 1937, AAN-MSZ, 10004/6. The Folkspartay was founded in Poland in 1916. It struggled to obtain cultural and secular autonomy for Polish Jews based on the Yiddish language. This party was much weakened in the 1930s. It stood against the propaganda calling upon Jews to emigrate from the country.
 22. These worries were not groundless. Polish ambassador Raczyński held an official meeting with William Strang, the director of the Central Europe Division in the British Foreign Office, on 9 December 1938. Raczyński told him that if some large scheme could not be found to absorb Jewish emigration from Poland, “the Polish government would inevitably be forced to adopt the same kind of policy as the German Government and indeed draw closer to that Government in its general policy.” See Strang’s report on his meeting with Raczyński, Public Record Office, London (hereafter cited as PRO), FO371/22540.
 23. See for example, Mojżesz Kleinbaum, “Pomówmy o emigracji uczciwie i po męsku,” *Ster*; 18 April 1937; on the American Zionists’ attitude to various Polish schemes for Jewish emigration, see Daniel Stone, “Polish Diplomacy and the American Jewish Community between the Wars,” *Polin* 2 (1987): 85.
 24. Deputy Sommerstein’s speech to the Budget Committee of the Sejm, reprinted in *Nasz Przegląd*, 6 March 1937.

25. *Sprawozdanie Sejmu*, 14 February 1937. See also the paper *Haynt*, 19 January 1938.
26. Report by Nahum Goldmann, the representative of the World Zionist Organization and the World Jewish Congress in Geneva, on the meeting between Weizmann and Beck in Geneva on 12 September 1937, in the Central Zionist Archive, Jerusalem (hereafter cited as CZA), S 25/1322.
27. *Haynt*, 6 August 1936.
28. Gruenbaum's report to Nahum Goldmann on his meeting with Beck, 29 October 1936, CZA, L22/201.
29. See the Bundist *Naye folkssaytung*, 4 August 1936, and the Zionist *Chwila*, 6 August 1936.
30. Gruenbaum, "A getzvingener entfer," *Haynt*, 14 August 1936.
31. M. A. Hartglas, "Krokdil-trehren," *Haynt*, 27 September 1936.
32. See note 12.
33. See Weizmann's letter to Blum, 22 October 1936, summarizing their meeting in Paris, in *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann*, ed. Yemima Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1979; New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1979), 17: 365–368. See also Weizmann to Moshe Shertok, 18 October 1936, *ibid.*, 364.
34. The Zionist Revisionists split from the World Zionist Organization in 1935 and founded the New Zionist Organization.
35. Details on his plan are in Melzer, *No Way Out*, 136–137. On the relations between the NZO and the Polish Government on emigration to Palestine, see Laurence Weinbaum, *A Marriage of Convenience: The New Zionist Organization and the Polish Government, 1936–1939*, (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1993).
36. Report of Apoloniusz Zarychta, Polish Foreign Office, Consular Department, on his meeting with Jabotinsky, 28 February 1936, AAN-MSZ, 9911/35–36.
37. Weinbaum, *A Marriage of Convenience*, 179–180.
38. See for example, *Nasz Przegląd*, 14 September 1936, and *Dos yudishe togblat*, 11 September 1936.
39. See the official figures on Jewish emigration from Poland in note 7.
40. On this expulsion, its circumstances, and its consequences see the full account in Jerzy Tomaszewski, *Preludium zagłady: wygnanie Żydów polskich z Niemiec w 1938 roku* (Warsaw: Wydawn Nauk. PWN, 1998).
41. On the founding and the tasks of the Jewish Colonization Committee, see copy of the memorandum of 31 December 1938 sent by Prof. Shorr to Lord Winterton, director of the Intergovernmental Commission on Refugees in London, in PRO, FO371/240074.
42. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 4 January 1939.
43. For example, M. Kleinbaum, "Tamevatte fir kashies," *Der tog*, 11 November 1938.
44. Drexel Biddle to Secretary of State Hull, 4 January 1939, National Archives, Washington, D.C., 860c.4016/578.
45. "Wytyczne dla delegacji Żydowskiego Komitetu Kolonizacyjnego, Styczeń 1939," AAN-MSZ, 9914/41–42. For a critical article on this visit to London, see M. Kleinbaum, "Di finf vos zenen geforen," *Haynt*, 20 January 1939.
46. In the elections to the Warsaw Jewish Community (Kehille) in 1936, the Bund received about one-third of the votes. The Bund registered similar achievements that year in elections to various Kehillot, such as Wilno, Lublin, and others. In the municipal elections in December 1938 and May 1939, the Bund achieved excellent re-

sults, winning an absolute majority in Warsaw, Łódź, Wilno, Lublin, Białystok, Radom, and many others towns. See Melzer, *No Way Out*, 96–97, 107–109.

47. According to the British White Paper on Palestine of May 1939, the emigration of Jews to this country was limited to 25,000 refugees and 50,000 additional immigrants over the next five years before being suspended altogether. Therefore Raczyński submitted a memorandum to the British asking them to allocate an alternate territory within the British Empire in which Polish Jews could be resettled. See Melzer, *No Way Out*, 159

CHAPTER 2

Lwów, 1918

THE TRANSMUTATION OF A SYMBOL AND ITS LEGACY IN THE HOLOCAUST



DAVID ENGEL

*I*n May 1942, Tadeusz Kiersnowski arrived in Palestine on an official visit at the behest of the Polish National Council in London. His assignment was to study the situation of Gen. Władysław Anders's Polish exile army, whose first evacuees from the Soviet Union had just begun to arrive in the country. But Kiersnowski, a nonparty (moderate Piłsudskite) member of the Polish National Committee, who had been head of Wilno's Polish Committee under Lithuanian occupation and a prisoner of the Soviets from July 1940 to August 1941, also met with local Jewish leaders in Palestine, hoping, as he later reported, "to induce the Jews to undertake . . . the [political] defense of our eastern territories, threatened . . . by Russia."¹ Suspecting, he explained, that Jews might greet his request reluctantly in light of the "unfavorable attitudes" they had experienced in Poland during the interwar years, he decided to stress to his interlocutors that the Jews themselves had created those attitudes, for on the eve of the establishment of the Polish Republic they had failed to support the Polish people's just claims to independence and territorial sovereignty: "The Polish nation will never forgive the Jews for the 'neutrality' they demonstrated with regard to Lwów in 1918. All Poles know that during the years 1918–1920 international Jewish influence was directed against us, especially with regard to the eastern territories. The Jews deny this, but it has become deeply embedded in the psyche of every intelligent Pole. That unpleasant memory of twenty years ago can be erased only through active present defense of our legitimate rights to those territories. . . . The Jews must rehabilitate themselves in the eyes of the Polish people through a declaration defending the interests of Poland."²

Other Polish political leaders also found merit in this approach. The following September, Władysław Banaczyk, chairman of the National Council,

warned the same Palestinian Jewish spokesmen that “in prewar Poland many Poles suffered at the hands of the Jews” and that unless they now did “something . . . on the Russian issue” they risked “spilling oil on the fire” of Polish-Jewish relations.³ And in December 1942 former interior minister Stanisław Kot, a close confidant of Polish exile prime minister Władysław Sikorski, replied to Jewish representatives requesting Polish government assistance in rescuing Jews from the Nazi murder campaign by asking, “Where is the Jews’ public declaration that Lwów and Wilno ought to be returned to Poland?”⁴ Only by atoning for the sin of 1918, Banaczyk and Kot implied, could Jews hope to find a sympathetic ear among the Poles in 1942.

But what was the “sin of 1918,” as it were? What did Kiersnowski mean when he spoke about the Jews’ unforgivable “neutrality” with regard to Lwów? How had “all Poles” come to know that “international Jewish influence” had been directed against them in the early days of their independence?

For clarification let us turn first to what for the past thirty years has served as the standard noncommunist summation of interwar Polish history, the second volume of Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski’s *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski* (A contemporary political history of Poland), published in Paris in 1967. Malinowski, a representative of moderate Piłsudskist political tendencies, like Kiersnowski, had the following to say about the events for which Jews were supposed to atone:

During the first days of liberation Lwów [occupied by Ukrainian forces since 1 November 1918] required the most immediate assistance. . . . In orders dispatched on 13 and 16 November, Piłsudski . . . called for . . . striking out . . . as quickly as possible in the direction of Lwów. . . . The organization and command of the expedition were taken over by Col. [Michał] Tokarzewski; his group of 1,340 troops set out from Przemysł on 19 November and the next day joined forces with the [Polish] detachment in Lwów. After a fierce, day-long battle, the Ukrainians were forced to retreat from the city on the night between 21–22 November. However, a discordant note of extremely grave consequences for Poland intruded upon the enthusiastic atmosphere of this victory. In the Polish-Ukrainian conflict the Jews of Lwów stood clearly in a significant bloc on the Ukrainian side. Over the three weeks of struggle [for the city] the Poles viewed this with mounting anger. On the day of liberation the population of the suburbs, led by irresponsible elements, moved through the Jewish quarter, destroying stores, burning houses, plundering. There was no lack of people killed [*nie brakowało zabitych*]. The army’s firm intervention put an end to this on that very same day. Sentences handed down by *ad hoc* courts were extremely severe, but they could not drown out or even weaken the echoes in Europe and America. Jews from all over the world blew the incident out of all proportion, mobilized opinion against Poland, and later took advantage of

the situation by exerting their influence on the peace conference at Versailles.⁵

Malinowski cited no sources for his statements about Jewish behavior, for, indeed, he was merely repeating what had long since, as Kiersnowski suggested, become common wisdom among Poles. The only part of Kiersnowski's 1942 warning that was not explicated in Malinowski's text was the reference to neutrality, but the meaning of that allusion can be found in many other Polish histories. Take, for example, a work entitled *The Jewish Question in Poland*, written only months after the events in question by one of the most prominent of Poland's historians, Franciszek Bujak, of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow: "From the first of November [1918] until the 22nd . . . Lwów was the scene of very serious fights between the Poles and the Ukrainians. . . . Part of [the Jews] . . . declared themselves neutral [in this fighting] and formed their own militia, which often infringed the rules of neutrality, while another part adhered openly to the Ukrainians, fighting against the Poles."⁶

Bujak also provided some additional details about those "irresponsible elements" that had led the assault on the Jewish quarter: they were criminals that the Ukrainians had released to the Polish side before quitting the city. And instead of referring ambiguously to "no lack of people killed," he noted that seventy-three Jewish dead had been reported.⁷

To recapitulate: in November 1918, by Polish accounts, a Polish mob burned and pillaged the Jewish quarter of a major city and killed seventy-three Jews. And yet for Poles these events became a symbol of Polish victimization at the hands of Jews. The image embedded in Polish memory triggered by the phrase "Lwów, 1918," was not one of a pogrom but rather one of a perfidious Jewry doing serious harm to the national ambitions of the Polish people, both in the local military and in the international diplomatic arena. And that memory demonstrably bore upon at least some Poles in considering the nature of their relationship with Jews during the period of the German occupation over twenty years later.

This transmutation of the symbolic value of "Lwów, 1918," may be unique in the annals of violent assaults upon Jews. There have, of course, been many anti-Jewish attacks that enjoyed widespread and long-standing societal approval. There have also been aggressive actions that have been justified as retaliation for alleged Jewish misdeeds. In a sense the Nazi Final Solution depended upon a psychological reversal of the roles of victimizers and victims.⁸ But we shall be hard pressed to point to an individual attack like the one at Lwów that was raised to the level of an abiding *symbol* of Jewish perfidy and entered the collective memory less as a justifiable act of retaliation than as an unrequited affront to the attackers demanding expiation by the targets. That is a process that ought to be traced.

Instructively, Jews appear to have sensed early on that Poles were interpreting the Lwów riot in this fashion, and their own language in talking about

it reflected this intuition. For example, at a meeting of Polish and Jewish representatives held in the city some ten weeks after the bloody events to discuss how relations between the two peoples ought to be adjusted, a prominent local Jew, Henryk Rosmarin, publisher of Lwów's Polish-language Jewish daily newspaper *Chwila*, expressed concern that "the Polish community and press . . . condemn the pogrom but say it was partially justified by the hostile behavior of the Jewish community." Hence, in his words, "it has become necessary to *rehabilitate* the Jewish community." He employed precisely the same word—*rehabilitate*—that Kiersnowski was to repeat in 1942. Such rehabilitation could be achieved, Rosmarin suggested, through "a statement from the representatives of the Polish community that the Jews behaved properly in the Russo-Polish conflict."⁹ However, none of the assembled Polish spokesmen was prepared to offer such a statement.

That reluctance was particularly telling in light of the fact that an initial investigation, conducted within weeks of the riot by the newly established Polish foreign ministry, presented a strikingly different version of events from the one that was eventually to "become deeply embedded in the psyche of every intelligent Pole." In a report composed on 17 December 1918, the foreign ministry investigators narrated the circumstances leading up to the bloodshed of the previous month—which it termed unequivocally a "pogrom"—as follows: Numerous robberies of Jewish shops located in the Polish quarter of Lwów had taken place since the beginning of November. No police or security forces were present to deter the robbers. Robberies of Jewish shops in the Ukrainian quarter were also noted. There, however, Jews had managed to obtain 200 rifles (the report did not say how) and to form their own militia, "which captured Ukrainian and Polish bandits almost daily." Both the Ukrainian and Polish military commanders immediately recognized the Jewish militia as a neutral force whose purpose was to protect Jews and their property. So, too, did the local Polish Committee, which was soon to assume governmental responsibility for the city. As the only neutral agency in town, the Jewish militia was often called upon to perform services for each of the warring sides, including burying the dead and maintaining the municipal gas and water works. In addition, stores protected by the Jewish militia sold foodstuffs to all segments of the population at fixed prices, the same for Christians and Jews. The Jewish militia commanders honored their pledge of neutrality throughout, and their position was supported by all Jewish political and ideological groups except "the so-called extreme assimilation[ists]"—that is, the most ardent Polish patriots. The only pro-Ukrainian pronouncements that could be connected in any way with a Jew were those of the newspaper *Neue Lemberger Zeitung*, which was jointly owned by a Jew and a Czech. To be sure, a few irresponsible Jewish militiamen acted in opposition to their commanders' orders in ways that were not consistent with their neutral status, but on the whole the report denied that a significant bloc of Jews had actively fought against the Polish side.¹⁰

Nonetheless, the report continued, virtually the entire Polish population

of Lwów was convinced that the Jewish militia was not neutral. The reason for this misperception, the investigators suggested, lay in the peculiar circumstances in which the battle for the city was fought. During the first days of Polish-Ukrainian armed clashes, the Polish quarter was defended by only a handful of local students and young people. Gradually, others, mostly criminals who had been released either by the Austrian rulers before they abandoned the town or by the Ukrainian authorities thereafter, came to volunteer. Because at the time the Polish forces needed every available able-bodied man, these felons were not turned away. Instead, they were given uniforms and arms, and they played an important role in the battle. However, whenever such soldiers could plunder for their own gain, they did; they were the bandits who attacked Jewish stores in the Polish quarter. Thus, in defending Jewish-owned property, the Jewish militia frequently found itself firing upon looters wearing military uniforms. In those circumstances, the investigators concluded, it was easy for the Polish population to gain the impression that Jews were firing upon the same Polish troops who were heroically defending Lwów for Poland.¹¹

The report also sharply criticized Polish military officials for failing to take prompt action to quell the pogrom, which took place not during the Polish-Ukrainian fighting but after the town was in Polish hands. On 22 November, the day the Ukrainian forces evacuated the city, “the army burned with the desire for revenge, completely convinced that the Jews had worked hand in hand with the Ukrainians and, moreover, that such revenge had simply been ordered.”¹² Soldiers believed that they had been commanded to undertake a punitive expedition against Lwów’s Jews. Although the investigators found no evidence of such an order having been issued, they did report that two full days passed before the troops—now including not only criminal elements but regular Polish legionnaires—were ordered to desist; that during that interval commanders continued to spread the falsehood that Jews had waged an organized armed struggle against Poland; that several officers took part in the murder and robbery; and that attacks upon Jews continued for a week under the guise of searching for arms. The result, they stated, was “a truly hellish orgy” characterized by “the most completely medieval animalistic behavior.”¹³

The results of the foreign ministry inquiry, however, were never made public. No doubt this act of evasion owed much to the broader international context in which the young Polish state was compelled to operate. Since May 1918 concern had been expressed in Polish diplomatic circles, struggling to obtain Allied backing for the establishment of an independent Polish state, about the appearance of articles in Western newspapers alleging repeated violence by Poles against Jews in several Galician cities.¹⁴ Concern mounted in November, when news of the proclamation of Poland’s independence was juxtaposed with reports of pogroms, not only in Lwów but throughout Galicia and even in Warsaw.¹⁵ Such press coverage, Polish leaders feared, was liable to turn Western public opinion in an unfavorable direction for Poland at a time when the young country still lacked recognition *de jure*, not only of its territorial claims (which extended

to many nonethnically Polish regions) but of its very sovereignty. Thus, it is not surprising that it was precisely the Polish foreign ministry that had initiated investigation into the Lwów events, hoping, evidently, to uncover exculpatory information that could blunt the force of what it feared would become an international outcry.¹⁶ Its delegation, however, found nothing useful in this regard; in fact, its report suggested that only swift and severe punishment of the estimated more than one thousand Poles who took part in the murder and pillage would lead to the “separation of Polish society as a whole from the wild criminals . . . in world opinion.”¹⁷

One result of this undoubtedly embarrassing situation was the appointment of a second official investigating commission, headed by supreme court justice Zygmunt Rymowicz under the auspices of the justice ministry. This time, however, efforts were made in advance to ensure that the new investigators delivered more useful findings. Consider, for example, the following order by the commandant of the Lwów municipal civil guard, dated 14 January 1919:

The special government investigating committee from Warsaw, delegated to conduct inquiries into the occurrences in the Jewish quarter last November, which claimed the lives and property of citizens, is currently staying in Lwów. The honor of our city and community demands that this matter be properly projected and that the accusations being tossed about by hostile parties, to the effect that the perpetrators of these outrages were Polish soldiers, be rebuffed with precise evidence. At the same time it must be demonstrated that the robberies and attacks were perpetrated by bandits, among whom were quite a few belonging to the Greek Catholic and Mosaic religions, and that the Jewish community repeatedly provoked our soldiers through its hostile behavior toward the Polish army, especially its sniper fire from houses, its sadistic treatment of the [Polish] wounded, and so forth. To this end all members of the municipal guard who have any knowledge of the events of those critical days are called upon to report to the above-mentioned commission . . . in order to give testimony.¹⁸

Evidently, though, not enough witnesses testified before the Rymowicz Commission in this fashion, for its report, though somewhat less apodictic than that of the foreign ministry investigation, still placed heavy responsibility upon the Polish military. It did indicate, to be sure, that “a part of the Jewish population” had shown “a real sympathy for the Ukrainian cause” and that “the [Jewish] militia maintained close contact with the Ukrainians,” even to the point where “some detachments . . . consider[ed] themselves in some degree national police functioning in the interests of the Ukrainian government”; but it was equally emphatic that a “significant fraction of the Jews opposed them,” and it concluded that on the whole the militia “had no intention whatever of helping the Ukrainians.” The militia’s goal, Rymowicz declared, was simply “to rid the [Jewish] street of bandits on territory occupied by the Poles and lost by the Ukrainians,” and to

this end it had periodically fired shots at suspected looters. Polish troops, however, “irritated as they were by street fighting,” mistook those shots for hostile military action and began to spread stories of Jewish violence that quickly, in Rymowicz’s words, “grew beyond measure.” The spiraling exaggeration of those stories was facilitated, according to the judge, by an “elementary hate” that Poles displayed universally toward Jews. Thus it was that when fresh reinforcements arrived prior to the final battle, they were confronted with tales that Jews had not only shot at Polish troops but had poured boiling water on passing patrols and committed all manner of other atrocities. These regular troops, the report suggested, were the principal perpetrators of the murders and robberies of 22–23 November, although “professional criminals gave the signal for this plundering.” The military authorities proved unable to control the soldiers, and in fact “some officers . . . expressed themselves in a way that, if it did not . . . inspire the violence against the Jews, in any case gave reason to assume that those officers would not oppose their men’s desire” for revenge. In sum, Rymowicz stated, “The men simply fell prey to bestiality.”¹⁹

Like its foreign ministry counterpart, this report was also suppressed (although it was eventually made available to a special U.S. commission, which visited the country in July and August of 1919, led by Henry Morgenthau, to investigate the causes of anti-Jewish violence). Instead, Polish spokesmen, including even senior Polish officials, were left to invent their own narratives of what had happened. Not surprisingly, such inventions were often self-serving. For example, in response to an April 1919 request from the foreign ministry for information on the progress of court-martial proceedings against military personnel charged with taking part in the Lwów riots, the chief of the Polish general staff, Józef Haller, gave an evasive answer about the difficulties of investigating “anti-Jewish excesses, if they occurred,” preferring instead to expound at length upon alleged Jewish provocations. He spoke of the Jews’ “large participation in the planned military action against the troops and Polish state,” claiming that the Jewish militia initially “wore yellow-blue emblems of the Ukrainians . . . , kept guard at a Ukrainian machine gun . . . , [and gave] a prize to two wounded officers for having fought so bravely against the enemy . . . , the Polish troops.” The part of Polish soldiers in the riots was, in his words, “minimal,” with more Ukrainians and even Jews caught among the looters than Poles. His implication was that the military courts had little to do in this matter and that the ministry’s request for a progress report was out of place.²⁰

Yet Haller’s letter reveals much more than a military commander’s understandable tendency to try to hold civilian scrutiny at arm’s length. Most striking is his assertion that his version of events was based upon “a long and detailed inquiry made . . . by a special commission of which Judge Rymowicz was president.” The Rymowicz report contained no basis for any of the claims just quoted. In fact, later in his reply Haller acknowledged that he “[did] not know the contents of Judge Rymowicz’s report”—this in response to a question about whether he thought the report ought to be published.²¹ Nonetheless, Haller evidently felt

confident enough to make definite statements about what the report said to people who clearly *had* read it and were considering the advisability of its broader dissemination. It was, it seems, inconceivable to him that a serious investigation by a respected Polish jurist could turn up any other account of what had transpired.

It is revealing, too, that the central features of Haller's claims—that the murder and plunder had not been the work of Polish soldiers and that if any Polish troops did shoot at Jews they did so only in self-defense, after being provoked by hostile Jewish fire—paralleled the version that Polish witnesses had been encouraged to present to the Rymowicz Commission while it was still gathering testimony. The similarity makes it plausible to surmise that the January 1919 order to the Lwów civil guard may well have represented something other than a bald-faced incitement to perjury. No doubt the commandant who issued that order was firmly convinced that the assertions it advanced were true and that abundant witnesses would come forth to testify to it honestly. Indeed, unshakable certainty in the absence of any culpability on the part of Polish soldiers was expressed almost universally by Polish spokesmen, both in Poland and abroad, long before any serious investigations had been undertaken. In fact, the initial calls for investigation came not from the Jewish but from the Polish side. On 14 December 1918 the two leading Polish émigré political organizations in the United States invited the Zionist Organization of America and the anti-Zionist American Jewish Committee to form a commission “of two Jews and two Poles of the United States and two representative Americans who are neither Jews nor Poles, for the purpose of investigating the actual conditions in Poland affecting the Jews and of making a public report of their findings.”²² The same groups also issued “a formal demand on the American and Allied governments that they dispatch at once to Poland a special commission, on which the Jewish and Polish immigration in the United States shall have membership, to investigate the actual conditions and to report the results of their investigations to the people of the United States and the Allied nations.”²³ To be sure, such calls may have been put forth as a bluff, but the same cannot be said about the initiatives of the foreign and justice ministries. These official agencies were undoubtedly quite confident that a properly conducted investigation would redound to Poland's benefit.²⁴

Identifying the source of that confidence is the key to understanding how “Lwów, 1918,” was ultimately to become transmuted into a symbol of Polish victimization at Jewish hands. Doing so is not difficult, for the source was stated explicitly in several Polish documents of the period. The invitation from the Polish émigré organizations in the United States to form an investigating commission put it quite clearly: “Such practices [as the alleged pogroms] are contrary to the traditions and inconsistent with the character of the Polish people.”²⁵ The order from the commandant of the Lwów civil guard said much the same thing when it declared that “the honor of our city and community demands that . . . the accusations being tossed about by hostile parties . . . be rebuffed with precise

evidence.” In other words, the suggestion that Polish soldiers could have robbed and murdered innocent civilians was deemed such an affront to national honor, standing in such radical opposition to everything that Poles believed about themselves, that it simply could not be true. Hence the foreign and justice ministry reports had to be discarded *a priori* and a myth constructed in their place, one that would remove all responsibility from the heroes in whose hands lay the future of the independent Polish state.

That instinctive reaction, ironically, was to confound the Poles’ diplomatic strategy and ultimately lead to the Lwów pogrom’s acquiring its particular symbolic value for the Polish community. The foreign ministry report in particular had implied that a sort of public atonement by the Polish authorities for their failure to maintain order following the capture of Lwów, symbolized by the rapid trial and punishment of both soldiers and civilians suspected of wrongdoing, might help preserve Poland’s good name among the Allies. This conjecture was actually quite reasonable, since the outcry in the Western press over the Lwów pogrom had not yet—in December 1918—generated any notable political repercussions. The Polish public, however, evidently could not have borne the spectacle of Polish soldiers, including officers, being tried for dishonorable behavior, especially when that behavior coincided with a heroic national victory; so such a tactic was out of the question, even as an insincere sop to the powers that be. But to advance the alternative narrative that was becoming crystallized in Poland—the one that in essence held the Jews responsible for their own misfortune—presented tactical difficulties of its own: Allied policy makers were liable to decide that if Jews, who represented one-third of the city’s population, had so graphically expressed their preference for Ukrainian over Polish rule, then perhaps Lwów ought not to be placed under Polish sovereignty. Polish spokesmen were thus stymied, with no usable line to offer in their defense. Some, such as Franciszek Bujak, tried, to be sure, to forge a path between what must have seemed to them like Scylla and Charybdis, but their efforts were necessarily equivocal and could carry virtually no moral force.

Yet the Poles’ strategy *vis-à-vis* the Allies in their quest for sovereignty, particularly over predominantly nonethnically Polish areas such as the Lwów region, had been based in large measure upon cultivating an image of exceptional moral merit.²⁶ The history of the Jews in Poland was supposed to serve as an outstanding example of that merit: according to the version that Polish spokesmen attempted to promulgate in the West on the eve of the peace conference, Poland had been the only state to provide refuge to Jews fleeing persecution in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. It was the sole country in Europe never to expel Jews from its borders, and for centuries it represented a “secure and beneficent oasis” in which the largest Jewish community in the world had prospered economically and flourished culturally.²⁷ The Poles’ tactical paralysis in responding to the Lwów pogrom in the international arena thus had profound strategic ramifications as well: it undercut one of their principal arguments for expanded borders. And indeed, beginning in February 1919, the image of a

Poland “indulging in a mad wave of imperialism and chauvinism” began to permeate the conversation of British and U.S. diplomats negotiating Poland’s frontiers.²⁸ Although that image does not appear to have affected Polish territorial claims in the east adversely, it did raise the specter of what might happen if over two million *Germans* inhabiting Poland’s western borderlands were placed under Polish rule²⁹—a specter that was to result eventually in the severing of Upper Silesia from Poland and the imposition of the minorities protection clauses of the Versailles Treaty, which became the *bête noire* of Polish diplomacy throughout the interwar years.³⁰

The loss of Upper Silesia and the creation of a mechanism legalizing hostile foreign intervention in Poland’s internal affairs (which is how Poles of virtually every political stripe viewed the minorities treaty) represented such severe blows to Polish national pride that those responsible for them had to be called to account.³¹ But who was responsible? It appeared clear that the inability of Polish leaders to react to the Lwów pogrom in a way that would both advance Poland’s diplomatic interests and preserve the Polish people’s sense of their own honor had cost the country materially. But that inability, it seemed, was in the first instance a consequence of Lwów Jewry’s actions in November 1918. To Polish minds, had the Jews behaved honorably—had they acted as centuries of Polish hospitality obligated them to act, as Poles had a right to expect them to act, in categorical and conspicuous support of the Polish cause—then the events of Lwów would never have occurred, and Poland’s downward diplomatic spiral would have been avoided. Instead, however, they declared themselves “neutral”—a declaration that would by itself have damaged Poland’s claim to the city even had it not been honored more in the breach than in the observance. And by breaching their own self-proclaimed neutrality, they effectively maneuvered the entire Polish cause into a blind alley, condemning the nation to stand by helplessly as the great powers gnawed away at its sovereignty. That is what “Lwów, 1918,” came to symbolize in Polish consciousness and what the Polish nation, in Tadeusz Kiersnowski’s words, could never forgive: the Jews of Lwów and their advocates in Poland and throughout the world had done serious damage to the Polish nation in November 1918, and their collective loss of life, limb, and property could never adequately compensate for it.

To conclude, let us return to where we began. When Kiersnowski, Banaczyk, and Kot met with Jewish leaders in Palestine in 1942, the fate of Lwów once again hung in the balance. The Red Army had occupied the city in 1939 and incorporated it into the Ukrainian SSR (Soviet Socialist Republic), only to see it fall into German hands in 1941. Clearly, the Allies did not recognize the legitimacy of the German occupation, but the fact that two members of the Allied camp, Poland and the Soviet Union, claimed Lwów and other territories as their own meant that Britain and the United States could be expected, as in 1918 and 1919, to exercise important influence over the city’s disposition upon liberation. Also, as in 1918 and 1919, Polish diplomats were attempting to sway the opinion of those two governments by appealing to an image of the Polish

nation as an exemplar of fundamental moral values that the Western democracies held dear. The Soviets, in contrast, claimed to represent the voice of the non-Polish ethnic groups (especially the Ukrainians) that constituted the majority of the contested territories' population, arguing that those groups had suffered grievously under Polish rule and would not abide its continuation. Here again, Jews found themselves between two warring camps, where adding their voice to one or the other side might conceivably sway British and U.S. opinion.³²

A harbinger of what that voice might have to say had come in the person of several hundred Jewish soldiers in the Polish exile army once they arrived in Palestine in mid-1942. The soldiers brought with them tales of mistreatment and discrimination that they had allegedly suffered at the hands of Polish civilian and military officials in the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). Jewish officials had given publicity to those tales, thereby placing an obstacle in the way of the Poles' cultivation of their desired image. From the Polish point of view, it was Lwów, 1918, all over again.³³

Henryk Rosmarin, who in February 1919 had observed the irony in the fact that following the pogrom the Jews needed to be rehabilitated in Polish eyes, was now serving as Polish consul general in Tel Aviv. He was the one who arranged the meetings of Kiersnowski, Banaczyk, and Kot with the Jewish leaders, and he was present as the three Polish representatives pointed the way for Jews finally to atone for their sins of two decades earlier, as it were. Since he left no recollections, one can only wonder what he must have thought of those discussions, facing former Jewish colleagues as an official of the Polish government. It must have been a gut-wrenching experience; for, as all three Polish spokesmen made clear, the sin of Lwów, 1918, was to continue to be held over Jewish heads even as Polish Jewry faced death at Nazi hands. The transmuted symbol left a powerful legacy during the Holocaust.

Notes

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1. T. Kiersnowski, "Pro memoria," 7 October 1942 (no. 4985/Ia/42), Archives of the Polish Institute, London, PRM. 88/2/19.
2. Ibid.
3. "Konferencja z p. Prezesem Banaczykiem," 23 September 1942, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter cited as CZA), J25/2.
4. "Reprezentacja Żydów Polskich," 5 December 1942, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, Stanford, California, Polish Government Collection, box 700, file "Mniejszości-Żydzi" (old archival nomenclature).
5. Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski* (London: B. Swiderski, 1967), 2:157.
6. Franciszek Bujak, *The Jewish Question in Poland* (Paris: Impr. Levè, 1919), 36.
7. Ibid., 37.

8. See, for example, Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), esp. 106–108.
9. *W sprawie polsko-żydowskiej: Przebieg ankiety odbytej w dniach 2, 3, 4, 9 i 16 lutego 1919 we Lwowie* (Lwów: Nakładem Komisji rządzącej we Lwowie, 1919), 29, italics added.
10. “Raport delegacji Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych R.P. w sprawie wystąpienia antyżydowskich we Lwowie,” 17 December 1918, in Jerzy Tomaszewski, “Lwów, 22 listopada 1918,” *Przegląd Historyczny* 75 (1984): 281–283.
11. *Ibid.*, 282.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, 283–284.
14. See, for example, the untitled memorandum beginning with the sentence, “Od paru miesięcy szerzone są w prasie różnych krajów wieści o rzekomych pogromach żydowskich w Polsce,” 13 May 1918, Archiwum Akt Nowych (Archive of New Records), Warsaw (hereafter cited as AAN), PRM. 10, poz. 33–35.
15. See, for example, *Times* (London), 15 November 1918, 6; *New York Times*, 15 November 1918, 2; 16 November 1918, 4; 20 November 1918, 3; 30 November 1918, 3.
16. On this matter see the observations in Tomaszewski, “Lwów,” 281.
17. “Raport delegacji Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych,” 285.
18. Komenda Miejskiej Straży Obywatelskiej, Lwów, “Rozkaz Nr. 52” (L. 405/19), 14 January 1919, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C., M820/225.
19. *Ibid.*; “The Extraordinary Governmental Investigating Commission in Lemberg to the Minister of Justice,” 13 February 1919, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C., M820/225.
20. Haller to Polish foreign ministry, n.d. (Nr. 41384/IV/10), U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C., M820/225.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Polish National Department and Polish National Defence Committee to American Jewish Committee and Zionist Organization of America, 14 December 1918, AAN-Komitet Narodowy Polski (the National Committee of Poland), housed at AAN (hereafter cited as KNP), 159, poz. 95.
23. *Ibid.*, poz. 93–94.
24. On 2 January 1919 the Polish administration even granted the British Jewish journalist and Zionist activist Israel Cohen a visa to conduct his own investigation of the condition of Polish Jewry and issued him a letter instructing local authorities “not to make any difficulties for him in this matter and to provide him with the information necessary to the fulfillment of his task.” Polish Liquidation Commission, Administrative Department, Cracow, 2 January 1919, CZA, A213/11/1.
25. See note 22.
26. See, inter alia, Aleksander Bocheński, *Rzecz o psychice narodu polskiego* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1986), 43–44.
27. See, for example, Stanisław Kutrzeba, *La question juive en Pologne: Essai historique* (publication du Bureau des Travaux Préliminaires pour le Congrès de Paris, Cracow, 1919), esp. 3–4.
28. “Extract from letter to Mr. Rex Leeper (F.O.),” 27 February 1919, in *A Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, by James Wycliff, ed. Agnes Headlam-Morley, Russell Bryant, and Anna Cieniala (London: Methuen, 1972), 37. See also, inter alia, “Extract from letter to Mr. Namier (F.O.),” 27 February 1919, *ibid.*, 36; and “The

- Ambitions and Designs of the French Militarists,” 10 April 1919, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Robert Lansing Papers, box 7, folder 3.
29. See, for example, “Notes on the Report of the Polish Commission,” 1 April 1919, in Headlam-Morley, *Memoir*, 60.
 30. See David Engel, “Metsav ha-yehudim be-polin ve-ha-diiyunim al amanat ha-mi’utim be-ve’idat ha-shalom be-pariz, 1919—Ha’arachah hadashah,” in *Divrei haKongres haOlami ha-12 leMada’ei haYahadut*, ed. Ron Margolin (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2000), 2:183–190.
 31. See Paweł Korzec, “Polen und der Minderheitenschutzvertrag (1919–1934),” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 22 (1975): 515–555.
 32. For further details, see David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939–1942* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 114–156.
 33. See David Engel, “Ha-sichsuch ha-polani-sovieti ke-gorem be-hityahasutah shel memshelet polin ha-golah la-sho’ah,” *Shvut* 12 (1986): 29–30.

PART II



*The Widening Gap,
1939–1941*

CHAPTER 3

Psychological Distance between Poles and Jews in Nazi-Occupied Warsaw



BARBARA ENGELKING-BONI

*I*n this essay, I examine the psychological aspects of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War. The field of psychology, and particularly of collective psychology, is speculative and subjective. Historians will find no facts here apart from those documenting emotional experience presented through the oral testimonies of those who lived through the tragic years of the Nazi occupation. I shall concentrate not on the objective facts of Nazi policies, but on the resulting subjective, psychological, and emotional differences in the daily life of Poles and Jews in wartime Warsaw.¹

Before the war Jews constituted 30 percent of Warsaw's population. Their community was highly diversified with respect to national identity, social status, attitude toward religion, and political standpoints. Notwithstanding the many assimilated, upper-middle-class, and professional Jews in Warsaw, Poles and Jews generally made up two different communities, and social barriers were hard to overcome. They created feelings of alienation and remoteness on both sides. The growing antisemitism, aggressive publications in the press, anti-Jewish squads, and excesses at universities contributed to the growing popularity of Zionist and socialist ideas in the Jewish community. Poles and Jews were two different communities. Despite the goodwill of many people on both sides, the gap between the two communities widened and conflicts became sharper in the 1930s.

A decrease in tension between Poles and Jews occurred immediately before the outbreak of war and continued throughout September 1939. In the face of the common enemy, earlier conflicts receded into the background. Citizens of Warsaw—Poles and Jews—jointly dug trenches, jointly put out fires, and jointly defended the city.

However, not long after the initial shock of the Nazi and Soviet invasions, the feeling of common fate proved short-lived and illusive. As a contemporary

observer, Aleksander Donat, recalled: “Polish-Jewish relations deteriorated. Just prior to the war and at the opening of hostilities, anti-Semitism had slackened. The threat of a common enemy and the wartime sharing of experience had brought Poles and Jews closer together. But the idyll was short-lived. Poisonous Nazi propaganda soon reawakened native antisemitism.”²

The series of German discriminatory anti-Jewish regulations from the very start of their occupation of Poland is well known. Those regulations were diverse, ranging from those targeted at all Jews, such as the decree to wear arm bands or the prohibition against entering the Saxon Gardens Park, to edicts aimed against very specific social groups, including the prohibition on purchasing stamps by Jewish philatelists. The virulent German initiative to persecute the Jewish community made it instantly clear that the occupant would treat Poles and Jews differently, even if both groups were subjected to daily terror.

On the level of the collective psyche, the occupation was dualistic: for Poles it was a problem between Poles and Germans. Germans were a negative point of reference for the behavior of Poles during the war, and for the way in which it was later interpreted. This attitude to Germans—well known in Polish history—laid down the canons of morality, patriotism, and decency.

In Poland today, the history of the Second World War continues to be one that concerns Poles and Germans (also Russians, but this is another story). This perception of the war has been a logical consequence of centuries of being Germany’s neighbor, of the period of the nineteenth-century partitions, and of the firmly rooted stereotype of Germans as enemies. The wartime experiences of the Poles were yet another stage in this old conflict. Thus, from this point of view—which saw the war as a matter between Poles and Germans—the problem of Jews was marginal for Poles, themselves absorbed in fighting a war with the Germans.

From the point of view of Jews, the situation looked very different. For them, the experience of the war was not dualistic, but trilateral: a situation of conflict between themselves, Poles, and Germans. Jews were to a much greater degree dependent on Poles than were Poles on Jews. The relationship was therefore asymmetrical. In contrast, Poles did not need Jews in order to wage their war against Germans. Meanwhile, Jews—if they wished to avoid certain death at the hands of Germans—could not manage without Poles. They were dependent on the consequences of the charity, compassion, decency, heroism, hatred, indifference, or greed of individual Poles. The Jews’ wartime situation had two outside points of reference—Poles and Germans—while that of Poles had only one outside point of reference: the Germans.

The Nazi terror, which included street arrests for the sake of forced labor and antisemitic outrages in the streets with the participation of Poles—particularly those in the spring of 1940—made Jews feel both menaced and fearful of leaving home. They found themselves locked up in a mental ghetto before they became locked up in the physical one.

In this context Polish aggressiveness toward Jews may have been, in a cer-

tain sense, emotionally more painful for Jews than the German terror, for the relationship between themselves and Germans was clear—it was a relationship between two enemies: the victor and the vanquished, the occupying power and the subjected community. Jews expected nothing from Germans but persecution, trouble, and terror. But they wanted to see Poles as comrades, fellow-citizens uniting with them against shared oppression. They thought that they were on the same side of the barricades as Poles and expected from them empathy and solidarity. Manifestations of aggression and antisemitism—or even chilly indifference—which conveyed that there could be no common cause between Poles and Jews, must therefore have been all the more painful.

At least at the beginning of the establishment of the Warsaw ghetto, some Jews felt a certain relief. But the tragic daily reality of the ghetto swiftly dispersed any such illusions. Life in the ghetto was a constant experience of physical, spiritual, and moral suffering. The ghetto was a separate world inaccessible to outsiders.

Jews in the ghetto were getting more hungry and more lonely. Even though the Poles were right on the other side of the wall, the gap between the two communities was impossible to bridge. The frontier between “the Aryan side” and the ghetto seemed to be one between two different worlds.

The physical setting of the ghetto only deepened the psychological gap between Poles and Jews. Jews in the ghetto had the feeling of immeasurable distance between the ghetto and the rest of Warsaw. They could see it but could not reach it. Emmanuel Ringelblum noted, “On Przebieg Street, they constructed a wooden bridge. It gives a view over the Vistula River and Żoliborz. Many Jews stand there all day long and keep looking at this free world.”³

Helena Merenholc, a Warsaw psychologist who worked in the ghetto with children and, later, on the Aryan side, with Żegota (the Council for Aid to the Jews), conveyed to me her impressions upon leaving the ghetto in a 1995 interview: “On March the 6th, 1943, we crossed to the Aryan side, going through the sewers. I walked along the street and it was normal. Normality, that was my first impression. I was in a daze. I thought I was a free person. In the ghetto, when I looked through the window at the people on the Aryan side, I thought, they must be happy. A prisoner’s perspective.”⁴

The psychological distance between the ghetto and the rest of Warsaw grew with time. It was dramatically felt during the great deportations in the summer of 1942. At that time, when citizens of Warsaw spent their free time sun-bathing and swimming in the Vistula River, their neighbors behind the wall were being transported to the gas chambers of Treblinka.

Adina Blady-Szwajger, a medic working in the children’s hospital in the ghetto, described her feeling of distance:

We stood in the window, well actually at the window embrasure, because they were shooting at the windows, and we looked as they were being marched. They went and went with baby carriages and some

strange items, some hats and coats, and pots or bowls and went on and on. There went old men with gray beards, small children, women in summer dresses and coats, women in light overcoats, and women with bundles for this long travel. It was a day of extreme heat, the 30th of July, and there was such silence in the air, as there was no wind and the air stood still. . . . In a house on Żelazna Street on the other side, a woman in a flowery dress came out onto the balcony and watered flowers in boxes. She probably saw the march but kept doing what she was doing.⁵

The decision to leave the ghetto was a very difficult one, especially given the fact that the Aryan side consisted of both sympathetic and hostile Poles. Stefan Ernest, who lived in the Warsaw ghetto until the fall of 1942, wrote in his diary about the dilemma of whether to seek salvation on “the Aryan side” or stay and build bunkers in the ghetto: “There is a dilemma: here or there? Should we build shelters here, hiding-places with supplies to last for weeks, or should we go over the wall? It is an insoluble problem. There, on the other side of the wall, you need money—either money or friends. On that side, one false step, one piece of blackmail, can overturn all the careful planning of hiding for weeks or months, not to mention more dramatic circumstances. And to leave aside a whole mass of unbelievable difficulties connected with ‘getting settled.’”⁶

The ability to hide on the Aryan side was simply beyond most Jews. Those who wanted to live among Poles had to meet at least one (or—even better—several) of the following conditions: a “good” (i.e., non-Jewish) appearance, money, forged documents, fluent command of Polish, and, first of all, Polish acquaintances and contacts.

These conditions limited the number of people able to survive outside the ghetto. In technical terms, the actual departure from the ghetto was usually not difficult, but it was difficult in psychological terms. It was the equivalent of parting with family, of hiding one’s own identity. There was the uncertainty of one’s own fate, and also the dangers of exposure to suspicion, blackmail, and denunciation. Leaving the ghetto thus required determination and courage.

The most important thing, however, was to have *some place* to go. Informers were swarming at the ghetto gates and looking for victims among the escapees. Ita Diamant, a rabbi’s daughter from Jeziorna who worked as a nurse in the ghetto, described her journey from the ghetto gate on Żelazna Street near Leszno to the Main Railway Station on Aleje Jerozolimskie (about one kilometer):

When we made the first three steps on the other side of the ghetto, we were assaulted by a swarm of boys, blackmailers. I didn’t have the slightest idea that anything like that might happen to me on the other side. They started chasing us and . . . shouting that we should give them

money. Of course we were not wearing the armbands. In the beginning I thought: we will give something to this one, something to that one and they will leave us in peace. But they were like a swarm. When one departed—he sent in another one; when this one left—he sent in the third one and so on. Finally I realized that it would not work and we would not make it. . . . We got into a horse cab. It is hard to describe how much money we had to pay for everything. We were going in the horse cab and suddenly—next to us—one guy on a bicycle and the second one and the third one appeared. Each reached out his hand and you had to give something to each. We could not beat it. . . . To put it briefly: when we [got on the train]—we had no money, no rings, no watches or shoes left. We had nothing.⁷

Informers would follow their victims, blackmail them several times, and demand permanent payments “for silence.” It would sometimes happen that people seeking support on the Aryan side returned to the ghetto robbed of everything.

There were also people who had no intention of leaving the ghetto, although they could have made it. They had good looks, money, and friends. But they decided not to seek help outside the wall. These were chiefly activists of clandestine organizations, such soldiers of the Jewish Fighting Organization who wanted to stay in the ghetto and prepare for the uprising. There were also civilians who—similarly to clandestine activists—bound their fate with the fate of the nation and for whom staying inside the ghetto was an issue of solidarity. Others did not even consider hiding among non-Jews for religious reasons; for them, orders of the religion could not be suspended even in the face of death. Bracha Karwasser, who came from a religious family from Brwinów and who survived the ghetto and now lives in Israel, wrote the following account: “When the displacement campaign started my father went to the Rabbi and asked for advice. Rabbi Shapiro told him: ‘send the children to the Aryan side, because this is of utmost importance—maybe one of you will survive.’ My father divided jewelry among us and said, ‘children, this is the will of HaShem—save yourselves as you can. At home you never ate non-Kosher food, I never let you do this, but now act in such manner as to save yourselves, survive and later tell people what we all experienced in the ghetto.’”⁸

Some people would not leave the ghetto because they did not want to leave their families or part with their children, elderly parents, or spouses. They wanted to be together with them although they knew what fate awaited them in the future. There were also those who were simply tired after two years spent in the ghetto, tired because of what they saw and what they experienced. They did not have enough strength and energy, and they were unable to put any effort into saving themselves. There were also those who did not want to constitute a moral challenge to others. They were unable to face another human being and tell them:

save me although you are afraid to. Save me, because my life is worth as much as yours.

In conclusion, I would like to present some general reflections. It is significant that during the war there was approval in Polish society for clandestine activities, for secret teaching, for various forms of struggle against Germans. However, there was no social approval for hiding Jews. Jews were placed outside the moral responsibility of Poles. They were excluded from the world in which principles of brotherhood were binding. The many Poles who actually saved Jews, at risk to themselves, did so in the face of general indifference among most Poles to the fate of the Jews.

Jews feared Poles. I think that Poles feared Jews, albeit in a different sense. And they still do. Poles were immediate eyewitnesses of the Holocaust. This situation was exceptional and particular for them. Very few people in their lives, very few nations will ever experience the situation of facing ultimate evil. This situation is hard to comprehend, hard to bear. But at the same time this situation is an opportunity. The opportunity for human beings to learn the truth about themselves. An opportunity to take the challenge of facing the questions: Who am I? How shall I behave? This is a chance to make a choice of being a hero or a scum. Usually this is not a conscious choice. Most people are certainly unable to make such choices and remove them from their eyesight. Then they can remain indifferent, remove Jews from the domain of their moral responsibility, and thus do not need to make such hard choices.

However, Jews sometimes did appear as individuals within the eyesight of Poles, as persons apart from the anonymous mass. When they did appear, their very presence demanded something. Those persons suddenly appearing could be old neighbors, acquaintances, or perfect strangers—tired and hungry. I think this is precisely what Poles feared. They feared they would have to do something with that sudden, individualized, and personal Jewish presence, that they would have to behave somehow in relation to an individual needing help. They would have to make a choice which they did not want and could not make.

I think that Poles still fear Jews. They fear their silent absence, which is a reproach. Absent Jews also demand something of us. They demand our respect for their suffering. They demand our memory. They still give us Poles a chance. I hope that—although so far we have failed to do it—we Poles will have the opportunity to talk about what it is to be the closest witnesses of evil and what kind of responsibility has thus been laid upon us.

Today Jews no longer need Poles. They have their own independent state. Their history has moved to another place. But Polish history is still going on in the place where the Holocaust happened. And today we Poles need Jews. We need them to better understand our own past, our own Christian tradition and identity, our own experience. We need them to finally accept the Holocaust not only as a fact of Jewish history but as an extremely important experience belonging also to the history of Poland.

Notes

1. This study is confined to Jews in the Warsaw ghetto.
2. Aleksander Donat, *The Holocaust Kingdom: A Memoir* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1978), 13.
3. Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Kronika getta warszawskiego wrzesień 1939—styczeń 1943* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1983), 293.
4. Helena Merenholt, “Nie żałuję ani jednego dnia spędzonego w getcie . . .,” in *Na łące popiołów*, by Barbara Engelking (Warsaw: Cyklady, 1993), 208.
5. Adina Błady-Szwajger, *I więcej nic nie pamiętam* (Warsaw: Volumen, 1994), 121.
6. Stefan Ernest, quoted in *Pamiętniki z getta warszawskiego: Fragmenty i rejestry*, ed. M. Grynberg (Warsaw: Wydawn. Nauk. PWN, 1993), 95.
7. Ita Diamant, “A Testimony,” Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem, 03/3153.
8. Bracha Karwasser, “A Testimony,” Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem, 03/3484.

CHAPTER 4

Polish Jews under Soviet Occupation, 1939–1941

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES OF SURVIVAL



ANDRZEJ ŻBIKOWSKI

The growing interest of historians in the Jewish population of prewar eastern Poland (the Kresy) is unfortunately connected to the saddest page of Jewish history, the Holocaust. Scholars have observed that during the first weeks of the Nazi-Soviet partition of Poland, the Jewish population became the object of attacks not only by the German special divisions but also by the local population. They explain this primarily by pointing to the emergence of ethnic tensions during the time of the Soviet occupation. Today, when outbreaks of pogroms in eastern Poland and Lithuania during the summer of 1941 are better understood, we must ask if there was a connection between the growing ethnic tensions in 1939 and 1941 and Polish-Jewish relations in the 1930s. For a number of reasons, the answer is neither simple nor monolithic, owing to the near complete absence of analytical data.

Polish-Jewish relations between the two world wars have thus far been studied globally, on a countrywide scale. Various indicators or categories of anti-semitism, such as the attitude of government bodies and various social groups toward Jews, have shaped this discourse. These indicators include the rise of economic tensions, the growing social disparities, the evolution of antisemitic ideology in Poland and its receptivity to German models. To date, we have no study that examines how Polish-Jewish relations differed across various regions of Poland, particularly in the mid-1930s when a wave of pogroms spread throughout the country.

Despite the absence of specialized archival studies, we can still come to some conclusions about the specificity of the Jewish population of the Kresy by analyzing the results of the public census. In 1931, more than 3.1 million

Jews lived in Poland, constituting 9.8 percent of the country's inhabitants and 27 percent of the urban population. Approximately 43 percent, or about 1.3 million Jews, lived in the eastern provinces. In the two eastern Polish capitals of Vilnius and Lwów, Jews represented, respectively, 28 percent and 32 percent of the population. In seven eastern provinces, the proportion of Jews ranged from 5.2 percent in the province of Vilnius to 7.8 percent in the area of Nowogródek (Novohrodok), with even more in the provinces of Polesie (10.1 percent) and Białystok (12 percent). Incomparably more numerous were Jews in the large and medium Kresy cities. We cannot establish that Kresy Jews as a whole had any characteristics that distinguished them from their co-religionists living in the central provinces. The differences only become apparent when we examine the occupational structure. Among professionally active Jews, the majority, as we know, worked in trade. On a countrywide scale, Jews represented 62.0 percent of all employed in this industry. In the eastern provinces, however, they represented a much greater share in trade: 80.1 percent in Stanisławów, 82.1 percent in the province of Tarnopol, and, as of 1927, 90 percent in Pinsk. This indicator was about 2 to 3 percent lower in the remaining Kresy provinces, falling especially low in Białystok (67 percent).¹

The indicator that even more dramatically diverged from the national average is the Jewish share in the divisions of medicine and hygiene. In the whole country, Jews represented slightly under 27 percent, reaching a record high of 46 percent in the Tarnopol province. In the Kresy region, of all doctors in private practice, those of Jewish descent represented more than 70 percent. It is important to note that the percentage of Jewish craftsmen in the general population of a given province was usually higher in the Kresy than in the central and southern provinces, with a record high in Polesie (81 percent), followed by the Nowogródek (77 percent) and Białystok (76 percent) Provinces.² The examples above suggest that the cities and towns in prewar Eastern Poland were much more Jewish than other parts of the country. This is part of the background for my evaluation of Polish-Jewish relations in Soviet-occupied Eastern Poland.

In a previous study on Jewish reactions to the Soviet arrival in September 1939,³ I took as my starting point an original essay by Jan T. Gross entitled "I Thank Them for This Liberation, and I Ask That This Is the Last Time That I Have to Experience It."⁴ I fully agree with Gross that a connection exists between the fact that some Jews greeted the Russians with joy and the fact that opinion-forming circles in Polish society had good reason to see this reaction as important to all the inhabitants of the region.⁵ But it is necessary to add that Polish historians often stress that it was a decisive factor on the limited aid extended to the Jews during the mass murder carried out by the Nazis. However, I do not agree with Gross's characterization of this commonly accepted opinion as a fully false stereotype. Such a view greatly diminishes its value in explaining the processes that were taking place.

The Jewish reaction to the Red Army echoed the structure of small and medium-sized towns (the typical *shtetl*) where Jews, especially the Jewish poor

and the Jewish youth, were extremely numerous and included fugitives from central Poland. But there were also several objective factors that made the Soviets attractive to Jews. First, it was obvious that the Soviet occupation prevented the Germans from entering the area. Second, the Soviets suppressed a wave of peasant revolts that had swept over the Kresy in September 1939 and whose victims were the landowners and the Jews. Third, it was also important that the new Soviet regime prohibited antisemitism. As one memoirist noted, "For the first time a Jew was not a second-class citizen."⁶

It is also true that the Jews had good reasons to put their personal and group interests above the abstract idea of Polish patriotism, as the Endek and Sanacja governments of the late 1930s had done little to encourage Jewish loyalty to Poland. How much loyalty toward their former compatriots could have been expected from the Jews of the Kresy? Clearly, the Poles demanded the maximum, while many Jews felt none. Perhaps the most that could have been expected was that they should observe commonly accepted rules of behavior: not to inform on people because of their views; not to use underhanded methods to take another's job; and not to take advantage of other people's hardships. As Gross has convincingly shown, only a few Jews crossed that line, while the majority remained attached to Poland. But Gross and I interpret some of the same facts differently. Gross, for example, notes the widespread refusal of most Jewish fugitives to accept Soviet citizenship, for which Jews suffered harsh punishment. This is nonetheless not, in my view, proof of attachment to Poland but only of a disillusionment with the Soviet paradise.

Let us now focus on a few aspects that I regard as central, relating mostly to the context in which the phenomenon of welcoming the Soviets was recorded.

Gershon Adiv, an eyewitness to the Soviet entry into Vilna, recorded the following entry in his diary in September 1939: "It is difficult to describe the feeling that agitated me when in the street I saw, opposite our gate, a Russian tank. . . . A crowd gathered around where the tanks were standing, someone shouted: 'Long live the government of the Soviets,' and everyone cheered in their honor. . . . It was difficult to make out non-Jews in the crowd. Mostly it was the Jews who showed enthusiasm. This aroused the anger of the Poles somewhat. . . . The Jews' happiness was complete: the Russians are better than the Germans."⁷

One activist of Hashomer Hatsa'ir residing in the eastern Polish town of Rovne recorded the following diary entry on 18 September 1939: "The feeling that [the Jews] had been saved from Nazi barbarism swelled in everyone's breast and caused people to dance in the streets. With a feeling of gratitude, they lined the streets to greet the Red Army marching in."⁸

After reaching Palestine in 1940, Moshe Kleinbaum reported the following: "The residents of Stryj received the Soviet army with mixed feelings. The Poles regarded the Soviets with hatred; the Ukrainians were reserved, and the Jews looked upon the new regime as the lesser of two evils."⁹

Other contemporary impressions are found in accounts from the underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto, accounts deposited by Jews who returned

to Warsaw at the end of 1941. When a young Zionist who returned from Łuck, for example, was asked about Jewish attitudes to the Soviet Army in the East, the following response was recorded: “The simple Jew received it coldly, some even with hatred. The majority of the youth expressed great enthusiasm. They kissed the soldiers, climbed the tanks, they gave an ovation. Even earlier, before the Red Army had entered the town, a part of the Jewish youth organized meetings and demonstrations. For us Jews it was politically very unwise that a part of the Jewish community had a very bad attitude towards Polish society and the Polish army.”¹⁰

Another Jew returning from the East similarly responded: “Relations between the different nationalities in Ukraine should be described in short as mutual and bitter hatred. The Ukrainians hate the Poles and the Jews, the Poles—the Ukrainians and the Jews, and the Jews pay the Poles and the Ukrainians back in the same currency. . . . As for Jews, they took revenge on Poles sometimes in a very nasty way; the expression, ‘Your time is over,’ was not only much used, but, by and large, overused.”¹¹

More critical was another respondent, who noted, “The situation of Jews in the Polish areas seized by the Soviets was quite favorable. Owing to their natural cleverness and talents, they could make their lives most agreeable.” The report continued:

When the Bolsheviks entered Polish territory, they were very mistrustful of the Polish population, and fully trusted the Jews. They deported to Russia the more influential Poles and those who before the war held important jobs, and all offices were given mostly to Jews, who everywhere were trusted with positions of power. For these reasons, the Polish population at once assumed a very hostile general attitude. Hatred became even stronger than before the war. . . . The coming of the Bolsheviks was greeted by Jews with great joy. Now they felt proud and secure. They almost considered themselves in charge of the situation; towards the Poles they were condescending and arrogant, and they often let them feel their powerlessness, and they scorned them because of it. . . . There were many Jews who at any opportunity took special pleasure in mentioning to Poles that their time was over, that now nothing depended on them, and they had to obey the Soviet authority.

And he concluded with the most interesting passage:

The economic situation of Jews in the occupied territory was much better than that of the Polish population. While Poles had to earn a living with hard work, Jews took better jobs and were employed in lighter work. Poles were mostly employed in factories and kolkhozes, whereas Jews preferred to work as clerks in warehouses and shops. Even if salaries in these positions were officially much lower than those of workers

in factories, while working as clerks, salespeople, or warehouse attendants, they had opportunities to make use of their skills in trading and speculation; they made various deals and in this way earned privately a substantial amount.¹²

The archives contain many similar Jewish accounts by fugitives. Nevertheless, the majority of Jewish fugitives noted that relations between the different ethnic groups substantially deteriorated during these two years and that the Jews were to a large extent to blame for it. For the Jews who had the good fortune to reach Palestine or another free country, the joy of the Jews at the arrival of the Red Army was remembered as natural and fully justified. For the other group—which spent two years under Soviet occupation—the joyful welcome afforded the Red Army was only a small part of a larger phenomenon, namely the deterioration of Polish-Jewish relations in the Kresy, with the Jews, according to Polish opinion and also in their own opinion, largely responsible. Memories of the euphoria of September 1939 were apparently overshadowed by the later events.

It is not my goal to determine to what extent this generalization is justified, since these reports came from a very uniform and narrow group without strong roots in the local Jewish communities. But I should stress that their views are very similar to the opinion of most Poles, who observed that Jews, on the whole, collaborated with the Soviet regime. We find this view—shared by most Poles and some Jews—especially in the collection of testimonies collected by the Historical Office of the Anders Army and in the Kresy reports prepared by the correspondents of the Polish Government-in-Exile and its underground delegate inside occupied Poland, the Delegatura, as well as from the High Command of the Home Army. The best known of these testimonies are Jan Karski's 1940 report submitted to Minister Stanisław Kot and the opinion of General Stefan Rowecki, commander of the Home Army. In a communication from 25 September 1941, Rowecki wrote, "Right after the Bolsheviks entered, [the Jews] turned with all their fury against Polish offices; they subjected the officials of Polish state, and Polish activists, to mob law; they stigmatized them en masse as antisemites and delivered them into the hands of social scum adorned with red ribbons."¹³

Karski similarly reported that, "In fact, in most towns, the Jews greeted the Bolsheviks with baskets of red roses, with submissive addresses, etc." Karski nonetheless did make some distinctions between the pro-Soviet attitude of communists and the Jewish proletariat in general, as well as "the intelligentsia, and richer and more cultured Jewish circles," which had refused collaboration. He concluded that "all Poles are resentful and disappointed in relation to the Jews, and the vast majority (first among them, of course, the youth) literally look forward to an opportunity of repayment in blood. . . . An attempt to create any common front would encounter very large difficulties on the part of the broad layers of Polish society in which antisemitism has by no means decreased."¹⁴

Karski's evaluation deserves special attention. Although Karski spoke privately to me, indicating that he had had no personal relations with the Jews in Lwów at this time, it seems that the Jewish intelligentsia had a similar opinion of the Kresy Jews. I think that he was right in expressing the view that "the Jews created the situation in which the Poles regard them as devoted to the Bolsheviks."¹⁵ The question of the degree to which Polish opinion was the consequence of the prewar stereotype of the "Judeo-communists" (*Żydokomuna*) is another problem.

But all these testimonies also show something more important: that in September 1939 it was absolutely clear to the entire Jewish population in the Kresy that the Soviets not only saved the Jews from the Germans, but they provided them with the opportunity to get even with their former oppressors, the Polish, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian antisemites.

In my opinion the crucial issue for Polish-Jewish relations under the Soviet occupation was not, primarily, the festive welcoming of the invader. It is clear that not all Jews welcomed the Soviets and that many non-Jews were among those who greeted the arrival of the Red Army favorably. The reason for the Jewish response—an underlying fear of the Germans—was quite clear to at least some Poles. The key factor was rather the collaboration of a substantial section of the Jewish community. This collaboration was for the most part forced and rarely openly directed against the Poles. But, in the Polish unwritten code universally rejecting the occupation and in the call for at least passive resistance, there was no room for exceptions: who is not with us is against us. Given this attitude, every Jewish doctor, clerk, agronomist, or bookkeeper who accepted a job in a Soviet office took upon himself the odium of a collaborator. They placed themselves in the same position as young communists starting their careers in the local party committee or in the local NKVD office. Polish opinion classed with such people those who, unable to provide for themselves legally, engaged in black-market trade.

In Polish memoirs we find no words of approval for Jewish resourcefulness, but accusations of making money out of Polish misery. In Polish opinion we also will not find a positive word about the young people who sought to escape the shtetl for a school in the cities of Białystok, Vilna, or Lwów. As one might expect, in Jewish memoirs there are many favorable judgments of the Soviet authorities who put an end to the *numerus clausus*, or quotas on Jews, which had been universal in Polish universities before 1939.

Even if we regard as completely unjust the accusations directed against the Jews by both Polish society and the Jewish assimilated intelligentsia, we have to accept that the two communities chose different strategies for surviving the Soviet occupation. The Jewish strategy was surely more rational from the beginning, relying on the need to prepare thoroughly for a long winter. As Moshe Kleinbaum concluded in his diary entry from the year 1940, "Typical of the facts is that right away a saying began to circulate among the Jews who evaluated their position following the arrival of the Soviets as follows: Until now we

have been sentenced to death, but now our sentence has been converted to life imprisonment.”¹⁶

Notes

1. Sz. Bronsztejn, *Ludność żydowska w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym: Studium statystyczne* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolinskich, 1963); B. Wasiutyński, *Ludność żydowska w Polsce w wiekach XIX i XX* (Warsaw: Wydawn. Kasy im. Mianowskiego, 1930).
2. W. Bienkiewicz, “Niektóre wiadomości o województwie poleskim,” *Rocznik Poleski* (1927); P. Wróbel, “Żydzi w Białymstoku, 1918–1939,” *Studia Podlaskie* 2 (1989): 166–202.
3. Andrzej Żbikowski, “Jewish Reaction to the Soviet Arrival in the Kresy in September 1939,” *Polin* 13 (2000): 62–72.
4. Jan Tomasz Gross, *Upiorna dekada: Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i komunistów, 1939–1948* (Cracow: Universitas, 1998), 61–92.
5. This reception was important for the future course of the Soviet occupation and especially for relations between the different ethnic groups living in the territory.
6. Cited in Gross, *Upiorna dekada*, 72.
7. Cited in Dov Levin, “The Response of the Jews of Eastern Poland to the Invasion of the Red Army in September 1939 (as Described by Jewish Witnesses),” *Gal-Ed* 11 (1989): 95.
8. Quoted in *Youth amidst the Ruin: A Chronicle of Jewish Youth in the War* (New York: Scopus Publishing Company, 1941), 33–34.
9. Quoted in Levin, “The Response of the Jews of Eastern Poland to the Invasion of the Red Army,” 101.
10. A IH (Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw), Fond: Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawskiego (Ringelblum Archive), I/ 1042.
11. *Ibid.*, I/475.
12. *Ibid.*, I/934.
13. Quoted by M. Kula, “Między żydowską Palestyną a polskim Londynem,” *Więź* 347 (1987).
14. Quoted by Artur Eisenbach, “Raport Jana Karskiego o sytuacji Żydów na okupowanych ziemiach polskich na początku 1940 r.,” *Dzieje Najnowsze* 2 (1989): 179–200; and David Engel, “An Early Account of Polish Jewry under Nazi and Soviet Occupation Presented to the Polish Government-in-Exile, February 1940,” *Jewish Social Studies* 45 (1983): 1–16.
15. Eisenbach, “Raport Jana Karskiego,” 189, 193–195.
16. Levin, “The Response of the Jews of Eastern Poland,” 101.

CHAPTER 5

Facing Hitler and Stalin

ON THE SUBJECT OF JEWISH “COLLABORATION” IN
SOVIET-OCCUPIED EASTERN POLAND, 1939–1941



BEN CION PINCHUK

The subject of Jewish-Soviet collaboration is as old as the Red Army’s invasion of the eastern provinces of the Second Polish Republic on 17 September 1939. The sights and sounds of jubilant Jewish masses that met the advancing troops, expressing publicly their sense of relief and joy; the role played by Jewish communists and sympathizers in establishing the Soviet regime as well as taking up positions formerly held only by the ruling Poles—these were difficult to digest. It went contrary to what might be called the natural order of things as perceived by the ordinary Pole. For twenty-two months the traditional roles were at least partially reversed. Moreover, it occurred under Russian rule; Russians were the powerful historical enemy of the Poles. In the minds of Polish patriots, there had to be some sinister plot behind it. Equality of the Jews under the Soviet rulers was perceived as “collaboration,” if not actual treason on their part. In Polish memory this period of “unnatural” relations with their Jewish neighbors remained an open sore. It was a score to be settled in due time. When Jan Gross, in his challenging book, *Neighbors*, revealed the details of the Jedwabne massacre, the story of Soviet-Jewish relations preceding the German occupation surfaced again. The prominence of the subject in the soul-searching and at times tormented debate is striking¹—as if one could find an answer, a justification, or at least mitigating circumstances in Soviet-Jewish relations that could explain the genocidal massacre.

Between September 1939 and June 1941, the Soviet Union ruled the eastern provinces of Poland. The multiethnic population of the region had to adapt to the new rulers, learn to live and survive under Soviet rule. In one way or another, when active fighting against the invaders ceased, the vast majority of the population accepted the new regime and in varying degrees collaborated with

the Soviet rulers. However, the use of the term “collaboration” in research is problematic at best and misleading at its worst. By its very use, it implies negative moral judgment and comes pretty close to meaning actual treason. Its use in research means a priori the assumption of an unwarranted moral superiority of the investigator and prejudgment of the subjects of the research. It is misleading rather than enlightening. Nevertheless, “collaboration” remains the standard term used by Polish researchers and commentators to describe Jewish-Soviet relations during the first years of the Second World War. Thus, I shall avoid it in order to prevent from the very beginning of our investigation a distorted view of the different ways adopted by the local inhabitants, in general, and the Jewish community, in particular, to cope with the situation; and I will describe the evolution of their relations with the Soviet authorities.

The subject of the relations between the Jewish community and the Soviet regime in the former Polish territories should be analyzed on several levels. First and foremost, it has to be seen in the context of the geopolitical realities of the time. The Nazi and Soviet invasions, the collapse of the Polish state, and the disintegration of its administrative apparatus determined to a large extent the relations from the beginning of the Soviet occupation. The social-economic and ethnic realities of the region as well as Soviet policies vis-à-vis its Jewish citizens determined the place of the Jewish population in the new social-economic structure. A central component of Soviet rule, present from the very beginning to, literally, the last day of the Soviet presence, was the ever present “purge” of the territories from “undesirable elements.” It assured effective control of the area and affected the relations of all social and ethnic groups. In assessing the relations between the Soviets and the Jewish community, one has also to take into account all along the peculiarities of the Jewish community’s place in Poland prior to the war, the policies pursued by the government, and the attitudes prevailing in Polish society toward the Jews.

Did They Wave? Indeed They Did

On 17 September 1939, Soviet troops invaded Poland and within days occupied its eastern territories. The Red Army met only scattered and limited resistance. The Polish Army, by the time of the Soviet invasion, ceased to exist as an effective fighting force. Despite pockets of heroic resistance here and there, the outcome was obvious from the first day of the invasion and signaled the end of independent Poland. It was day seventeen of the German invasion which, since 1 September, overran the western provinces of the Republic. For many the Red Army appeared as savior from impending Nazi occupation, and they felt genuine relief and gratitude. At the time few were aware that the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) was merely implementing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed a couple of weeks earlier, on 23 August, in Moscow. Final borders between the two were determined on 28 September 1939 in a new friendship treaty.² The fourth partition of the Polish Republic, this time between Nazi Ger-

many and Communist Russia, was completed. The entire population of the Republic had to face new powerful masters. By the time the Red Army arrived, Polish rule in the eastern provinces was for all practical purposes nonexistent. The Polish administration and the entire governing apparatus disintegrated, creating a dangerous political vacuum. The choice for the local population was between a communist regime or the government of Nazi Germany. Even that was only a theoretical choice.

The initial reaction to the Red Army by the different ethnic and social groups of the region was of great importance in the creation and strengthening of images and myths of group behavior. The question of whether there were overt displays of rejoicing and enthusiasm, spontaneous or organized welcome receptions, toward the invading army became for many Poles a test of loyalty to either the Polish state or the new Soviet rulers. For those loyal to the later, public welcome displays of support and well-organized shows of "enthusiasm" for the "liberation" were an integral element of the Soviet communist regime. Hence the symbolic importance of these events during the first few days of the invasion.

The overwhelming reaction in the Jewish community to the entry of Soviet troops into eastern Poland was a deep sense of relief, a feeling that they had been delivered from the danger of German occupation. With it came demonstrations of joy and gratitude. Some, like the many Zionists or the older and more religious generation, though grateful for the rescue, watched the advancing troops with deep apprehension. They knew that Zionism was considered an enemy of the regime and that its members were imprisoned and exiled. The religious community was aware of the atheistic policies of their new rulers as well as the persistent persecution of Jewish religion and its practitioners. The immediate possibility of a Nazi occupation overshadowed all other considerations. At the moment of first encounter with the invading Soviet troops, the expressions of sympathy and joy were widespread and encompassed the majority of the Jewish community. "Rescued," "delivered," and "liberated from the German nightmare" were just some of the expressions used to convey the feelings prevailing at the time in the community. The almost complete unanimity of the positive Jewish reaction was noted by many who lived in the region and aroused great resentment among the Polish population. Jews were not the only group to welcome the advancing Soviet troops. So did many Belorussians, Ukrainians, and even communist Poles. Particularly enthusiastic were the less affluent sections of the community.³

One could detect in the Jewish community a strong sense of alienation from the antisemitic Polish state with its overt policies of discrimination. Poland on the eve of the invasion was one of the more antisemitic countries in Europe. There were severe limitations on Jewish higher education, job discrimination that reached the level of almost complete exclusion from state employment, boycotts of Jewish-owned businesses, and widespread street violence reaching often pogrom levels. The image of the Soviet Union was different. Antisemitism was still considered a state crime in the USSR and Jews enjoyed,

formally at least, freedom and equality. The presence of Jewish soldiers and commanders among the invading troops strengthened that conviction. In eastern Poland the pre-revolution Russian soldier was still remembered from the not so distant past as associated with violence, looting, and pogroms. Now the image was completely different. The orderly and friendly behavior of the ordinary Soviet serviceman was a pleasant surprise. Acting under strict orders, the soldiers were polite and friendly, projecting a most positive image of the new Soviet man. They had plenty of Polish money and paid any price demanded by the Jewish shopkeepers, thus strengthening the conviction that security as well as law and order would be maintained.

Polish patriots, who only recently lost a war and a state, resented any favorable expression toward Russia, the traditional enemy. Expressions of satisfaction with the unfolding events were particularly objectionable when they came from Jews, with their stereotypical image as traitors. Jews waving red flags to welcome Soviet troops rose to great symbolic meaning in Polish memory of the period.⁴

Transition

The transition period, which lasted from a few days to a couple of weeks, between the disintegration of the Polish Army and administration and the establishment of a firm Soviet presence, was a time of anarchy and violence. A new political and economic structure was emerging and a different social order was established. Those who previously had wealth and political power not only lost their prestige, economic status, and influence, but quite often were thrown in jail or exiled into the interior of the Soviet Union, and quite a few even lost their lives. It should be stressed, as we shall see later, that all ethnic groups were subjected to the transformation that took place in the annexed territories. However, there were differences in time and scale of the process. It was obvious from the very beginning that the Polish population, from whose ranks came the former ruling elite, stood to lose most under the new regime. The Soviet administration was aware of existing ethnic divisions and animosities and exploited them to consolidate its hold on the newly acquired lands.

The first few weeks were crucial for the relations between the various ethnic groups. Long-suppressed hatreds and grudges against the haughty Polish officials, who were often new settlers brought into the area to strengthen a Polish presence, now found violent forms. In many smaller places, particularly those removed from the major routes of the advancing Red Army, the power vacuum was filled by local Jewish-communist activists who formed what they considered Soviet institutions. Revolutionary committees of all kinds seized temporary control in many of the smaller towns. Temporary executive committees confiscated houses, landed property, made arbitrary arrests. Most victims were Polish officials and landowners. Harassment of the more affluent and the expropriation and arbitrary distribution of goods among the poor by self-appointed

rulers were rampant in the time of transition. In some towns the temporary administrations established self-defense units to maintain law and order and prevent looting and pogroms by peasants from the countryside before the arrival of the Red Army. Jewish communists played a prominent role in these short-lived local committees and militias.

Polish as well as Jewish sources note the disproportionate number of Jews in the Soviet-established institutions immediately after the arrival of the Red Army. Eager to return to a semblance of normality in the shortest possible time, the new rulers were ready to employ temporarily anybody who could be of help. The Polish population could not provide the needed manpower since, at this stage, it refused to cooperate with the invaders. Though the Soviets pretended to liberate the Ukrainian and Belorussians from Polish oppression, the kindred nationalities were far from being able and reliable allies. The Jewish community was, until the large-scale arrival of reliable cadres from the Soviet interior, the most important reservoir of manpower. Jews were relatively well educated, trustworthy as far as outside powers were concerned, and willing to take up jobs under the new rulers.⁵ Hence the high and visible presence of Jews in the Soviet institutions during the initial stages of the occupation.

Local conditions, the oppressive antisemitic regime in Poland, and, above all, the looming threat of Nazism were responsible for the favorable disposition of the Jewish community toward the Soviet invaders. No ideological or ethnic preferences were involved. In Polish memory the role of the Jews in the initial and short-lived stages of Soviet rule was the most offensive.⁶

Life under Soviet Rule

The entire population of the new Soviet territories was the subject of a ruthless social-economic transformation accompanied by massive arrests, deportations, and executions. All ethnic groups—Poles, Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Jews—were subjected to the so-called Sovietization process. It encompassed almost every aspect of social life. It was an attempt to form in the shortest time a Stalinist totalitarian regime as practiced in the USSR itself and thus assure Soviet rule of the occupied territories. The destruction of the old order and its elite came with the formation of new institutions, economic relations, and a Soviet social order. The Jewish community did not get any preferential treatment. These were the dark days of Stalinism, when an attempt was being made to force complete assimilation on the Jews living in the USSR itself. They were forced to get rid of any distinct national and religious existence and dissolve into the “Soviet family of nations.” Stalin’s antisemitism and anti-Jewish policies are by now well documented.⁷ To attribute to his emissaries in the new Soviet lands a different, pro-Jewish policy would be utterly mistaken. The same policies were pursued in the Soviet interior as in eastern Poland.

The elaborate network of Jewish autonomous institutions was destroyed within a couple of months after the occupation. For the Jews, a non-territorial,

ethnic-religious minority, the destruction of their collective organizations and institutions meant, in the long run, the death of a distinct and separate group existence. Thus the *kehilla*, the Jewish communal organization, which had an official status in independent Poland with the right to raise taxes, ceased to exist. A similar fate befell the many philanthropic, welfare, cultural, and educational institutions in the area. Actually, all organized Jewish life came to a standstill, except for a de-nationalized Yiddish school system that was under constant pressure to change the language of instruction. All Jewish political parties—and there were many of them representing the different economic, social, and ideological divisions in the Jewish community—were liquidated. Many of their leaders were arrested, deported, or simply went into hiding. The fate of organized Jewish life in the annexed territories was sealed.⁸

The economic changes brought about by the Soviet regime affected the Jewish population in a differential way. A disproportionate section of the community was self-employed and, according to Soviet definitions, belonged to non-productive classes. It included the small, affluent group that owned real estate, factories, and other forms of wealth as well as the group of political, religious, and cultural leaders who lost their property and any means of livelihood. These latter people were prevented from getting employment in the new economy since they were defined as “class enemies.” The many small shop owners, quite a sizable group in the community, were ruined economically when private commerce disappeared after the short transition period. Independent artisans fared better, since they found their place in the many co-ops and state enterprises. At the same time the new rulers abolished the discriminatory practices of the former Polish government. Jews could and did get jobs in the inflated Soviet administration, in new industrial enterprises, and in health and education services. Jewish professionals such as engineers, doctors, pharmacists, accountants, and teachers, who in the past could not get a decent job, were now sought after. Also, for the first time higher education became free and accessible to Jewish youth.

The prominence of Jews during the first few weeks in the local administration was short lived as communist cadres who soon arrived from the interior took up the higher ranks of the Soviet institutions. Only subordinate positions were open to locals, Jews and others. The change in social and economic status of many Jews was revolutionary and strongly resented by Poles, who lost not only political independence but also their former economic and social standing. For many it also included arrest and deportation.

The Continuous Purge

Effective control of the acquired territories was both the goal and a prerequisite of Sovietization. The elimination of any overt or potential opposition was indispensable for the success of the integration. The Soviet rulers conducted a systematic policy designed to eliminate the former elite as well as elements of the population that were considered by the new rulers undesirable or

unadaptable. There were no exceptions to this policy. It encompassed an ever-widening circle of victims in an attempt to eliminate any person with authority in the community. By 1939 the Soviet authorities were highly adept in wielding the purge as a tool of terror and control. More than twenty years of experience, during collectivization and the Great Purges of the mid-1930s in particular, resulted in well-tested methods and personnel. Trained and experienced crews of the NKVD, the Soviet secret police, accompanied the advancing Red Army. They came prepared with detailed instructions as to who should be imprisoned and deported. When they used local inhabitants to accomplish their mission, it was only in subordinate capacities, such as guides and drivers who were familiar with the local population and geography. Exact numbers of deportees are unknown, and we are left with different estimates.⁹ However, the relative weight of each group among the prisoners and deportees is clear. The largest group of prisoners and deportees were Poles. People connected in any form to the Polish administration were apprehended in the first days of Soviet rule. Successive waves of arrests and deportations continued until 20–22 June 1941, when the German invasion swept the annexed territories. It felt like a continuous purge. Jews were disproportionately present among the prisoners since they were over-represented in sections of society considered by the regime as unproductive, as class enemies. People connected with Jewish nationalism, religion, and culture, which were anathema in Soviet eyes, were prime targets for elimination. Many of the Jewish refugees from the Nazi-occupied areas were among the Jewish deportees. According to various estimates, Jews made up about 30 percent of the deportees, while constituting only 10 percent of the population.¹⁰ It was obvious that the Jewish community as a group and Jews as individuals were no favorites of the Soviet regime. However, that was not the impression of the embittered Polish population.

The depth of the Polish suspicions and resentment concerning Jewish-Soviet relations was dramatically revealed recently when the details of the Jedwabne massacre became widely known.¹¹ The prominent role of Jews in establishing the Soviet regime and the sights of Jewish joy and satisfaction when the Red Army entered Polish territory haunted the memory of many Poles. Facing the genocidal act committed in Jedwabne, there were many who turned to the twenty-two months of Soviet-Jewish relations for an explanation. When the massacre is treated in the context of what happened in the Soviet period, the unavoidable impression is that one is seeking mitigating circumstances, at least partial justification for murder.¹² The attempt to connect the massacre of an entire community, an obvious act of genocide, to the behavior of the victims during the Soviet period is historically false and morally untenable. It was not specifically those who were suspected of collaboration who were murdered. The victims included men and women, young and old, good, bad, and indifferent neighbors. It was an act of genocide of an entire community that had in common one thing: they were all Jews. The roots for the massacre are to be looked for in much deeper historical and cultural levels than the events of twenty-two months of Soviet rule

over eastern Poland. Jewish-Soviet relations should be studied not as collaboration but on their own. This was a distinct and sad chapter in the history of the region, when people had to learn to live between Hitler and Stalin.

Notes

- I would like to thank my friend and colleague Prof. Shimon Redlich, from the Ben-Gurion University, for his valuable advice in preparing this essay.
1. Selected articles in the Polish press on the Jedwabne controversy have been translated and published in English. See *Thou Shalt Not Kill: Poles on Jedwabne*, ed. William Brand (Warsaw: Wiedź, 2001).
 2. Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 435–443.
 3. See Ben Cion Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews under Soviet Rule: Eastern Poland on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1990), 20–27.
 4. Numerous reports on Polish reactions are to be found in the files of the Sikorski Historical Institute, London. See, for example, file A–9–3–2a/19, *ibid.*
 5. Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews under Soviet Rule*, 26–27.
 6. K. Jasiewicz, a Polish historian who published some very thorough and impressive studies on Soviet rule in eastern Poland, not surprisingly discovered that many Poles found employment in Soviet institutions of all kinds. Thus, in the Białystok region, Jasiewicz found that out of 5,500 people who were openly collaborating with the Soviet authorities, 2,773, or 51%, were ethnic Poles. See K. Jasiewicz, “Research Still Needed on These Neighbors,” in *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, ed. Brand, 129–130.
 7. See, for example, W. Korey, *The Soviet Cage: Anti-Semitism in Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1973); as well as L. Rapoport, *Stalin's War against the Jews: The Doctors Plot and the Soviet Solution* (New York: Free Press, 1990).
 8. A detailed analysis of the problem is found in *Special Report No. 1 of the Select Committee on Communist Aggression*, House of Representatives, 83rd Congress, 2nd sess., Washington, 1954.
 9. Poland Embassy, *Polish-Soviet Relations, 1918–1943* (Washington, D.C.: Polish Embassy, 1944), 1: 573–574 (official documents).
 10. *Ibid.*
 11. It was in the wake of the Polish publication of Jan T. Gross's book, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).
 12. Striking in that respect is Tomasz Strzembosz's essay, “Covered-up Collaboration,” in *Rzeczpospolita*, 27 January 2001, reprinted in *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, ed. Brand, 163–181. The author accused the Jewish community of outright treason. No wonder that the respected professor felt the need to assure his readers in his introduction that “Murders carried out on any group of civilians cannot be justified” (164, *ibid.*).

CHAPTER 6

Jews and Their Polish Neighbors

THE CASE OF JEDWABNE IN THE SUMMER OF 1941



JAN T. GROSS

On 8 January 1949, in the small town of Jedwabne, some nineteen kilometers from Łomża in Poland's historical province of Mazowsze, security police detained fifteen men. We find their names in a memorandum ominously called *Raport likwidacyjny* (A liquidation report) among the so-called control-in-files (*akta kontrolno-śledcze*) kept by the security police to monitor their own progress in each investigation.¹ Among the arrested, mostly small farmers and seasonal workers, there were two shoemakers, a mason, a carpenter, two locksmiths, a letter carrier, and a former town-hall receptionist. Some were family men (one a father of six children, another of four), some still unattached. The youngest was twenty-seven years old, the oldest sixty-four. They were, to put it simply, a bunch of ordinary men.²

Jedwabne's inhabitants, at the time totaling about two thousand, must have been shocked by the simultaneous arrests of so many local residents.³ The wider public got a glimpse of the whole affair four months later, when, on 16 and 17 May in the District Court of Łomża, Bolesław Ramotowski and twenty-one codefendants were put on trial. The opening sentence of the indictment reads, "Jewish Historical Institute in Poland sent materials to the Ministry of Justice describing criminal activities of the inhabitants of Jedwabne who engaged in the murder of Jewish people, as stated in the testimony of Szmul Wasersztajn who witnessed the pogrom of the Jews."⁴

There are no records at the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH) telling us how or when Wasersztajn's deposition was communicated to the prosecutor's office. On the basis of the court files, likewise, it is impossible to know, for example, when the prosecution was informed about what had happened in Jedwabne and why the indictment was so long delayed. The control-investigative files from the Łomża Security Office shed some light on the matter, but they are also

inconclusive.⁵ In any case, Wasersztajn gave his testimony before the Jewish Historical Commission in Białystok on 5 April 1945. And this is what he said:

Before the war broke out, 1,600 Jews lived in Jedwabne, and only seven survived, saved by a Polish woman, Wyrzykowska, who lived in the vicinity.

On Monday evening, June 23, 1941, Germans entered the town. And as early as the 25th local bandits, from the Polish population, started an anti-Jewish pogrom. Two of those bandits, Borowski (Borowiuk?) Wacek with his brother Mietek walked from one Jewish dwelling to another together with other bandits playing accordion and flute to drown the screams of Jewish women and children. I saw with my own eyes how those murderers killed Chajcia Wasersztajn, Jakub Kac, seventy-three years old, and Eliaz Krawiecki.

Jakub Kac they stoned to death with bricks. Krawiecki they knifed and then plucked his eyes and cut off his tongue. He suffered terribly for twelve hours before he gave up his soul.

On the same day I observed a horrible scene. Chaja Kubrzanska, twenty-eight years old, and Basia Binsztajn, twenty-six years old, both holding newborn babies, when they saw what was going on, they ran to a pond, in order to drown themselves with the children rather than fall into the hands of bandits. They put their children in the water and drowned them with their own hands: then Baśka Binsztajn jumped in and immediately went to the bottom, while Chaja Kubrzanska suffered for a couple of hours. Assembled hooligans made a spectacle of this. They advised her to lie face down in the water, so that she would drown faster. Finally, seeing that the children were already dead, she threw herself more energetically into the water and found her death too.

The next day a local priest intervened, explaining that they should stop the pogrom, and that German authorities would take care of things by themselves. This worked, and the pogrom was stopped. From this day on the local population no longer sold foodstuffs to Jews, which made their circumstances all the more difficult. In the meantime rumors spread that the Germans would issue an order that all the Jews be destroyed.

Such an order was issued by the Germans on July 10, 1941.

Even though the Germans gave the order, it was Polish hooligans who took it up and carried it out, using the most horrible methods. After various tortures and humiliations, they burned all the Jews in a barn. During the first pogrom and the later bloodbath the following outcasts distinguished themselves by their brutality: Szlezinski, Karolak, Borowiuk (Borowski?) Mietek, Borowiuk (Borowski?) Waclaw, Jermalowski, Ramutowski Bolek, Rogalski Bolek, Szelawa Stanisław, Szelawa Franciszek, Kozłowski Geniek, Trzaska, Tarnoczek Jerzyk, Ludański Jurek, Laciecz Czesław.

On the morning of July 10, 1941, eight gestapo men came to town and had a meeting with representatives of the town authorities. When the gestapo asked what their plans were with respect to the Jews, they said, unanimously, that all Jews must be killed. When the Germans proposed to leave one Jewish family from each profession, local carpenter Bronisław Szleziński who was present, answered: We have enough of our own craftsmen, we have to destroy all the Jews, none should stay alive. Mayor Karolak and everybody else agreed with his words. For this purpose Szleziński gave his own barn, which stood nearby. After this meeting the bloodbath began.

Local hooligans armed themselves with axes, special clubs studded with nails, and other instruments of torture and destruction and chased all the Jews into the street. As the first victims of their devilish instincts they selected seventy-five of the youngest and healthiest Jews, whom they ordered to pick up a huge monument of Lenin that the Russians had erected in the center of town. It was impossibly heavy, but under a rain of horrible blows the Jews had to do it. While carrying the monument, they also had to sing until they brought it to the designated place. There, they were ordered to dig a hole and throw the monument in. Then these Jews were butchered to death and thrown into the same hole.

The other brutality was when the murderers ordered every Jew to dig a hole and bury all previously murdered Jews, and then those were killed and in turn buried by others. It is impossible to represent all the brutalities of the hooligans, and it is difficult to find in our history of suffering something similar.

Beards of old Jews were burned, newborn babies killed at their mothers' breasts, people were beaten murderously and forced to sing and dance. In the end they proceeded to the main—the burning. The entire town was surrounded by guards so that nobody could escape; then Jews were ordered to line up in a column, four in a row, and the ninety-year-old rabbi and the shochet [Kosher butcher] were put in front, they were given a red banner, and all were ordered to sing and were chased into the barn. Hooligans bestially beat them up on the way. Near the gate a few hooligans were standing, playing various instruments in order to drown the screams of horrified victims. Some tried to defend themselves, but they were defenseless. Bloodied and wounded, they were pushed into the barn. Then the barn was doused with kerosene and lit, and the bandits went around to search Jewish homes, to look for the remaining sick and children. The sick people they found they carried to the barn themselves, and as for the little children, they roped a few together by their legs and carried them on their backs, then put them on pitchforks and threw them onto smoldering coals.

After the fire they used axes to knock golden teeth from still not

entirely decomposed bodies and in other ways violated the corpses of holy martyrs.⁶

While it is clear to a reader of Wasersztajn's deposition that Jews were annihilated in Jedwabne with particular cruelty, it is difficult at first to fully absorb the meaning of his testimony. And, in a way, I am not at all surprised that four years elapsed between the time when he made his statement and the beginning of the Łomża trial. This is, more or less, the amount of time that elapsed between my discovery of Wasersztajn's testimony in the ŻIH's archives and my grasp of its factuality. When in the autumn of 1998 I was asked to contribute an article to a Festschrift prepared for Professor Tomasz Strzembosz—a well-known historian who specialized in wartime history of the Białystok region—I decided to use the example of Jedwabne to describe how Polish neighbors mistreated their Jewish cocitizens. But I did not fully register then that after the series of killings and cruelties described by Wasersztajn, at the end of the day, *all* the remaining Jews were actually burned alive in a barn. (I must have read this as a hyperbolic trope, concluding that only some had been killed that way.) A few months after I submitted my essay, I watched raw footage for the documentary film *Where Is My Older Brother Cain?* made by Agnieszka Arnold, who, among other interlocutors, spoke with the daughter of Bronisław Śleszyński and I realized that Wasersztajn has to be taken literally.

As the book had not yet been published, I wondered whether I should withdraw my chapter. However, I decided to leave the chapter unchanged, because one important aspect of the Jedwabne story concerns the slow dawning of Polish awareness of this horrendous crime. How did this event figure (or, rather, fail to figure) in the consciousness of historians of the war period—myself included? How did the population of Jedwabne live for three generations with the knowledge of these murders? How will the Polish citizenry process the revelation when it becomes public knowledge?⁷

In any case, once we realize that what seems inconceivable is precisely what happened, a historian soon discovers that the whole story is very well documented, that witnesses are still alive, and that the memory of this crime has been preserved in Jedwabne through the generations.

The Murder

It all began, as we remember, with the convocation on the morning of 10 July of all adult Polish males to Jedwabne's town hall. But rumors about the planned assault on the Jews must have been circulating earlier. Otherwise, carts full of people from nearby hamlets would not have been converging on the town on this day since early dawn. I suspect that some of these people were veterans of murderous pogroms that had recently been carried out in the vicinity. It was typical, when a "wave of pogroms" swept over some area, that, in addition to

local participants unique to each locality, a core group of plunderers kept moving from place to place.⁸

“On a certain day, at the request of Karolak and Sabuta, several dozen men assembled in front of the city hall in Jedwabne and were equipped by the German gendarmerie and Karolak and Sobuta with whips and clubs. Then Karolak and Sobuta ordered the assembled men to bring to the square in front of the town hall all the Jews of Jedwabne.” In an earlier testimony witness Danowski added one more detail to this crisp narrative by pointing out that people were served vodka on the occasion, though nobody else confirmed this.⁹

More or less at the same time that Poles were called to the town hall, Jews were ordered to assemble at the square for, allegedly, some cleaning duty. Rivka Fogel recalled that she meant to bring along a broom. Since Jews had previously been pressed into debasing cleanup jobs, one could imagine at first that this was to be but a routine exercise in humiliation. She said, “My husband took our two children and went there. I stayed at home for a while trying to put things in order and lock the doors and windows.”¹⁰ But it became clear almost instantly that the circumstances were different on that day. Mrs. Fogel did not follow her husband and children to the square; instead, together with a neighbor, Mrs. Pravde, she hid in the nearby garden of a nobleman’s estate. And a few moments later, she recalled, “we could hear from there the terrible cries of a young boy, Joseph Lewin, whom the goyim were beating to death.”¹¹

By some uncanny coincidence we learn from the testimony of Karol Bardoń, who happened to be passing by in the vicinity a few moments later, that Lewin had been stoned to death. Bardoń, we recall, was repairing a car this morning in the courtyard of the German gendarmerie’s outpost and had to go to the toolshed on the nobleman’s estate (in whose garden the two women were hiding). “Around the corner from the foundry adjacent to the toolshed an inhabitant of Jedwabne, Wiśniewski, was standing. . . . Wiśniewski called me, and I came closer and Wiśniewski pointed to a massacred cadaver of a young man of Mosaic persuasion, about twenty-two years old, whose name was Lewin, and said to me, Look, mister, we killed this SOB with stones. . . . Wiśniewski showed me a stone weighing twelve to fourteen kilograms and said, I smacked him good with this stone and he won’t get up any more.”¹² This took place at the very beginning of the pogrom. As Bardoń writes, on his way to the toolshed he saw a group of only about a hundred Jews on the square; by the time he was on his way back, the assemblage had grown considerably.

In another part of town Wincenty Gościcki had just returned home from a night watchman’s job: “In the morning when I went to bed, my wife came and told me to get up and said that bad things were going on. Near our house people were beating Jews with clubs. I got up then and went outside the house. Then I was called by Urbanowski who told me, Look what is going on, and showed me four Jewish corpses. These were (1) Fiszman, (2) the two Styjakowskis [?] and Blubert. I, then, I hid in the house.”¹³

From early on that day the Jews understood that they were in mortal danger. Many tried to escape into neighboring fields, but only a few succeeded. It was difficult to get out of town without being noticed, as small vigilante groups of peasants were milling around trying to ferret out and catch hiding and fleeing Jews. A dozen teenagers grabbed Nieławicki, who was already in the fields when the pogrom began, as he was trying to sneak across the fields to Wizna. He was beaten up and brought to the square. Similarly, Olszewicz was caught in the fields by peasant youths, beaten up, and brought back to town. Some one to two hundred people managed to run away, hide, and survive that day—among them, as we know, Nieławicki and Olszewicz. But many others were killed on the spot, right where they were apprehended. On his trip to the toolshed, Bardoń saw “on the left side of the road, in the fields belonging to the estate, civilians mounted on horses, wielding thick wooden clubs,” who were patrolling the area.¹⁴ A horseman could easily spot people hiding in the fields and then catch up with them. Jedwabne Jews were doomed.

On this day a cacophony of violence swept through the town. It unfolded in the form of many uncoordinated, simultaneous initiatives over which Karolak and the town council exercised only general supervision (as we remember, they went around enlisting people for guard duty on the square, for example). They monitored progress and made sure at critical junctures that the goal of the pogrom was advanced. But otherwise people were free to improvise as best they knew how.

Bardoń, on his way to the toolshed one more time later in the day, stumbled on Wiśniewski in the same place as before, near Lewin’s body:

I understood that Wiśniewski was waiting here for something. I took all the necessary parts from the toolshed, and on my way back I met the same two young men whom I had seen when I went to the toolshed for the first time that morning [he later identifies them as Jerzy Ludański and Kalinowski]. I understood that they were coming to Wiśniewski to the place where Lewin had been killed, and they were bringing another man of Mosaic persuasion, a married owner of the mechanical mill where I had been employed till March 1939, called Hersh Zdrojewicz. They held him under the arms and blood was flowing from his head over his neck and onto his torso. Zdrojewicz said to me, Save me, Mister Bardoń. Being afraid of these murderers, I replied, I cannot help you with anything, and I passed them by.¹⁵

And thus, in one part of town, Ludański, Wiśniewski, and Kalinowski were stoning to death Lewin and Zdrojewicz; in front of Gościcki’s house four Jews were clubbed to death by somebody else; in the pond near Łomżyńska Street a certain “Luba Władysław . . . drowned two Jewish blacksmiths”;¹⁶ in still another location Czesław Mierzejewski raped and then killed Judes Ibram;¹⁷ the beautiful Gitele Nadolny (Nadolnik), the youngest daughter of the *melamed* (*kheyder* teacher), whom everybody knew because they had learned to read in

her father's house, had her head cut off, and the murderers, we are told, later kicked it around;¹⁸ at the square "Dobrzańska asked for water [it was a hot summer day], then fainted; no one was allowed to help her, and her mother was killed because she wanted to bring water; [while] Betka Brzozowska was killed with a baby in her arms."¹⁹ Jews were mercilessly beaten all this time, and their houses, in the meantime, were plundered.²⁰

Simultaneously with multiple individual actions, more organized forms of persecution were also engulfing Jewish victims, who were driven in groups to the cemetery to be killed wholesale. "They took healthier men and chased them to the cemetery and ordered them to dig a pit, and after it was dug out, Jews were killed every which way, one with iron, another with a knife, still another with a club."²¹ "Stanisław Szelawa was murdering with an iron hook, [stabbing] in the stomach. The witness [Szmul Wasersztajn, whose second deposition held in the Jewish Historical Institute I am now quoting] was hiding in the bushes. He heard the screaming. They killed twenty-eight men in one place from among the strongest. Szelawa took away one Jew. His tongue was cut off. Then a long silence."²² The murderers got excited and were working at a frantic pace. "I stood on Przytułska Street," said an older woman, Bronisława Kalinowska, "and Jerzy Laudański, inhabitant of Jedwabne, was running down the street, and he said that he had already killed two or three Jews; he was very nervous and ran along."²³

But it must soon have become apparent that fifteen hundred people cannot be killed by such primitive methods in a day. So the perpetrators decided to kill all the Jews at once, by burning them together. This very same method had been used a few days earlier, during the Radziłów pogrom. For whatever reason, however, the script does not seem to have been finalized in advance, since there was no agreed-upon location where the mass killing was supposed to take place. Józef Chrzanowski testified to this: "When I came to the square, they [Sobuta and Wasilewski] told me to give my barn to burn the jews. But I started pleading to spare my barn, to which they agreed and left my barn in peace, only told me to help them chase the jews to Bronisław Śleszyński's barn."²⁴

The murderers were determined to take away their victims' dignity before they took their lives. One person recalled, "I saw how Sobuta and Wasilewski took some dozen Jews from among the assembled and ordered them to do some ridiculous gymnastics exercises."²⁵ Before the Jews were chased along on their last brief journey from the square to the barn where they would all perish, Sobuta and his colleagues organized a sideshow. During the Soviet occupation a statue of Lenin had been erected in town, right next to the main square. So "a group of Jews was brought to the little square to fell Lenin's statue. When Jews broke the statue, they were told to put its various pieces on some boards and carry it around, and the rabbi was told to walk in front with his hat on a stick, and all had to sing, 'The war is because of us, the war is for us.' While carrying the statue all the Jews were chased toward the barn, and the barn was doused with gasoline and lit, and in this manner fifteen hundred Jewish people perished."²⁶

In the immediate vicinity of the barn, as we remember, a thick crowd was milling, helping to shove the beaten, wounded, and terrorized Jews inside. “We chased jews under the barn,” Czesław Laudański would later report, “and we ordered them to enter inside, and the jews had to enter inside.”²⁷

From the inside of the barn, we are told two stories. One concerning Michał Kuropatwa, a coachman, who some time earlier had helped a Polish army officer hide from his Soviet pursuers. When the self-styled leaders of the pogrom noticed him in the Jewish crowd, he was taken out and told that because he had helped a Polish officer earlier, he might now go home. But he refused, choosing to share the fate of his people.²⁸

The barn was then doused with kerosene, issued at the warehouse by Antoni Niebrzydowski to his brother Jerzy and Eugeniusz Kalinowski: “They brought the eight liters of kerosene that I had issued to them and doused the barn filled with Jews and lit it up; what followed I do not know.”²⁹ But we do know the Jews were burned alive. At the last moment, Neumark managed to tear himself away from this hell. A surge of hot air must have blown the barn door open. He was standing right next to it with his sister and her five-year-old daughter. Staszek Sielawa barred their exit, wielding an ax. But Neumark wrestled it away from him and they managed to run away and hide in the cemetery. The last thing he remembered from inside was the sight of his father, already engulfed in flames.³⁰

The fire must have spread unevenly. It appears to have moved from east to west, perhaps on account of the wind. Afterward, in the east wing of the incinerated building a few charred corpses could be found; there were some more in the center, and toward the western end a multitude of the dead were piled up. The bodies in the upper layer of the heap had been consumed by fire, but those beneath had been crushed and asphyxiated, their clothes in many cases remaining intact. “They were so intertwined with one another that bodies could not be disentangled,” recalled an elderly peasant who, as a young boy, had been sent with a group of local men to bury the dead. And he added a detail in unwitting confirmation of Wasersztajn’s chilling testimony: “In spite of this people were trying to search the corpses, looking for valuables sewn into clothing. I touched a Brolin shoe-polish box. It clinked. I cut it through with a shovel, and some coins glittered—I think golden tzarist five-ruble coins. People jumped over to collect them, and this drew the attention of onlooking gendarmes. They searched everybody. And if someone put the find in his pocket, they took it away and gave him a good shove. But anyone who hid it in his shoe saved the catch.”³¹

The worst murderer of the whole lot was probably a certain Kobrzyńiecki. We are also told by some witnesses that he was the one who ignited the barn. “Later people said that the most jews were killed by citizen Kobrzyńiecki—I don’t know his first name,” recalls witness Edward Śleszyński, in whose father’s barn most of Jedwabne’s Jews were killed on that day. “He apparently personally killed eighteen jews and participated the most in the burning of the barn.”³² Housewife Aleksandra Karwowska knew from Kobrzyńiecki himself that he had

“knifed to death eighteen jews. He said this in [her] apartment when he was putting up the stove.”³³

It was the middle of a very hot July, and the burned and asphyxiated corpses of murder victims had to be buried quickly. But there were no more Jews in town who could be ordered to accomplish this grisly task. “Late in the evening,” recalls Wincenty Gościcki, “I was taken by the Germans to bury those burned corpses. But I could not do this because when I saw this, I started to vomit and I was released from burying the cadavers.”³⁴ Apparently he was not the only one who couldn’t stomach the job, since “on the second or the third day after the murder” we are told once again by Bardoń, “I was standing with Mayor Karolak in the square not far from the outpost, and the commander of the outpost of the German gendarmerie in Jedwabne, Adamy, came up and said to the mayor with emphasis, So, kill people and burn them you managed, eh? but bury them no one is eager to, eh? by morning, all must be buried! Understood?”³⁵ This angry outburst by the local gendarmerie commander quickly became the talk of the town. Sixty years later Leon Dziejdz from Przestrzele near Jedwabne could still quote his words: “‘You insisted that you’d put things in order with the Jews [że zrobicie porządek z Żydami], but you don’t know how to put things in order at all.’ He [the German gendarme] was afraid that an epidemic might break out because it was very hot and dogs were already getting at [the corpses].”³⁶ But this was an “impossible job,” as Leon Dziejdz further clarified in another interview, for the piled-up bodies of Jewish victims were entwined with one another “as roots of a tree. Somebody hit upon the idea that we should tear them into pieces and throw these pieces into the dugout. They brought pitchforks, and we tore the bodies as best we could: here a head, there a leg.”³⁷

After 10 July, Poles were no longer permitted to kill the Jews of Jedwabne at will. The routine of the German occupation administration was reestablished. A few survivors returned to town. They lingered there for a while—a few worked at the gendarmerie outpost—and in the end they were driven by the Nazis to the ghetto in Łomża. About a dozen people survived the war. Seven of the total had been hidden and cared for in the nearby Janczewo hamlet by the Wyrzykowski family.

New Approach to Sources

The mass murder of Jedwabne Jews in the summer of 1941 opens up the historiography of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War. Sedatives that were administered in connection with this subject by historians and journalists for over fifty years have to be put aside. It is simply not true that Jews were murdered in Poland during the war solely by the Germans, occasionally assisted in the execution of their gruesome task by some auxiliary police formations composed primarily of Latvians, Ukrainians, or some other “Kalmuks,” not to mention the proverbial fall guys whom everybody castigated because

it was so easy not to take responsibility for what they had done—the so-called *szmalcowniks*, extortionists who made a profession of blackmailing Jews who were trying to pass and survive in hiding. By singling them out as culprits, historians and others have found it easy to bring closure to the matter by saying that there is scum in every society, that these were a few socially marginal individuals, and that they were dealt with by underground courts anyway.

After Jedwabne, the issue of Polish-Jewish relations during the war can no longer be put to rest with such ready-made formulas. Indeed, we have to re-think not only wartime but also postwar Polish history, as well as reevaluate certain important interpretive themes widely accepted as explanations accounting for outcomes, attitudes, and institutions of those years.

To begin with, I suggest that we should modify our approach to sources for this period. When considering survivors' testimonies, we would be well advised to change the starting premise from a priori critical to in principle affirmative in appraisal of their evidentiary contribution. By accepting what we read in a particular account as fact *until we find persuasive arguments to the contrary*, we would avoid more mistakes than we are likely to commit by adopting the opposite approach, which calls for cautious skepticism toward any testimony *until an independent confirmation of its content has been found*. The greater the catastrophe, the fewer the survivors. We must be capable of listening to lonely voices reaching us from the abyss, as did Wasersztajn's testimony before the memorial book of Jedwabne Jews was published, or Finkelsztajn's testimony about the destruction of the Jewish community in Radziłów.

I make the point, to some extent, on the basis of my own experience. It took me four years, as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, to understand what Wasersztajn was communicating in his deposition. But the same conclusion—that we ought to accept as true Jewish testimonies about atrocities committed by the local population until they are proven false—suggests itself as we consider the general absence in Polish historiography of any studies about the involvement of the ethnically Polish population in the destruction of Polish Jewry. It is a subject of fundamental importance and has been extremely well documented. In the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw alone one can find over seven thousand depositions collected from the survivors of the Holocaust immediately after the war; these provide voluminous evidence of collusion by the Poles in the destruction of their Jewish neighbors. But quite often—as with Wasersztajn's and Finkelsztajn's testimony—these come from the only surviving witnesses, who have utterly incredible stories to tell. All I am arguing for is the suspension of our incredulity.

But in the last analysis, it is not our professional inadequacy (as a community of historians of this period) that calls most compellingly for revision in the approach to sources. This methodological imperative follows from the very immanent character of all evidence that we are ever likely to come across about the destruction of Polish Jewry.

All that we know about the Holocaust—by virtue of the fact that it has

been told—is not a representative sample of the Jewish fate suffered under Nazi rule. It is all skewed evidence, biased in one direction: these are all stories with a happy ending. They have all been produced by a few who were lucky enough to survive. Even statements from witnesses who have not survived—statements that have been interrupted by the sudden death of their authors, who, therefore, left only fragments of what they wanted to say—belong to this category. For what has reached us was written only while the authors were still alive. About the “heart of darkness” that was also the very essence of their experience, about their last betrayal, about the Calvary of 90 percent of the prewar Polish Jewry—we will never know. And that is why we must take literally all fragments of information at our disposal, fully aware that what actually happened to the Jewish community during the Holocaust can only be more tragic than the existing representation of events based on surviving evidence.

Notes

Reprinted by permission of the author and publisher from Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 14–22, 90–104, 138–142.

1. The report, dated 24 January 1949, is currently held, together with other control-investigative files of the Łomża Public Security Office (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego w Łomży), in the archives of the Office for State Security in Białystok (Wydział Ewidencji i Archiwum Delegatury Urzędu Ochrony Państwa, hereafter cited as UOP). We also learn from it that in addition to the fifteen arrested in Jedwabne “seven people were not apprehended, because they are hiding in unknown localities.”
2. I borrow this expression from a pathbreaking study by Christopher Browning entitled *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper and Collins, 1992).
3. A mimeographed publication, *Głos Jedwabnego*, in its June 1986 issue, informs us that in 1949 the city “together with Kajetanowo, Kossaki, and Biczki suburbs comprised 2,150 inhabitants.”
4. I quote in this study from the files of two court cases which are kept in the archive of the Main Commission for Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation (Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, hereafter cited as MC)—transferred in the year 2000 into the newly established Institute of National Memory (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej). The case against Bolesław Ramotowski and others is filed under catalog no. SOŁ123; the case against Józef Sobuta (tried in 1953), also pertaining to the circumstances of the massacre of the Jedwabne Jews, is filed under catalog no. SWB 145. In those files, consecutive sheets, rather than pages (recto and verso), are numbered by hand. The sentence quoted in the text can be found in MC, SOŁ 123, on page 3 (I will hereafter use the notation form 123/3).

I would like to thank Professor Andrzej Paczkowski for facilitating my access to the archives of the Main Commission at the time when they were being packed prior to their imminent transfer into the custody of the recently established (1999) Institute of National Memory. I also want to thank him and his collaborators from the Laboratory of Late Modern [Najnowszej] Polish History at the Institute of Political

Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw (ISP PAN) for the opportunity to present and discuss initial findings of my research.

5. In a document entitled "Report Concerning the Beginning of Investigation of the Case" (Meldunek o wszczęciu rozpracowania sprawy), we find the following information filed under the rubric "History of How the Investigation Was Initiated" (historia wszczęcia rozpracowania): "A letter was sent to the Ministry of Justice by a Jewess Calka Migdal, who escaped when the Jews were being murdered in Jedwabne, and who saw everything and also who took part in the murder of Jews in 1941 in Jedwabne." But her letter is not included in the files, and we do not know when it was sent to the Ministry of Justice. One more document is held in the files that alerted the Security Office to wartime crimes in Jedwabne, this one dated 30 December 1947. Entitled "Report," it reads as follows: "I hereby report that in the town of Jedwabne in the Łomża County there lived during the German occupation and worked in the municipality as a mayor citizen Karolak Marian. His description: heavyset, round face, hair used to be dark now mostly gray, about six feet tall, clear face without any characteristic marks. Still under the Germans he was arrested by the German authorities, as far as I know because of all the riches he took from the Jews and did not divide equally with the Germans. He was released and then once again taken by the Germans, and he disappeared. Recently, on December 1, 1947, I was in Warsaw in the Grochowska district and I saw personally how the same Karolak Marian walked in the street. As soon as he saw me, he disappeared. I wanted to report him to the militia or some other authorities, but no one was in the street at the time" (UOP). The Security Office was not able to find and arrest Karolak in subsequent years.
6. Jewish Historical Institute (hereafter cited as ŻIH), Warsaw, Poland, collection no. 301, document no. 152 (hereafter in format 301/152). Throughout my translations I try to preserve the linguistic and orthographic awkwardness of the original documents being quoted. Collection no. 301 at the institute, called "Individual Depositions," contains over seven thousand depositions collected immediately after the war from survivors of the Holocaust by a then established Jewish Historical Commission. These are probably the most important sources for the study of the Holocaust period in Poland because they are quasi-contemporaneous. The Jewish Historical Commission had branches in several larger towns (capitals of Poland's *voivodeships*, i.e., largest territorial units of administration) where Jews resided at the time. Thus, for example, Wasersztajn's deposition was made before the Jewish Historical Commission in Białystok on 5 April 1945. At the bottom of the page we find an additional note: "Witness Szmul Wasersztajn, written down by E. Szejman; chairman of the Voivodeship Jewish Historical Commission, M. Turek, freely translated from the Yiddish language by M. Kwater."

We should take note, as well, that various people left several depositions about their experiences, and they may vary somewhat as to details. For example, a second Wasersztajn deposition, filed at ŻIH under 301/613, states that fifty young Jews were murdered at the cemetery and that altogether eighteen Jews from Jedwabne survived the war.
7. The film was aired on the main channel of Polish state television in April 2000 and was very well received by critics. The Jedwabne episode occupies but two minutes in a sixty-three-minute-long documentary feature. I want to thank Agnieszka Arnold for making available to me the script of her interviews conducted in Jedwabne, as

- well as for her not objecting to my using the title *Neighbors* for my book, a title she had planned all along to use for her documentary film about the Jedwabne massacre.
8. An illustration of how a small-town population behaved under such circumstances is the 13 April 1942 entry from *Dziennik lat okupacji zamojszczyzny*: “There is even more panic among the Jews. From the morning on they were expecting the gendarmes and the Gestapo. . . . All kinds of lowlifes crawled out about the town; many horse carts came from the countryside, and all of them were waiting the whole day in anticipation, awaiting the moment they could start the plundering. From various directions we get news about scandalous behavior of the Polish population, about plundering of abandoned Jewish dwellings. In this respect our village certainly will not lag behind” (Zygmunt Klukowski, *Dziennik lat okupacji zamojszczyzny* [Lublin: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1958], 255).
 9. I am quoting from Danowski’s testimony in August 1953 (MC, SWB, 145/238). In his testimony of 31 December 1952, he mentions the distribution of vodka in front of the town hall. We know from trial documents that Danowski was an alcoholic. Quite possibly, then, the free vodka was a detail that was sharply carved in his memory (MC, SWB 145/185, 186, 279).
 10. Julius L. Baker and Jacob L. Baker, eds., *Yedwabne: History and Memorial Book* (Jerusalem and New York: Yedwabner Societies in Israel and the United States of America, 1980), 102. People knew from past experience that their houses, when left unattended, might be broken into. Nieławicki, for example, running into the fields on this day, put on two good pairs of trousers and two shirts, expecting to find the house plundered upon his return. We know also from Ludański that Jews were assembled on the square under the pretext of a cleaning job.
 11. Baker and Baker, *Yedwabne*, 103
 12. MC, SOŁ 123/503.
 13. MC, SOŁ 123/734.
 14. MC, SOŁ 123/503.
 15. MC, SOŁ 123/503, 504.
 16. MC, SOŁ 123/683.
 17. MC, SOŁ 123/675.
 18. Baker and Baker, *Yedwabne*, 103.
 19. `IH, 301/613.
 20. MC, SOŁ 113/675; ŻIH, 301/613 (this is the second deposition by Wasersztajn). When I asked Nieławicki what he observed when he was brought to the square, he told me that he did not look around much but rather tried to move into the center of the crowd because it was encircled by a tight ring of people wielding clubs and other blunt instruments, beating anyone within reach (author’s conversation with Nieławicki, February 2000). Several witnesses already quoted have this merciless beating of Jews in the square in mind when they say that this was a spectacle “one could not look at.”
 21. MC, SOŁ 123/681.
 22. `IH, 301/613
 23. MC, SOŁ 123/686.
 24. MC, SOŁ 123/614.
 25. MC, SOŁ 123/653.
 26. MC, SWB 145/255. In addition to Adam Grabowski, other witnesses, as well as perpetrators, offer the same description of this episode. Thus Julian Sokołowski states:

- “I remember that when jews were chased [toward the barn], citizen Sabuta gave his stick to the rabbi and ordered him to put his hat on it and scream, ‘War is because of us, war is for us.’ All this crowd of jews on the way toward the barn outside town was screaming, ‘War is because of us, war is for us’” (MC, SWB 145/192); see also testimonies by Jerzy Laudański (MC, SOŁ 123/665); Stanisław Danowski (MC, SWB 145/186), and Zygmunt Laudański (MC, SOŁ 123/667).
27. MC, SOŁ 123/666.
 28. Baker and Baker, *Yedwabne*, 103.
 29. MC, SOŁ 123/618. Bardoń also played some part in this transaction of “releasing” kerosene from the warehouse—of which he may have been in charge as a mechanic. But he states in his testimony that he ordered Niebrzydowski to issue kerosene “for technical purposes and not to burn a barn full of people” (MC, SOŁ123/505).
 30. Baker and Baker, *Yedwabne*, 113.
 31. “Nie zabijaj,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 2 July 2000.
 32. MC, SOŁ 123/685. See also the testimony of Władysław Miciura, who says, “From further away I saw only Józef Kobrzeniecki, who was setting the barn on fire” (MC, SOŁ 123/655).
 33. MC, SOŁ 123/684.
 34. MC, SOŁ 123/734.
 35. MC, SOŁ 123/506.
 36. “Nie zabijaj,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 2 July 2000.
 37. Adam Wilma, “Broda mojego syna,” *Gazeta Pomorska*, 4 August 2000.

PART III



*Institutional Polish
Responses to the
Final Solution*

The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Final Solution

WHAT CONDITIONED ITS ACTIONS AND INACTIONS?



DARIUSZ STOLA

*T*he Polish government-in-exile and its policies toward the Jews have been the object of substantial scholarly interest. Thanks to the efforts of historians and to the relatively rich amount of available sources, the topic has arguably become the most thoroughly researched aspect of Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust. Through extensive queries on specific issues, substantial scholarship has accumulated while discussions have matured from an exchange of accusations and apologetics to that of a dialogue.¹ In this essay, I shall present several major factors, both external and internal, that conditioned the Polish government-in-exile's policies on Jewish matters during the period before and after the Final Solution became known. In the period 1939–1941, the question of the future postwar status of Polish Jewry dominated discussions in London, while from 1942 on, the priority shifted to the question of how to react to the German Final Solution and relevant Jewish demands. In both periods the London-based government also addressed a number of issues related to Jewish refugees and soldiers in the Polish Armed Forces. Even well after the Holocaust became known such contemporary problems attracted the attention of Polish émigré leaders.

The Polish government-in-exile was the legitimate successor of prewar Polish governments and was recognized as such by its allies. Yet the government-in-exile operated under highly unusual conditions. It resided far from Poland, as a guest and refugee in London, it had no control over its territory or population, which were subject to occupation by two totalitarian regimes, and it was waging war. Its major asset—the impressive underground structure inside occupied Poland—was not fully controllable, while the coalition providing its political base was loaded with tensions, at times on the brink of dissolution. These

basic facts affected the government's policies in all fields, including the Jewish one.

The government-in-exile was first of all a government of war. The nature of this war and Poland's role, including whom Poland fought against and who were its allies, had implications for policies toward the Jews. The extraordinary character of the "Jewish question" during the war should have placed it as a factor of special consideration, at least from the time when the Nazi Final Solution became known. But the government-in-exile paid less attention to Jewish matters than one might have supposed, particularly from today's perspective. Paradoxically, the outbreak of war initially led to high expectations for a favorable change in Polish policy toward the Jews: it was a war in which Poland, as an ally of liberal Western democracies, stood against Nazi Germany—the very symbol of antisemitism. Émigré Polish-Jewish leaders took these factors into account and expressed optimism, especially in the early stage of the war, about the future of Polish-Jewish relations.²

The exiled government was inevitably weaker and more vulnerable than a normal government that exercises control over its territory and does not have to struggle against two powerful neighbors. One dimension of this weakness was its far-reaching dependence upon political and material support from powers that were friendly but not necessarily supportive of all Polish aims, including the crucial issue of the eastern borders. Recognition and credits extended to the government-in-exile by Great Britain, the United States, and (until June 1940) France were the *sine qua non* of the government's political significance and capacity to act. These Western Allies were also considered crucial for future post-war negotiations. In November 1939, for example, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a circular delineating the aims of Polish diplomacy. It included the goal of winning "the support of the Western democracies for Polish war aims through affirming [our common] aims and principles in matters of security, peace, ethnic and religious tolerance, [and] improving material and economic conditions, etc."³ In forming their wartime aims, exiled Polish leaders were particularly aware of the unambiguous opposition to antisemitism among Poland's Western Allies. As Władysław Sikorski, the prime minister of the government-in-exile, noted, the Western allies were "uncompromising in their attitude towards antisemitism; the condition of their support for our interests is tolerance and equality of rights [for the Jews]."⁴ Such perceptions of the Western Allies' attitude toward Jews and antisemitism clearly made exiled Polish leaders more sensitive and more responsive to Jewish demands than the prewar government had been.

A factor that strengthened the link between the dependence upon Western democracies and Polish policies toward Jews was the belief in Jewish influence on American, British, and French ruling elites, finance, and media. Many Polish leaders shared this conviction, from left to right. Apparently, the notion of a powerful Jewish lobby was particularly convincing for the antisemitic National Democrats (Endeks). Among émigré Poles, it was believed that Western

Jewry could either aid or harm the Polish cause, adding some weight to contacts with Jewish organizations.⁵ Whether fact or fiction, the belief in international Jewish influence played a role in the political side of wartime Polish-Jewish relations. The idea of international Jewish influence can be discerned, for example, in the government-in-exile's declarations on the future status of Jews in Poland. On such occasions, Prime Minister Sikorski explicitly referred to "American and British society" and "international opinion" which "desires to know what will be the future Poland, to have a basis for trust."⁶ The combination of weakness, dependence upon the Western Allies, and a belief in Jewish influence contributed to a greater responsiveness to Jewish demands. Yet we can observe that this same combination of factors at times led to the opposite result, contributing to a Polish defensive attitude and suspicion.

The weakness of the government-in-exile inevitably limited its capacity for action, which also had practical consequences for its response to the Holocaust. This was most clearly shown by the Polish government's failure to make the Allies retaliate for German crimes in Poland (for example, through bombing German civilian objects). This demand came from the Jewish underground in Poland and was communicated both to the government-in-exile and to Western Jewish leaders. The underground Bund wrote on "the necessity of immediate retaliation against German nationals who live in allied countries, with a threat that immediate further retribution [will come] if the slaughter of the Jewish population continues."⁷ Similar messages came from the underground Jewish National Committee as well as from the Polish underground, especially as fears grew that Germans might extend their killing operations to non-Jewish Poles.

The Polish government repeatedly approached British and U.S. authorities with the demands for retaliation, but with no results. No matter how effective it could have actually been, the campaign for retaliation (together with publicizing the news of the Holocaust, which served the same goal) was the Polish government-in-exile's main response to the Holocaust, and it failed due to its insufficient leverage.⁸ Similarly, very little results, if any, came from the Polish government-in-exile's diplomatic intervention with various governments to accept refugees from Poland or to prevent the deportation of Polish Jews from Vichy France and Hungary.⁹

The government-in-exile, and the exiled Poles in general, suffered from insufficient information from the occupied country. There were extraordinary problems in gathering information inside occupied Poland, assessing its reliability, interpreting it, and then getting such information to London for review. With regard to Jewish matters, the government sought at least four kinds of information: Nazi Jewish policy, Polish attitudes toward Jews, Jewish attitudes (especially in the Soviet zone of occupation in 1939 and 1941), and the Polish underground's views on the situation of the Jews. Due to its secret and unprecedented character, the German Final Solution made its observation and analysis difficult for domestic observers and particularly challenging for those abroad whose imaginations resisted horrifying and seemingly exaggerated descriptions.¹⁰

Reactions to the news of the Holocaust provide some of the most dramatic examples of how people do not react to the world *as it is* but to what they perceive. As the knowledge in London about developments in Poland was inevitably secondary, their “perception” meant reading (or misreading) and understanding (or misunderstanding) messages from inside occupied Europe. It took Polish leaders in London (and not only them, of course) many months to understand that the news coming out of Poland read literally, not metaphorically, of the “total destruction” and “annihilation” of the Jews. Initially, such news was discounted as unreliable. Shmuel Zygielbojm was, in the summer of 1942, the only person in London to publicly confirm and correctly explain the news about the murder of Warsaw Jewry. The fact that other Polish and Jewish leaders in London failed to see what was really taking place in occupied Poland cannot be explained by differences in access to information.¹¹

Disbelief and misinformation about the destruction of Polish Jewry had a direct influence on how the future of Polish-Jewish relations was perceived. In considering the future of Jews in postwar Poland, it was not irrelevant whether there remained 200,000 or 2 million Jews. Diverse estimates of how many Polish Jews had perished (since 1943 the question changed into How many remain alive?) reveal much confusion (or at least the potential for it) and a tendency to underestimate losses. Ignacy Schwarzbart, a member of the National Council in London and an insightful observer, noted as late as 1944, “The fear of the allegedly ‘too many Jews in Poland’ continued to hold Polish thought captive during the war.”¹²

The Polish government-in-exile’s institutional and political structure also influenced Jewish policies. The Polish wartime state consisted of two parts: Poland-in-exile and the Polish underground state. Poland-in-exile consisted of the expatriate state bodies; that is, the president, the government-in-exile, the National Council (a quasi-parliamentary body of the government), and the Polish Armed Forces. The Polish underground state consisted of the government’s delegate, a person appointed by the London government, and his civilian administration, known as the Delegatura; the Political Council, a representative body of major parties; and the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*), the military branch that actually made up the major part of the whole.¹³ In a broader sense, the term “underground state” referred to all underground organizations that recognized the government-in-exile.¹⁴ All its institutions were clandestine and operated under death penalty for their participants. Membership was thus voluntary and selective, especially in the first years of war, before it reached a mass scale.

Formally, the government-in-exile ruled the underground state through the delegate and his administration, while the military branch was subordinate to the supreme commander resident in exile. Actually, the relations between the underground and its government were ambiguous and evolved according to domestic and international developments. The leadership abroad was incapable of wielding full control over the underground bodies: the reasons included problems in communication between the government and Poland after the fall of

France (which made it very difficult for the underground to coordinate emergency decisions), the underground's growth and institutional development since 1942, divergent political shifts, and differences in opinions that inevitably emerged among leaders living in distant places and acting under very different conditions. Cooperation between the domestic and émigré bodies was, in fact, the Polish state's key problem.

Unlike the examination of the government-in-exile, the question of the underground state's policies and positions toward the Jews has been explored fragmentarily and awaits systematic examination. Generalized statements on the topic are not difficult to find, but they remain controversial and are not satisfactorily substantiated.¹⁵ A tentative thesis for our purposes is that the underground was significantly less responsive to Jewish demands than the Polish leaders in exile, and the latter knew it. The exiled leaders were receiving messages that included reports on unfriendly Polish attitudes toward the Jews and critical reactions to the government's favorable decisions in Jewish matters. Such statements came also from such authoritative sources as the delegate and Home Army commander. The latter wrote the following in his dispatch of 25 September 1941, "[A]ll the steps of the government and members of the National Council regarding the Jews make the worst impression in the country and facilitate enemy propaganda"; and the delegate stated once that "the government exaggerates with its love towards the Jews. . . . The government goes too far in its philosemitism, especially as the Jews are not liked in the country."¹⁶ The accuracy and reliability of such statements is another question that refers us back to the problem of the information deficit. The exiled Polish leaders could disagree or be skeptical about certain underground reports, but they had to take into account (and especially in statements geared for domestic use) that such were the opinions expressed by important actors in the underground. Schwarzbart noted in a diary entry from December 1942, "[T]he government fears the opinion of the country in Jewish matters."¹⁷

Sources suggest that the government-in-exile decided not to give specific directives on Jewish matters to either the underground or the Polish population in general. Such a position emerges from the minutes of debates held in the National Council and is expressed most clearly by the Endeks, who undoubtedly were its main supporters. This policy maintained that the government should not instruct Poles on how to behave toward the Jews; the underground, not the distant government in London, would define what should be the attitude under current conditions. Speaking more precisely, the government was not ready to instruct the country on what to do, but it did instruct on what not to do, as it sent to Poland guidelines on Jewish matters, guidelines that were, however, of a negative character. That is to say, it instructed its underground on what should be avoided rather than on what should be done. The main clandestine newspaper, *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, stated that in 1940 the government "gave the command to refrain from any cooperation, or even appearance of cooperation, in the anti-Jewish actions organized by the Germans."¹⁸ After the German attack

on the Soviet Union, the government repeated this instruction in a message that “emphasize[d] the necessity of warning the population not to follow German incitements to actions against the Jews.”¹⁹ This tendency to leave domestic policies in Jewish matters to the underground authorities was not unique. In political debates in London, the argument “let us leave the decision to the country” was often in use in various controversial matters in domestic policy.

Deference to the underground seems to have been the main factor shaping the government’s action and inactions. Take, for example, a key Jewish demand following the reception of the news of the Holocaust. Jewish leaders abroad were prodding the government-in-exile to broadcast by radio an appeal to the Polish population to aid Polish Jewry. But for several months the government resisted, offering various explanations. Eventually, General Sikorski made such an appeal during his speech broadcasted to Poland on 4 May 1943, asking “[his] compatriots to extend every help and protection to those [Jews] being murdered.”²⁰ The government altered its policy most likely only after receiving support from the Polish underground on this matter. Sikorski made his appeal only after receiving news of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, including a joint dispatch by the Home Army commander and the delegate with the demand, “[S]peak to the ghetto.”²¹ The Polish underground press printed Sikorski’s speech along with the delegate’s appeal. From that moment, the government-in-exile abandoned its hesitancy and, in 1943 and 1944, appealed several times to the Polish population to aid Jews.²²

Although the government-in-exile was the legal representative of all citizens of Poland, it had no authority among certain groups inside the occupied country. First and foremost, this included the ethnic Germans who voluntarily joined the Deutsche Volksliste, but also those Belorussians, Ukrainians, and Jews who welcomed Soviet rule in eastern Poland in 1939 through 1941, denying their allegiance to the Polish state.²³ Both occupiers aimed to enhance and exploit preexisting ethnic tensions, and, as reports available to the government-in-exile showed, they were not entirely unsuccessful. On the other hand, for many of those who saw the government as their representative, the “we” it represented did not include ethnic Germans, Ukrainians, or Jews. As an underground report to London put it, “the country perceives the government not just as the state authority but first of all as its [ethnic] national representative.” Following the ethnic connotation of the Polish word *naród*, the term *reprezentacja narodowa* in the latter report referred generally to ethnic Poles.²⁴ The imagined community, which the government was to represent, was ethno-national. Such understanding was certainly strengthened by a seemingly widespread perception that ethnic nations, not just states, were the historical actors in the drama of the war. Thus, many Poles, including some of the politicians in exile, regarded the London-based government’s main task as serving the Polish cause (*sprawa polska*); that is, the restoration of independent Poland.

The ethno-national tendency of the Polish government-in-exile was reflected in the limited minority representation in wartime state institutions. Of

the numerous national minorities of prewar Poland, minorities that made a third of its population, only the Jews had political representation in the bodies of the government-in-exile. This representation was limited and institutionally weak, consisting of two members (and in 1940 and 1941 only one member) of the National Council, an advisory body with very limited powers.²⁵ Despite Jewish demands, and support from Polish socialists, no representative of Jewish organizations was appointed to a ministerial position. Attempts to include the largest minority—Ukrainian representatives—failed, mainly due to the fundamental differences in Polish and Ukrainian aims.²⁶ Notably, the fact that Jews were the only minority represented shows that Poles shared more with the Jews than with any other ethnic group in Poland.

Until the fall of 1942, there were no formal contacts between the Delegatura and underground Jewish organizations, although there were contacts between, for example, Jewish and Polish socialist parties. Why this was the case is complex and by no means can be reduced to the resistance of the Polish underground. Jews began to receive special assistance from the Polish underground from 1942, but their participation in decision-making was limited to the humanitarian Council for Aid to the Jews (RPŻ or Żegota), which was not a strictly political body.²⁷ Due to the fact that Żegota was affiliated with and financed by the Delegatura, the Jewish National Committee, and the Bund, it was incorporated into the underground state, albeit not directly as a section of the Delegate's administration. Similarly, the Home Army extended assistance to the Jewish Fighting Organization (ŻOB) in Warsaw through providing weapons, explosives and training materials, as well as carrying out several assaults on German posts around the ghetto during the April 1943 uprising, but it did not incorporate the ŻOB into its structures; the formal character of relations between the two military organizations is unclear.²⁸

Both in exile and in the underground, wartime Polish leadership consisted of a coalition of four major prewar parties. These included the Peasant Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe), the National Party (Stronnictwo Narodowe, that is, the National Democrats or Endeks), the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, or PPS), and the Labor Party (Stronnictwo Pracy). Before the war, the four parties were opposed to the increasingly authoritarian rule of the Sanacja, which they consequently excluded from the coalition, although the Sanacja retained some positions around the president and in the armed forces. The political elite rightly regarded unity as a patriotic duty during the catastrophe that befell Poland during the Second World War. Thus, close cooperation of the four political parties, despite ideological and political differences, became a basic operating principle of the government-in-exile and the source of its legitimacy. This unity was an important aspect of the government, especially given the fact that it was not elected but appointed (a power provided for in the Constitution in extraordinary circumstances), and its leaders emphatically distanced themselves from the prewar ruling Sanacja camp. Representatives of the four parties filled key positions in the London-based government and in the underground,

constituting most of the National Council in London and the clandestine political council in Warsaw.

Although party divisions reflected prewar differences in ideology and interests, they also reflected the ethnic divisions of Poland. Three of the “Big Four” parties were ethnic Polish parties: the nationalist National Democrats were openly antisemitic, the Labor Party was *Christian* democratic not only in terms of ideology but also in terms of membership; while the Peasant Party represented a constituency that—as almost no Jews were peasants—did not include Jews. Only the PPS emphasized the solidarity of workers above ethnic differences, had a tradition of cooperation with the Jewish left, consistently rejected antisemitism, and included Jews among its leadership and constituency.²⁹ Thus, the maintenance of national unity on a party basis, combined with the ethnic character of parties in prewar Poland, greatly contributed to the ethno-national character of the Polish wartime state.

The four political parties that made up the Polish wartime state did not revise their prewar positions, including those regarding the Jews. Their leaders in exile were reluctant to significantly depart from prewar platforms as they could hardly consult their constituencies. In this way, the legacy of the past, including the anti-Jewish tide that marked Polish politics in the 1930s, was present in the political debates in exile. News about the anti-Jewish mood persisting among various sectors of Polish society also restricted room for a changed position on the Jews. Debates in the National Council on motions submitted by its Jewish members showed a stable pattern: as a rule the Socialists were supportive and the National Democrats (Endeks) opposed, with the Peasant Party often taking a middle-of-the-road position. The Labor Party, the weakest of the four, positioned itself between the Endeks and the Peasant Party. Consequently, the positions of the government-in-exile on Jewish matters tended to reflect those of the Peasant Party, defined by the last prewar congress of the party, which, in Jewish matters, combined support for equality of rights with emigrationism.

The principle of national unity predisposed the parties toward compromise. With the desire for unity and the avoidance of imposing decisions against firm opposition, all four parties enjoyed a kind of unwritten veto power. Such a practice reduced strains on the coalition and stabilized the government. However, it did place constraints on their attempts to enact change in controversial spheres, such as the policy toward Jews. In practice, this meant that decisions which were unacceptably pro-Jewish for the Endeks or unacceptably anti-Jewish for the Socialists were avoided. The problem was that Jewish leaders wanted the government-in-exile to embark on a radical departure from Jewish policies that had marked the last years of prewar Poland. Jewish efforts often did not find sufficient support; Schwarzbart noted, “The unity of the Polish right and left is strengthening due to [their] common catastrophe, which means the left is drifting under the influence of the right.”³⁰ Jewish leaders were not satisfied with the government-in-exile’s position, yet, in comparison with the Polish policies of the late 1930s, it was certainly more favorable for the Jews. This was the con-

sequence of a combination of external factors, presented above, and a relative strengthening of the parties of the left: Sanacja, whose position in Jewish matters drifted in the 1930s toward the anti-Jewish right, was marginalized; the most antisemitic party of Poland—the extreme right ONR (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny)—was excluded from the government-in-exile, remaining in opposition both abroad and in the underground; the Endeks in London, aware of sensitivity to antisemitism in the West, were cautious in public discussions on these matters; the Socialists enjoyed some support from the Western labor movement; while the Peasants skillfully exploited their centrist position, strengthening their influences in the administration.

Paradoxically, the Jewish question and related policies were more important for the Endeks than for other parties because antisemitism was a key part of the party's identity, especially since the 1930s. Moreover, the Endek leaders in exile were particularly sensitive to the question because of intra-party tensions and the questioning of their orthodoxy. The Endeks inside occupied Poland pressed their London representatives to resist "philosemitic" tendencies in the government. Thus, although the Endeks in the London government tactically refrained from antisemitic statements, they were committed to counterbalancing those Polish leaders who advocated improving Polish-Jewish relations and made efforts to prevent the government-in-exile from doing anything they perceived as excessively philosemitic.

The fact that a party such as Endecja was antisemitic was by no means unusual in the 1930s and 1940s in Europe. The particular feature of the wartime Polish right-wing nationalists was that they belonged, as a rule, to the anti-German front. In many European countries, nationalist parties tended to favor collaboration with the Germans, but the Endeks were a key element in the Polish resistance movement. Many members and followers were devoted underground fighters and victims of Nazi persecution. As Józef Cyrankiewicz, a socialist leader, explained to his fellow inmates in the concentration camp in Auschwitz, "German, Austrian, French [inmates] are a defined political group; they are antifascists. . . . We [the Poles] stay in the camp with our reactionaries."³¹

The destruction of Polish Jewry radically transformed the prewar Jewish question in Poland and made the old positions of Polish parties largely irrelevant. However, the delays in understanding the new reality and the hesitancy of adequately altering old opinions made prewar views influential among the émigré Polish leadership. For example, the pattern of pro-Jewish socialists and anti-Jewish nationalists persisted. In fact, the great majority of Polish Jews had been killed before the government-in-exile received and understood the news of the Final Solution.

The government-in-exile was unprepared to face the Holocaust, as were other Allied governments. Its responses were either well motivated but ineffective, as in the case of demands for retaliation, or reluctant and delayed, as in the case of the appeal to the Polish population for aid to Jews. In his letter to the Polish president and prime minister before his suicide in May 1943, Shmuel

Zygielbojm wrote, “Although the Polish government has in great measure contributed to stirring world opinion, it has not done so sufficiently, nor has it risen to anything extraordinary to match the extent of the drama taking place in occupied Poland.”³²

Notes

1. Major books on the Polish government-in-exile include, among others, Dariusz Stola, *Nadzieja i zagłada: Ignacy Schwarzbart-żydowski przedstawiciel w Radzie Narodowej RP, 1940–1945* (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 1995); David Engel, *Facing a Holocaust: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1943–1945* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939–1942* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Teresa Prekerowa, “Wojna i okupacja,” in *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce*, ed. Jerzy Tomaszewski (Warsaw: Wydawn. Naukowe PWN, 1993); Edward Duraczyński, *Rząd polski na uchodźstwie, 1939–1945, Organizacja, personalia, polityka* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1993); Krystyna Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm: Anatomia półprawd, 1939–1968* (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992); Stefan Korbonowski, *The Jews and the Poles in World War II* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1989); Yisrael Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski, *Unequal Victims: Poles and Jews during World War II* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1986); Richard Lucas, *The Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles under German Occupation, 1939–1944* (Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1986); and Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna, *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej: Polacy z pomocą/ Żydom, 1939–1945* (Cracow: Znak, 1969).
2. Stola, *Nadzieja i zagłada*, 64–68.
3. Quoted in Stanisław Zabiełto, *O rząd i granice: Walka dyplomatyczna o sprawę polską w II wojnie światowej* (Warsaw: Pax, 1965), 31.
4. Cable of 12 December 1941 to the government’s delegate in Poland, quoted in Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm*, 16.
5. Engel, *In the Shadow*, 50, 56, 70; Stola, *Nadzieja i zagłada*, 71.
6. Sikorski’s statements of 4 June 1941 and 24 February 1942, quoted in Stola, *Nadzieja i zagłada*, 95, 101.
7. Bund’s letter of 31 August 1942, in *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej*, by Bartoszewski and Lewinówna, 970–971.
8. For further discussion on this question, see Stola, *Nadzieja i zagłada*, 190–196.
9. Dariusz Stola, “Dyplomacja polska wobec zagłady Żydów,” in *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, vol. 5, ed. Waldemar Michowicz (Warsaw: Wydawn. Naukowe PWN, 1999); David Engel, “The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Deportations of Polish Jews from France in 1942,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 15 (1983): 91–124; Paweł Korzec and J. Burko, *Le Gouvernement polonais en exil et la persecution des Juifs en France en 1942* (Paris: Cerf, 1997).
10. Control over communication between London and the underground in Poland was a subject of rivalry between Polish parties, and it was used to strengthen the position of one party against the others through limiting their access, screening their correspondence, and even influencing the content of the messages from the underground. Such manipulations also applied supposedly to Jewish matters. Jewish and socialist

- members of the Polish National Council in London believed that the London Endeks requested from Poland strongly critical comments about the “excessively pro-Jewish” declarations of the government-in-exile, to prevent more favorable policies (see Stola, *Nadzieja i zagłada*, 116).
11. Stola, “Early News on the Holocaust from Poland,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11, no. 1 (spring 1997).
 12. Note from the meeting with O. Górka, 13 April 1944, in Schwarzbart’s collection in Yad Vashem, M2/74, microfilmed copy in Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw, Poland.
 13. The political representation evolved under the names Główna Rada Polityczna, Polityczny Komitet Porozumiewawczy, Krajowa Reprezentacja Polityczna, and Rada Jedności Narodowej. Until 1942 the Home Army was known as Związek Walki Zbrojnej (Union for Armed Struggle).
 14. See Stanisław Salmonowicz, *Polskie państwo podziemne* (Warsaw: Wydaw. Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1994).
 15. For divergent generalizations, see Bartoszewski and Lewinówna, *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej*; Gutman and Krakowski, *Unequal Victims*; Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust*; Korboński, *The Jews and the Poles in World War II*; and Bernerd Mark, *Powstanie w getcie warszawskim* (Warsaw: Idisz Buch, 1963).
 16. The two reports, as well as other similar statements, are quoted in Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm*, 16.
 17. Schwarzbart’s diary, 12 December 1942 (microfilmed copy in Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw). Of similar opinion was a Polish socialist minister (Schwarzbart’s diary, 10 August 1942, *ibid.*).
 18. *Biuletyn Informacyjny* of 6 March 1941, quoted in *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach*, ed. K. Iranek-Osmecki, vol. 6 (London: Studium Polski Podziemnej, 1989), 177.
 19. “Instrukcja nr 2,” 23 June 1941, quoted in *Kto ratuje jedno życie: Polacy i Żydzi, 1939–1945*, by K. Iranek-Osmecki (London: Orbis, 1968), 184.
 20. Sikorski’s speech is quoted in Paweł Szapiro, *Wojna żydowsko-niemiecka: Polska prasa konspiracyjna 1943–1944 o powstaniu w getcie Warszawy* (London: Aneks, 1992), 114.
 21. Korboński’s quoted cable to London on 20 April 1943 is in *Kto ratuje jedno życie*, by Iranek-Osmecki, 21; other cables are published in *Armia Krajowa w Dokumentach*, ed. Halina Czarnocka (London: Studium Polski Podziemnej, 1970), 2: 500, 6: 313; and in Korboński, *The Jews and the Poles in World War II*, 52, 61.
 22. On the appeal, see Stola, *Nadzieja i zagłada*, 198–204; for a different interpretation, see Engel, *Facing a Holocaust*, 69–73.
 23. This does not mean that most Polish Jews or Ukrainians welcomed the Soviets or that ethnic Poles did not collaborate with the occupiers at all. It means that, according to various reports and accounts reaching the government-in-exile, members of ethnic minorities constituted most of those who welcomed the end of Polish rule.
 24. The term *naród* is ambiguous in legal documents, including the Constitution of 1921, where its meaning was close to the English *nation*, while its colloquial meaning has a strong ethnic dimension.
 25. On the ethnonational character of the underground state, see Krystyna Kersten, “Polska—państwo narodowe,” in *Narody. Jak powstawały i jak wybijały się na niepodległość* (Warsaw: PWN, 1989), 467; Jan T. Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation: The Generalgouvernement, 1939–1944* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 256, 304–306; Czesław Madajczyk, “Państwo podziemne

- w okupowanej Polsce (Analiza pojęcia w historiografii),” in *Państwo w polskiej myśli politycznej*, ed. Wojciech Wrzesiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1988), 174–176.
26. Stola, *Nadzieja i zagłada*, 43–47.
 27. On the RP, see Teresa Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada pomocy Żydom w Warszawie, 1942–1945* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982).
 28. Stola, *Nadzieja i zagłada*, 115–121.
 29. Yet, the fact that there were Polish and Jewish socialist parties (Bund) made them at times compete, not cooperate.
 30. Schwarzbart’s diary, 30 August 1940 (microfilmed copy in Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw).
 31. Aleksander Smolar, “Tabu i niewinność,” *Res Publica* 23, no. 3 (1991): 51.
 32. Shmuel Zygielbojm’s letter of 11 May 1943, quoted in *Kto ratuje jedno życie*, by Iranek-Osmecki. Translation taken from the English version, *He Who Saves One Life* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971), 216.

*The Attitude of the Polish
Underground to the Jewish Question
during the Second World War*



SHMUEL KRAKOWSKI

*I*n the following essay I shall not repeat what I have myself written on more than several occasions.¹ Nor do I think the time is ripe for presenting final conclusions. I shall rather limit myself to presenting general features concerning the subject and devote somewhat more space to one specific problem, which has been, in my opinion, neglected by most historians: the attitude of the Polish underground toward the fugitives from the ghettos and camps.

The attitude of the Polish underground to the Jewish population exterminated by the Nazis on Polish soil is a very complicated Holocaust subject. We have to consider here the multiform structure of the Polish underground during the Second World War. The main Polish underground political movements were those subordinated to the Polish government-in-exile in London and to the body acting in the occupied country, the Delegatura. The Delegatura was composed of different parties, the biggest and most important being the Peasant Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe), the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), the right-wing National Party (Stronnictwo Narodowe), and the Labor Party (Stronnictwo Pracy). Their armed organization was the Home Army.

In opposition to the Delegatura were the extreme right-wing organizations connected to the National Armed Forces, part of which eventually joined the Home Army. The left opposition consisted mainly of the Polish Worker's Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza). The attitude of those different parties and movements toward the Jewish population was largely influenced by prewar ideologies and opinions and habits of leading personalities, which seldom changed under the impact of events.

Nazi-occupied Poland was the most visible scene of the Holocaust. This was the country with the greatest percentage of Jews in Europe. Here were the largest number of ghettos, the death camps, and concentration and slave labor camps for Jews. It was impossible for the Polish underground movements and large sectors of the Polish population to remain ignorant about the Holocaust. Although Jews and Poles shared the same enemy—the German Nazis—the enmity of Nazi Germany toward these two groups had two extremely different dimensions: enslavement of the Poles and total extermination of the Jews. The possibilities and conditions under which Poles and Jews lived in Nazi-occupied Poland were also very different.

The attitudes of the various organizations and leading underground personalities toward the Jews were indeed manifold. We notice, on the one hand, activities in favor of the Jews undertaken under the most severe circumstances, while, on the other hand, a great degree of indifference as well as the unfortunate existence of anti-Jewish actions.

Concerning the attitude of the various Polish underground organizations toward the extermination of the Jews, the following questions have to be examined. First, what possibilities did the Polish underground have to obstruct Nazi actions against the Jews, and further, was there a desire, and a willingness, to undertake such actions? Second, what was the extent of pro-Jewish activities? Third, what was the background for the manifested indifference shown toward the fate of the Jews? And fourth, what was the character and extent of anti-Jewish activities?

Obviously, the Polish underground could not have prevented the formation of the ghettos, nor could it have hindered their liquidation or the deportations. These were undertakings beyond the reach of the Polish underground, even if it had been willing to undertake such tasks. It should be remembered that the Polish underground was unable to hamper the establishment and function of concentration camps, in which ethnic Poles also were imprisoned, such as in Majdanek.

Quite naturally, the best-documented activities of the Polish underground toward the Jews are the positive ones. These actions included (1) the transmission to the free world of exact and constant information about the Nazi Final Solution; (2) the activities of the Council for Aid to the Jews, or *Żegota*; (3) the supply of some arms, which enabled Jews to organize the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; and (4) certain joint guerrilla activities.

The Activities of *Żegota*, the Polish Underground's Council for Aid to Jews

I want to stress here especially the activities of *Żegota*. As is known, the Council for Aid to the Jews began its activities in December 1942 and continued until the liberation of Poland. Well-known personalities from several parties connected with the *Delegatura* took part in the organization. These par-

ties were mainly the Socialist Party, the Peasant Party, the Democratic Party, and the Front for the Rebirth of Poland (FOP); members of the Jewish underground also took part. The Polish Worker's Party was not represented in Żegota, but there was some degree of cooperation with it. The antisemitic National Party refused to play any role in Żegota, although it was one of the main parties in the Delegatura.

Żegota acted under the most severe conditions, thus demanding great sacrifices from the engaged members. However, its activities were limited only to certain parts of occupied Poland, mainly in a number of big cities, such as Warsaw, Cracow, and Lwów. Documentary evidence suggests that Żegota conducted very little activity in the countryside.

Allocations of financial resources for Żegota's activities were very modest. While no exact numbers are available, we can state that they did not exceed a quarter of a million dollars, including the sums from Jews abroad, which the Home Army couriers helped smuggle into occupied Poland.² This was indeed very little considering not only the needs of the council and the immensity of the Jewish tragedy, but also the resources at the Polish underground's disposal. The main Polish underground forces, those subordinated to the Delegatura, received funds during the war from the Western powers to cover their activities. This included about \$35 million and 20 million German marks. Of course, they could have been much more generous in allocating resources needed to save human lives.³ No statistical data concerning the financial possibilities of the Polish Worker's Party (Communist) is available.

The total annihilation of the Jewish population in Poland was one of Nazi Germany's central strategic missions, adopted in accordance with its inhumane, insane ideology. It was consistently pursued, even when it interfered with the Nazi war effort. At the same time, the political, military, or underground forces fighting Germany did not regard saving the lives of Jews under the threat of mass murder as a high priority, and the Polish underground was no exception. Nevertheless, thanks to the devotion of the men and women in Żegota, thousands of Jews, including hundreds of children, were saved. These people deserve the highest tribute, and Yad Vashem has honored many with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

The Polish underground press of the political parties connected to Żegota, as well as the main underground paper of the Home Army, the *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, published many appeals encouraging the Polish population to aid Jews, including hiding them, and warned that betrayal to the Nazis constituted treason. At the same time, however, part of the right-wing underground press continued to print almost uninterrupted antisemitic propaganda.⁴

Unfortunately, the practice of spreading hatred toward the Jews was quite intensive, even by some underground organizations that strongly opposed the Nazi exterminationist policies. For example, the FOP, an organization of the Polish Catholic intelligentsia, which cooperated with Żegota, extended some help in hiding Jews. At the same time, however, it printed violent anti-Jewish propaganda.

Polish historian Czesław Żerośławski quite correctly stressed the inability of these people to free themselves from the antisemitism they had developed during the interwar period.⁵

The Polish Underground and Jewish Fugitives from Ghettos and Camps

The main problem, which in my opinion has not been properly addressed in the historiography, is the Polish underground's stance toward the mass escape of Jews from the ghettos and camps. This is a subject which demands a larger study, and I am therefore prepared to offer only tentative conclusions.

The number of escapees was, according to my estimate, at least 300,000 men, women, and children, and probably even more.⁶ This is of course a very rough estimate. More regional studies are needed to achieve more exact data, works that would deal with the Holocaust in the various regions of occupied Poland and especially in the countryside. To illustrate this crucial problem, I can present here the results of research conducted on the province of Rzeszów, today the southeastern part of Poland. That province, as a separate administrative union, was created in 1945 after the liberation of Poland. It comprised 18,658 square kilometers, or roughly 5 percent of Poland's prewar territory. During the Nazi occupation it was part of the Cracow District. At the beginning of the German occupation, 113,000 Jews resided in fifty-two localities throughout the Rzeszów region.⁷

According to incomplete data gathered by the Polish Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland, the German police forces shot over 9,800 Jews in the Rzeszów Province between 1942 and 1944. These shootings took place in 378 villages and in the nearby forests.⁸ This number does not include the Jews shot inside the ghettos during the deportations to the death camps. Neither does it include those Jews who were removed from ghettos for the purpose of killings. This partial figure thus undoubtedly refers only to those Jews who managed to escape from the ghettos and camps in an attempt to find shelter in the villages or the nearby forests.

One of these 378 villages of the Rzeszów Province was the village of Albingowa in the county of Łancut. A Polish teacher, Franciszka Reizer, kept a diary while residing in this village during the Nazi occupation. On 20 November 1942, Reizer wrote the following entry: "The Germans drove many peasants and firemen from the villages and, with their help, arranged a hunt for Jews. They went through the fields with dogs in scattered battle order with their weapons ready to fire. Then they surrounded the forests of Albingowa and Honie. . . . In the course of this action seven Jews were captured, old, young and children." These Jews were taken to the firemen's station and shot the next day.⁹ The following day, we find the following entry: "On the fields belonging to Augustyn Bator Jews arranged themselves an earth bunker. . . . They were caught by the gendarmes who were hunting after Jews. All of them were shot on the spot."¹⁰

And on 25 November 1942, Reizer wrote, "A Jew was seen disappearing in the darkness of the November night."¹¹

On 30 November, Reizer noted the death of a Jewish woman, Ickowa (the wife of Izaak), who tried to find shelter in the village.¹² In July 1943, he made reference to the capture and murder of a young Jewish woman, with her two children, who tried to find shelter in the village.¹³ Reizer wrote further: "October 2, 1943: These days the last Jews in the vicinity were tracked down and murdered. They were shot near the tannery, which belonged to the Jew Blank. Here, 48 Jews were buried."¹⁴ "March 26, 1944: The Gestapo shot the whole Ulm family for hiding Jews. They burned the whole household and threw the bodies into the fire."¹⁵

Immediately after the war (July 1945), 757 Jews were living in the Rzeszów region according to official Polish sources.¹⁶ That number was incomplete, as Jews subsequently returned from concentration camps or the Soviet Union. What these numbers reveal, however, is that there were only about 800 survivors out of the 9,800 escapees who sought shelter outside the ghettos and camps. The comparison of these figures, although far from complete, nevertheless enables us to understand the right dimensions of the enormous struggle for survival and, under the existing circumstances, the minimal chances for success.

The events in the countryside of the Rzeszów Province were very similar to those in all the other regions of the General Government. In the region of prewar eastern Poland, there were significantly more escapees from the ghettos and slave labor camps. In the regions of annexed western Poland, on the other hand, the number of escapees was rather insignificant.

Most of the escapees sought shelter in the forests, while others looked for possible hiding places among the local non-Jewish population. Quite a number of these fugitives tried to organize armed self-defense groups. Their success or failure depended again upon the attitude of the local population and, to a large degree, on the Polish underground. The stories of most of these Jewish self-defense groups remain unknown. What we have is very fragmentary knowledge from Polish sources. To cite one example, Franciszek Kotula, a Polish teacher from Rzeszów who kept a diary during the German occupation, made the following entry on 31 December 1942: "It is a matter of fact that different Jewish detachments came into being. They even gained weapons from somewhere. In order to live, they have to take products from the peasants, who are anyway robbed without mercy by the Germans. The robbed peasants show the Germans the possible Jewish hiding places or the direction where to hunt them."¹⁷ On 26 July 1943, Kotula wrote the following: "In the nearby and farther vicinity of Rzeszów a few Jewish 'gangs' were created, which in order to live have to rob. . . . The villages organize self defense. It came to fighting, and there were casualties on both sides. So, where the Germans were not able to reach directly the Jews, they fought against them indirectly."¹⁸

Thus the behavior of the local population was of utmost importance. This included the attitude of acting underground cells or guerrilla units in various

regions toward the forest Jews who tried to organize their own self-defense. Several thousand escapees from the ghettos and camps succeeded in finding shelter among the local population. Those Poles who agreed to shelter runaway Jews had to overcome enormous dangers. They had to sacrifice themselves and their families and were the greatest voluntary humanitarian heroes of the war.¹⁹

The problem of the Righteous Among the Nations demands separate treatment. On the base of my study, not yet concluded, I can state the following. First, Poles in the region of prewar southeastern Poland, in the territory of the so-called District Galicia, were much more willing to aid Jews than were Poles in the regions of central Poland. We have to stress here that in the region of prewar southeastern Poland, the Polish population was confronted with the enmity of Ukrainian nationalists and it was much more difficult and dangerous for them to shelter Jews. Notwithstanding, one in every five Polish recipients of the Righteous among the Nations award came from these territories. Second, the majority of recipients acted on their own with no connection or help from the underground organizations. Thus, they conducted their benevolent deeds in constant fear of being discovered, not only by the Germans. The Polish underground, it seems, failed to create a proper atmosphere of popular support for these noble people who sheltered Jews. This is one of the reasons why hiding Jews was so extremely difficult and demanded the greatest secrecy.

Some of the Jewish armed groups who survived the hard winter of 1942–1943 joined or were incorporated (not without difficulties) into the guerrilla units of the Polish People's Guard, later called People's Army. In contrast to the Home Army, which wished to avoid premature encounters with the German forces, the People's Guard had decided to begin guerrilla activities immediately, thus helping the Soviet war effort. This explains why the People's Guard accepted Jewish armed groups. The problem of how to protect Jewish families hiding in the forests was by no means an easy one. Here, the conduct of the People's Guard varies. In a northern part of the Lublin region, Jewish partisans protected a large Jewish family camp which survived in the Parczew forests thanks to the support of the local People's Guard units.²⁰ But in the southern part of this region, a People's Guard unit under the leadership of G. Korczyński engaged in the murder of Jews hiding in the forests.²¹

Some Jewish armed units joined the local Home Army forces in southeastern Poland. Thanks to that cooperation, Home Army units in Hanaczów and Pańska Dolina protected a number of Jewish escapees.²² Home Army units in the central regions of Poland, however, acted differently. In these regions, the Home Army did not accept Jewish armed detachments. However, several hundred Jews were accepted as individuals in various Home Army units, especially in those subordinated to the Home Army units of the Socialist Fighting Organization.

In the Volhynia region, a large partisan unit under the leadership of Polish communist Józef Sobiesiak protected a number of Jewish family camps that survived the war and allowed many Jewish fighters to join.²³ In the northeast-

ern regions of prewar Poland, a number of Jewish guerrilla detachments joined the Soviet partisans. Here the same difficulties arose as in the case of the People's Guard with regard to providing protection for the escapees in the forest. An example of a positive resolution to this problem was in the Nowogródek region. Under the leadership of Tuvia Bielski, and supported by Soviet units, Jewish partisans in the Naliboki forest protected the largest Jewish family camp. Over twelve hundred Jewish men, women, and children were saved there.²⁴

A very painful phenomenon was the widespread hostility of a significant part of the Polish underground toward Jewish armed detachments in the forests. Many documents of the Home Army and the Delegatura refer to these detachments as gangs of bandits and robbers. These allegations appeared often starting from the end of 1942 until the summer of 1944.²⁵

At the same time, very little was done to aid those Jewish escapees hiding in the forests, despite the circumstances which brought them to the forests. I cannot find any justification for labeling these fighting Jews as bandits. We find here a strange paradox. On the one hand, the Polish underground (and, in many cases, also the Jewish underground) often accused the Jewish population of passivity during the liquidation of the ghettos and the deportations. There was very little understanding for people who found themselves in circumstances unprecedented in modern history and without any means for effective action. On the other hand, the Polish underground labeled as bandits those extremely brave men and women who were able to escape from the closed ghettos and camps under harsh circumstances and organize some self-defense groups.

Overwhelming German forces confronted the armed and hidden Jews, sparing no effort to find and murder them. It is an extreme pity that these same Jewish groups also had to overcome local hostility. Many Jewish sources, as well as a number of Polish accounts, refer to hostile actions against the forest Jews undertaken by various armed units of the Polish underground. Those accused are mainly units of the right-wing National Armed Forces, but also some units of the Home Army, although these hostile actions against forest Jews are widely denied by many historians and writers in Poland. Careful study of the existing documentation nonetheless leaves no doubt that such hostile actions did take place and were quite numerous.²⁶

As the war was approaching its conclusion and the imminent collapse of the Third Reich became clear, divisions arose between the small remnant of Polish Jewry that survived the waves of mass extermination and the major forces of the Polish underground that made up the so-called Underground State. The situation in occupied Poland became more and more complicated. The main Polish underground forces, subordinated to the Delegatura and supported by the right-wing groups, strove to ensure the reestablishment of Poland in its prewar eastern frontiers. To reach this goal, a bitter struggle was launched against Soviet partisans in the east and the pro-Soviet People's Army in central Poland. In the regions of Vilna and Nowogródek, a kind of local cooperation between the Home Army and the Wehrmacht developed.²⁷ The information on Katyn, the

place where the Soviet security police murdered thousands of Polish officers and prisoners of war, reached Poland in the spring of 1943 and contributed heavily to the anti-Soviet sentiment in Poland. Many of the Delegatura leading personalities and Home Army commanders dreamed about the collapse of the Third Reich and the simultaneous breakdown of the Soviet Union. This, however, did not happen, and therefore bitterness grew among these underground forces. In contrast, the remnants of Polish Jews, living under constant fear of discovery both in hiding and in the forests, waited anxiously for the advancing Red Army as its only potential savior. Every delay in the Red Army's advance meant thousands upon thousands more innocent victims.

What was the number of Jews liberated on Polish soil, and how many of them survived thanks to the aid of Polish underground organizations? This is in my opinion the key question. Polish historians give mostly exaggerated numbers of Jews who survived on Polish territory. Some have argued, without evidence or explanation, that Poles saved about 100,000 Jews.²⁸ According to a very detailed study by Lucjan Dobroszycki,²⁹ and according to my own findings, the number of Jewish survivors on Polish territory did not exceed 30,000; almost half of them were in the eastern territories of prewar Poland. Additional research is needed in order to ascertain the probable number of Jews that the Polish underground, Polish individuals, and Polish families saved. We also need research to establish the probable number of Jews murdered by local groups and individuals.

While the devotion and sacrifice of those men and women who risked, and sometimes lost, their and their families' lives deserves the highest recognition, we cannot exculpate those who chose not to help. Neither can we pass in silence about the committed crimes. During the Nazi occupation, providing aid to Jews was very difficult and dangerous. At the same time it was extremely easy to murder or cooperate in the murder of Jews.

The creation of that unusual situation was a product of the Nazi occupation. First and foremost, the Germans are to be blamed for the horrors that took place in occupied Poland. The total mass murder of the whole Jewish population was a pure German-Nazi idea. The hunt for every hidden Jew, including newborn infants, who had to be picked up and murdered, was a deliberate German-Nazi practice and was never considered by even the extremely antisemitic Polish politicians. This does not, however, mean that significant parts of the Polish underground can be cleared of their own guilt in regard to their Jewish co-citizens.

Just as more research is needed to present a full picture of positive activities, intensive studies are indispensable to describe the negative side of the story. Only then shall we be able to make proper conclusions. Unfortunately, the mass of apologetic writing is a serious obstacle to understanding the complicated problems of this tragic past. The other obstacle is the still continued practice of refusing access to certain kinds of existing documentation.³⁰

Notes

1. See, among others, Shmuel Krakowski, "The Polish Underground and the Extermination of the Jews," *Polin* 9 (1996): 138–147.
2. Teresa Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie, 1942–1945* (Warsaw: PIW, 1982), 112–125.
3. Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, *Powołanie i przeznaczenie: Wspomnienia oficera Komendy Głównej AK, 1940–1944* (Warsaw: PIW, 1998), 294.
4. Shmuel Krakowski, "The Holocaust in the Polish Underground Press," *Yad Vashem Studies* 16 (1984): 241–270.
5. Czesław Zerostawski, *Katolicka myśl o ojczyźnie—ideowopolityczne koncepcje klerikalnego podziemia, 1939–1944* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1987), 202, 209–214, and 268–269.
6. Estimates are based on the inquiries conducted in 1945 on the extermination of the population on Polish territories, published partly in *Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce*, vols. 8–11 (Warsaw: Wydawn. Min. Sprawiedliwości, 1956–1960). Additional sources include several thousand testimonies held at the Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem, and volumes of *Pinkas ha-kehilot: Polin* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1976).
7. Based mainly on data from the "Pinkas Hakehilot," in *Pinkas ha-kehilot: Polin*, vol. 3: *Western Galicia and Silesia* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1984).
8. Based on the published sources by the Main Commission for the Investigating Nazi Crimes in Poland, *Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni popełnionych przez okupanta hitlerowskiego na ziemiach polskich w latach, 1939–1944* (Warsaw: Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce, 1983–1984).
9. Franciszka Reizer, *Dzienniki, 1939–1944* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1984), 71.
10. *Ibid.*, 72.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, 72–73.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, 92.
15. *Ibid.*, 98.
16. Jan Basta, "Mniejszości narodowe na Rzeszowszczyźnie," *Prace Historyczno—Archiwalne* 2 (Rzeszów, 1994): 182.
17. Yad Vashem Archives, 048/147.2, p. 154.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
19. As of 1999, Yad Vashem has honored over 5,200 Poles with the title of Righteous among the Nations.
20. Shmuel Krakowski, *The War of the Doomed* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984), 25–60.
21. *Kultura* (Paris, 1992): 25–26.
22. Shmuel Spector, *The Holocaust of the Wolhynien Jews, 1941–1944* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and the Federation of Volhynien Jews, 1986), 204–209 (in Hebrew).
23. *Ibid.*, 251–270.
24. Nechama Tec, *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Shalom Cholawski, *Al naharot ha-Nayman veha-Denayper:*

- Yehude Bialorusyah ha-maaravit ha-olam ha-sheniyah* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1982), 216–235.
25. Archive of the Party History, AZHP, Warsaw, Poland, 202/I–32; 202/III–28; 202/XV–2; 202/II–24; 203/III–136; 202/II–12; 202/II–23.
 26. Yisrael Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski, *Unequal Victims* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1986), 216–223.
 27. Special Archives (Osobi), Moscow, file 504.1.14. See also Jozef Swida, “Wyjaśnienia dotyczące okresu, 1943–1944,” *Zeszyty Historyczne* 73 (Paris, 1985): 74–80.
 28. Shmuel Krakowski, “New and Old Approaches in Polish Historiography,” in *Holocaust Literature*, ed. Saul S. Friedman (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 210.
 29. Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 13.
 30. For example, in the volumes of National Armed Forces documents published by Leszek Żebrowski (see Leszek Żebrowski, *Narodowy Siły Zbrojne: Dokumenty, struktury, personalia* [Warsaw: Buchard Editions, 1994]), there is no notation about archives, record groups, or files from which these documents were taken. So, no one can check the credibility of the selected documents. Another problem is the vast amount of extremely important documentation in the archives of the Polish Main Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation, now closed due to the reorganization of this institution. Most of these precious documents have not yet been studied by historians.

CHAPTER 9

Polish Catholics and the Jews during the Holocaust

HEROISM, TIMIDITY, AND COLLABORATION



JOHN T. PAWLIKOWSKI

Any examination of the Polish Catholic Church's role during the Holocaust must be placed within the context of Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland and its aftermath.¹ The western part of the country was formally incorporated into the Reich while the remaining part of central Poland was ruled by a military government headed by General Hans Frank (the so-called General Government area). In Nazi-occupied Poland anyone caught aiding Jews was subjected to immediate death, a penalty that could also be extended to one's family. In Warsaw, where the largest community of Jews lived, the Jewish community was eventually sequestered in a tightly controlled ghetto which Christians would have had great difficulty entering.

Poles themselves, it must also be remembered, were victims of the Nazi plan for "human purification." The Nazi invasion of Poland went far beyond mere military victory. Because the Poles were regarded as subhumans, they were to be reduced to virtual slave status, accompanied by the total destruction of all cultural, political, and religious symbols that would provide them with any form of human identity. Some Nazi leaders, such as Himmler, Hitler, and Frank, entertained on occasion the idea of the eventual total annihilation of the Poles in a manner similar to the Jews. Adolf Hitler declared that the aim of the Nazi invasion of Poland was "not the arrival at a certain line, but the annihilation of living forces."² Even prior to the actual invasion of Poland, Hitler had authorized on 22 August 1939 the killing "without pity or mercy all men, women, and children of Polish descent or language. Only in this way," he insisted, "can we obtain the living space we need."³ And the person placed in charge of implementing Hitler's Polish plan, Heinrich Himmler, said outright, "[A]ll Poles will disappear

from the world. It is essential that the great German people should consider it as its major task to destroy all Poles.”⁴

But whether the Nazis, if given a chance, would have pursued such a plan remains an open question. The fact that they contemplated it, and that they built the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1940 as an integral part of their effort to subdue the Polish nation, shows that Poles were not merely victims of military conquest but victims of genocidal attack. The Nazis realized they would have to break the back of the Polish Catholic Church if their plan to eradicate Polish national identity was to succeed.⁵

When the Nazis partitioned Poland, they seriously undercut the church’s own territorial structures by dividing up historic dioceses. Thus weakened, Polish Catholicism, especially in the annexed areas, lost most of its hierarchy and clergy. Central to the Nazi attack on the Polish church was the systematic arrest and imprisonment of bishops. By the end of the war many cities had suffered major losses in the ranks of the clergy: 47.8 percent in Chelmo; 36.8 percent in Lodz; and 31.1 percent in Poznan. In all, about two thousand out of ten thousand Polish diocesan priests were killed.⁶ Many church buildings were also destroyed. In Poznan, for example, only two out of thirty churches remained at the end of the war. Piotr Wróbel of the University of Toronto has recently documented this concerted Nazi attack against every aspect of Polish life.⁷

It is within this context of total Nazi control and systematic attacks on the churches that the Polish Catholic response to the Holocaust must be evaluated. I stress this point because many presentations of the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Poland, such as Claude Lanzman’s film *Shoah*, leave the impression of a rather tranquil situation for non-Jewish Poles. This was far from the actual situation.

Seen in these difficult circumstances, the Polish Catholic response to the Holocaust must be termed ambiguous. A secret courier for the Polish underground, Jan Nowak, recently said that, in his experience, antisemitism in Poland declined during the Nazi occupation due to mutual hatred of Germans. This disdain prevented any organized cooperation with the Nazis of the kind that surfaced in places such as France, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Ukraine. Renowned World War II historian John Keegan has stressed this unique aspect of the Poles, whom, he wrote, “produced few collaborators and no puppet chief, a unique distinction in the record of European response to German aggression.”⁸

There were indeed blackmailers in Poland who betrayed Jews to the Gestapo, sometimes for a small payment. Certainly they deserve our strongest condemnation. There were also people who rescued Jews, about whom we shall say more below. But, according to Nowak, both were in the minority: “Everybody in Poland was mainly concerned with how to survive—how to get food, how to avoid arrest—and this made people indifferent.”⁹ Despite the struggle for survival that was Poland’s daily fare under the Nazis, the point made by Michael Steinlauf in his challenging book needs to be emphasized as well: while both Poles and Jews suffered severely under the Nazis, non-Jewish Poles were able

to maintain some semblance of a normal life while Jews were not.¹⁰ Thus Polish Christians did have some possibility of assisting Jews. This was evident in the work of such Catholic figures as Fr. Marcei Godlewski of the All Saints Church, located within the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw; he worked closely with the Catholic social organization CARITAS and with Jewish leaders. He also arranged for hiding places for Jews with former parishioners on the Aryan side.

The preeminent scholar of Polish-Jewish relations, Yisrael Gutman, has likewise emphasized the distinction between Polish and Jewish victimization under the Nazis just as much as he has underlined the need to recognize Polish victimization as an integral part of the history of the Third Reich. Gutman insists that while Poles and Jews both suffered terribly during the Nazi onslaught, they were “unequal victims” in terms of the totality of the Nazi attack. For Gutman this is a basic difference that can never be blurred: “As a group,” Gutman writes, “the Jews were sentenced to death, whereas Poles had the chance, the possibility and the ‘right’ to remain alive.”¹¹ Jewish losses in occupied Poland amounted to some 90 percent of the total Jewish population. For non-Jewish Poles, the loss was about 10 percent, even though the hard numbers were roughly equal at three million for each community. Both the Polish underground and the Polish government-in-exile in numerous reports and publications recognized the significant difference in the fate of the two communities under the Nazis.¹² The fact that the Polish government in London sent the Polish courier Jan Karski to Allied leaders in Europe and the United States specifically to inform them about the annihilation of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland shows such recognition of this difference. There is no question that some Poles nonetheless believed they were next in line for annihilation. The supreme military commander of the underground Home Army (AK), Stefan Rowecki, issued an order in November 1942 indicating that, while he did not totally discount the possibility of the Nazis at some point beginning a process of annihilating the Poles, he did not believe that such a plan was being seriously contemplated.¹³

Gutman also points to the fact that the Nazis did not hunt down Poles in general or even the Polish intelligentsia (who were a major target of the Nazis in Poland itself) in other occupied countries such as France, Belgium, and Hungary. Jews, on the other hand, were sought out everywhere for transport to the death camps. Jewish annihilation became a central world goal for the Nazis. While we should not minimize Polish victimization under the Nazis, this distinction must be kept in mind as part of the authenticity of the historical record.

Polish Rescue Efforts

Turning now to the question of Polish rescue efforts in the context of intense Polish suffering under Nazi rule and the death sentence issued for such actions, we see both individual and organized efforts. I cannot detail the names and stories of individual rescuers. Their stories have been preserved in part in institutions such as Yad Vashem in Israel and the United States Holocaust

Memorial Museum in Washington. Nechama Tec has detailed the stories of such rescuers and their reflections.¹⁴ While overall rescuers represented a tiny fraction of the population in Poland, numerically they constitute the largest national group of individual rescuers authenticated and honored. Some Polish and Polish American writers have claimed that behind these were hundreds of thousands of people who assisted directly or indirectly in these rescue efforts. I do admit that in many cases the rescuers could not have done the job alone. But these numbers strike me as highly inflated and without sufficient documentary evidence. There are also people, such as the noted Brother Daniel, who did not turn in Jews on the run when they recognized them.¹⁵ I am not sure how much heroism is to be attributed to such people. It is true that they could have received money for revealing the identity of these Jews to the Gestapo and that they at least theoretically put themselves in some legal jeopardy by refraining from denunciations. But to call them “rescuers” represents a bit of a stretch in my view.

Two groups in particular showed remarkable courage in their efforts to save Jews. The first was the Council for Aid to the Jews, otherwise known as *Żegota*, which was the only organization during the Nazi era founded specifically for the rescue of Jews. While *Żegota* was not directly connected with the Polish Catholic Church and included a number of leading socialists who were generally hostile to organized religion, a number of prominent Catholics became deeply involved in the organization. Moreover, these Catholics do not appear to have received criticism for taking part in such activities. One prominent Catholic lay leader in *Żegota* was Władysław Bartoszewski, who has written extensively about his wartime experience.¹⁶

Bartoszewski himself has said that *Żegota*'s effort was modest. The Council for Aid to the Jews placed a particular emphasis on saving Jewish children. Children were often placed in homes, convents, and orphanages in the Warsaw area, though some individuals and independent groups sheltered them as well. No one can say with certainty how many people were saved by *Żegota*. Even such rescuers as Bartoszewski admit they do not have accurate statistics. Numbers range from several thousand to as high as twenty-five thousand. Bartoszewski also insists that no large-scale effort could be mounted because the Nazis would have quickly discovered such activities and because hiding Jews became increasingly more dangerous. Another complicating factor was that many Jewish parents were understandably hesitant to turn over their children to the *Żegota* emissaries. It took considerable persuasion in some cases to convince Jewish parents to agree to release their children. This often produced frustration for *Żegota* since at times their members risked their lives to make contact with Jewish families only to receive a negative response with regard to the placing of children. Several members of *Żegota* endured intense physical punishment at the hands of the Nazis, leaving them disabled for the rest of their lives.

Credit is generally given to two Polish women for launching the effort to coordinate the rescue of Jews in Poland; that effort matured into the *Żegota* move-

ment. Their names were Zofia Kossak-Szczucka and Wanda Krahelska-Filipowiczowa. Kossak-Szczucka, an established Polish literary figure, was an important member of the Front for the Rebirth of Poland (FOP). She had been deeply involved with Jewish rescue on a personal level for several years. This was likewise the case for her cofounder, Krahelska-Filipowiczowa, long an activist in the socialist movement. She had important connections to the Home Army, connections that would become indispensable to Żegota's rescue efforts.

Kossak-Szczucka and Krahelska-Filipowiczowa went about recruiting people who had already demonstrated some degree of personal commitment to the rescue of Jews. Such demonstrated commitment was necessary in order to ensure the security of Żegota. A neophyte might well be a Nazi spy or, if caught, might cave in to Nazi pressure and reveal all the details relating to Żegota's clandestine network. In retrospect this decision to seek only people previously active in rescue efforts—that is, the most committed—proved to be a wise decision on the part of Żegota's organizers. And in fact, Żegota members whom the Nazis apprehended never broke under Nazi questioning despite extremely harsh treatment in some instances.

Kossak-Szczucka and Krahelska-Filipowiczowa also quickly established links with the Home Army and the Polish government-in-exile in London. They likewise sought contacts with the Jewish underground and with the Jewish leadership in general. The Home Army had already established ties with the Jewish Fighting Organization (ŻOB), a group of generally younger members within the overall Jewish underground. Several Jewish leaders had managed to establish a residence on the Aryan side of Warsaw. This demonstrated to the Żegota leadership that while movement between the ghetto and the Aryan side was very difficult, it was not impossible. Hence, rescue options did exist. Vladka Meed's book, *On Both Sides of the Wall*, provides a good picture of the possibilities as well as the acute dangers involved in such movement.¹⁷ Adolf Berman, a leading Zionist, and Leon Feiner, an important member of the Bund, were among the early Jewish leaders invited to join Żegota. The initial Żegota leadership council included, in addition to Berman and Feiner, key representatives of the Socialist Party, the Democratic Party, and the Peasant Party. It also included Bartoszewski and Witold Bienkowski, both from the FOP.

Politically speaking, Żegota became an integral part of the established opposition in Poland. Though its actual membership was small, it commanded the attention and support of the principal anti-Nazi organizations in Poland. It was thus not a marginal reality. This is not to say that there was no opposition to Żegota within the underground movement. Opposition to Żegota was based on more classical forms of Christian antisemitism and religio-political nationalism, as well as on tactical considerations (undertaking difficult rescue attempts to save Jews endangered, it was argued, the overall underground effort and hence was not worth the great risks involved). But it would be difficult to argue that such opposition seriously impeded Żegota's work.

In addition to its special focus on the welfare of Jewish children, Żegota

addressed other pressing needs such as legalization, housing, financial assistance, medical care, and how to protect its members and the Jews from the activities of hostile Poles, the so-called *szmalcownicy* (blackmailers). Although Żegota made use of the extensive church contacts of its Catholic members such as Kossak-Szczucka, it certainly was in no position to halt the systematic Nazi annihilation of Polish Jewry. Nevertheless, they were able to save thousands and to provide an important counterwitness to moral indifference. Most of all, as some of the Jews involved with the rescue organization have underlined, Żegota provided an important measure of hope. Miriam Peleg, a Jewish courier at the time, testified in a film interview that such hope was, in the end, even more precious than the material assistance Żegota supplied. Those Jews who came into contact with Żegota no longer felt they were alone. Pawel Rogalski and his wife recalled that upon fleeing the ghetto they came upon a copy of Kossak-Szczucka's "Protest," Żegota's manifesto calling on Poles to actively aid Jews, which was issued in the summer of 1942. To this day they can recite the words from that publication that instilled hope in their lives. It was also Żegota that gave them the possibility of reestablishing themselves on the Aryan side.¹⁸

Despite the significance of Żegota's wartime activities, the organization has received insufficient attention in Holocaust historiography. This is true on the Polish side as well as the Jewish side. For many Poles, the participation in Żegota of socialists who were later to lend support to the postwar Communist regime has tarred the organization's image. Consequently, a kind of veil of silence surrounded Żegota in postwar Poland. As part of the Polish Communist regime's attempt to downplay the particular nature of the Nazi's Jewish policy, there was a great hesitancy to bring out the story of Żegota after the war. It was only a few years ago, in post-Communist Poland, that a memorial was dedicated to Żegota in Warsaw largely through the efforts of a dedicated group of Polish Americans. On the other hand, the widespread belief among Jews that Poland was a caldron of antisemitism during the Second World War has almost totally obscured mention of Żegota in discussions of rescuers. Rather, the Danes, the people of Le Chambon, and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church have been remembered as rescuers among world Jewry. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington is the only place in the Jewish world where Żegota has received due attention. In fact, it is the only place in the United States, Jewish or Polish, where Żegota has been accorded full recognition within the community of rescuers.

Yet, despite the honor accorded Żegota in Washington, the Holocaust Museum's official guide, prepared by Dr. Michael Berenbaum, contains some misleading comments about Żegota.¹⁹ For one, it indicates that some Poles who participated in Żegota were antisemites who simply could not condone Nazi extermination plans.²⁰ This is a serious overstatement. There were Catholic Poles who, while harboring a theological form of anti-Judaism, nonetheless risked their lives to save Jews. To call them "antisemites" without qualification is to vilify them beyond justification. Nobody of importance in Żegota was antisemitic in

the way the term is usually understood. There were also members of Żegota who espoused a form of nationalism that led them to contribute to the Zionist effort to encourage Jewish emigration to Palestine. I am not defending either of these Polish Catholic outlooks. But they are different from the more virulent forms of antisemitism that did exist in Poland in the first half of the twentieth century. This more virulent form of antisemitism, which I shall address below, should not be associated, even by implication, with Żegota.

The other major rescue effort involving Polish Catholics was that undertaken by the convents of religious women in Poland. Poland and Italy were the two Catholic countries in Europe during World War II in which Catholic nuns played a central role in rescue efforts. Through the research of Professor Ewa Kurek-Lesik, the stories of heroic rescue efforts among Polish nuns have been preserved.²¹ While these activities of individual Polish convents were not as coordinated as Żegota's, they do represent a concerted effort that at least had the tacit support of local bishops and the Vatican.

I would only like to raise one cautionary note regarding Kurek-Lesik's studies on Jewish children saved in Polish convents. It relates to the question of how to deal with the nuns' motivation and personal commitment to rescue efforts. Kurek-Lesik's materials clearly reveal a pronounced "conversionist" mentality on the part of some of the nuns engaged in rescue. While this does not diminish the nobility of these women's deeds at the time, and while one must recognize that it was part of the general Catholic mentality of the period, for the sake of enhanced understanding between Christians and Jews today, it is necessary to point out the clear conversionist mentality present in the mind-set of some of the Catholic rescuers in a more direct way than Kurek-Lesik has done.

Polish Catholic Antisemitism in Interwar and Wartime Poland

We now turn our attention to the other side of the coin, to Polish Catholic antisemitism. Polish Catholic antisemitism must be understood in the context of the highly complex setting of interwar Poland. At the time, Polish Jewry was extraordinarily diverse, ranging from the ultra-orthodox to radical secularists as well as some supporters of communism in certain limited sectors of the Jewish community. The then largest Jewish community in Europe was itself marked by considerable internal dissension and controversy. The new Polish state's incorporation of Europe's largest Jewish community corresponded with a struggle within Polish Catholicism during this period; the struggle was part of a general debate within European Catholicism as to whether it was appropriate to incorporate any aspects of liberalism into the expression of Catholic faith. Those who supported preserving Polish Catholicism from any taint of liberalism, a struggle they saw the Vatican encouraging, tended to espouse the strongest antisemitic attitudes within the Catholic Church. They also tended to make some distinctions in their attacks against Jews, showing a bit more openness to ultra-orthodox Jews, whom they regarded to some degree as kin in the battle against

liberalism, while targeting the more secular Jews who supported liberal, socialist, or even Bolshevik models of society. This antisemitism, in turn, needs to be understood against the backdrop of some anti-Jewish pronouncements from synods of bishops in Polish history.

As Ronald Modras and Anna Landau-Czajka have shown in their detailed studies of the subject, the net effect of Polish Catholic antisemitism was to increasingly marginalize Polish Jewry in the years leading up to the Nazi occupation.²² In my mind there is little doubt that prewar antisemitic attacks in Poland muted the possibility of greater Polish Catholic rescue efforts of Jews even though some Catholics may have been morally troubled by the ferocity of Nazi Jewish policies.

Perhaps the strongest source of Catholic antisemitism in early twentieth-century Poland came from the pervasive fear of Freemasonry, a movement seen as the carrier of the hated liberal tradition generated by the French Revolution and one that threatened the very existence of the Catholic Church. Jews came to be linked in an extensive way with Freemasonry, which had existed in Poland since 1738. That some liberal Catholics, including some priests, had shown a measure of sympathy for Freemasonry and in a few cases even joined Masonic lodges only intensified the anger of Polish Catholic nationalists. Efforts to promote a more secularized model of the state in Poland greatly disturbed Cardinal Hlond and many Jesuits who had a strong voice in interwar Poland, particularly in the realm of Catholic publishing. "This effort must be stopped in its tracks" was their powerful message. Otherwise, Polish Catholicism would be undermined and Poland itself would lose its authentic identity as a supremely Catholic nation. Important Catholic leaders such as Fr. Edward Kosibowicz, an influential Catholic writer in interwar Poland, saw Catholic and Jewish freethinkers as "apostles of immorality."

When some Polish church leaders, such as Cardinal Hlond (who was criticized by many Polish Catholics for leaving the country during the war), Cardinal Kakowski, Archbishop Sapieha, or Archbishop Teodorowicz, spoke out against Nazi Jewish policy, they generally coupled their remarks with strong attacks on Jews as communists and as agents of immorality in Polish society. While there certainly was some Jewish involvement in communist and especially socialist groups in Poland, as well as Jewish commitment to liberal cultural and political views (a trend that needs further examination by Jewish historians), the bishops' statements were highly exaggerated. This tendency to juxtapose protest against Nazi treatment of Jews with antisemitic pronouncements was also common on the level of popular Catholicism and was used in such newspapers as *Mały Dziennik*, published by Maximillian Kolbe, as well as many other similar Catholic-based publications.

My thesis, then, is that the most direct cause of Polish Catholic antisemitism in the 1930s was the perception of Jews as enemies of Poland, whether as liberals, socialists, or communists. This nationalistic antisemitism was tied to an internal struggle within Catholicism in which the right wing was attempt-

ing to purify the church of any supporters of liberalism or socialism. I nevertheless do not mean to imply a total disconnection between classical Catholic antisemitism and the Polish religio-nationalistic version. To the contrary, most of those who promoted religio-nationalistic antisemitism also shared the long-standing theological views of Jews and Judaism that had shaped much of European Christianity for centuries. What I wish to emphasize is that the profound hatred for liberalism and Freemasonry in particular, as well as for socialism and communism, with which Jews were significantly associated, strongly intensified these more classical forms of Catholic antisemitism. So it would be inaccurate to draw a simple straight line from classical Catholic antisemitism to the denigration of Jews by Polish Catholic nationalists.

The emphasis on combating secular currents led to a somewhat more tolerant attitude toward ultra-orthodox Jews (who likewise resisted liberalism and socialism) on the part of some Polish Catholic nationalists in the interwar period. But there were also right-wing elements within the Catholic community, and they strongly denounced even those traditional Jews who sided with conservative Catholics in opposing liberalism and socialism. Fr. Józef Kruszyński, a professor at the University of Lublin, was one such outspoken opponent of traditional Judaism; he warned Polish Catholics not to be deceived by the apparent religiosity of Talmudic Jews. Their spiritual practices were in fact shallow and formalistic, he claimed, adding that these Jews had in fact distanced themselves from Moses and the prophets and were full of hatred for Christians. Hence, they would always prove hostile to Poland's Catholic culture and were incapable of integrating into mainstream Polish society. Thus, while people such as Kruszyński regretted the Nazi violence directed at the Jews, they simultaneously regarded all Jews as a profound religious threat to Polish society. In this circle, one can observe a more pronounced form of classical antisemitism.

To summarize my argument, while classical forms of Catholic antisemitism played a definite role in undercutting wartime Polish Catholic support for Jewish victims of Nazi persecution, the fierce religio-nationalism of the 1930s was the primary source of this nonsupport. Notwithstanding the hostile attitude toward Jews, the religio-nationalists did not support Nazi exterminationist policies. To the contrary, there was a certain residual opposition to Hitler's extreme methods vis-à-vis the Jewish community, and this may account for the decrease in antisemitism in the immediate aftermath of the Nazi occupation—about which Jan Nowak has written. But there was no great sense of mourning among religio-nationalists about the loss of a significant sector of the Polish nation, a sector that had contributed much to the cultural, economic, and political life of the country. The multicultural, multireligious character of historic Poland, one of the most diverse countries in Europe for several centuries, was no longer considered the Polish ideal. It was as if many people were saying, "It is too bad what Hitler is doing to the Jews; but, when all is said and done, he is doing us a favor." I am not suggesting that this was the feeling among all Poles. But such an attitude was far more widespread than many Poles would care to admit.

Contemporary Poland and the Holocaust

Even today, as Professor Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska of the Marie Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin has underlined, Jews are not mourned in Poland.²³ While there have been some efforts to recover Poland's Jewish heritage and culture through events such as the annual Jewish Cultural Week in Cracow as part of the process of forging the nation's post-Communist identity, this attempt at recovery has not affected the Polish masses to any significant extent.

There have also been some attempts to confront the issue of Polish responsibility during the Holocaust. The literary critic Jan Błoiński first raised this issue in a 1987 article where he insisted that despite their own sufferings under the Nazis, Poles could have done more to save Jews.²⁴ Ten years later sociology professor Hanna Swida-Ziemia raised the issue again, but in a somewhat different way. She argued that Poles have a moral obligation to exhibit special sympathy for Jewish suffering under the Nazis because of their own wartime victimization which, while very bad, was not on a par with Jewish suffering.²⁵ Both articles generated intense public controversy in Poland.

In a January 1995 pastoral letter, the Polish Episcopal Conference also raised the issue of the failure of moral responsibility on the part of some Catholics. "Unfortunately, there were also those who were capable of actions unworthy of being called Christian," the letter read. "There were those who not only blackmailed, but also gave away Jews in hiding into German hands. Nothing can justify such an attitude."²⁶ This statement also recalls the words of a pastoral letter, issued in 1991, which was read in all Catholic Churches in Poland: "In spite of numerous heroic examples of Polish Christians, there were those who remained indifferent to inconceivable tragedy. In particular, we mourn the fact that there were also those among Catholics who in some way had contributed to the death of the Jews. They will forever remain a source of remorse in the social dimension."²⁷ These pastoral letters to the bishops refer as well as to those Catholics who risked and even gave their lives to save Jews as well as to the fact that in some instances Jews handed over fellow Jews to the Nazis.

The two pastoral letters cited above show a significant degree of awareness of some Catholic complicity in the Holocaust. But the implication in both letters is that this represented a small portion of the overall Catholic population of Poland. This is factually correct. But what these letters ignore is the question of general timidity toward Jewish suffering and the absence of any real sense of mourning among Catholics for the loss of the significant Jewish community that had been tied to its soil for centuries. This lack of mourning continues to persist today within the general population.

The last decade or so has seen a very mixed picture within Polish Catholicism on the Jewish question. Bishops such as Joseph Życiński in Lublin and Henryk Muszyński, chairman of the Polish Bishops' Commission for Catholic-Jewish Relations, have strongly promoted constructive programming such as the annual Day of Judaism launched several years ago. The Academy of Catholic

Theology in Warsaw and the Jesuits in Cracow have also initiated efforts aimed at improving Catholic-Jewish understanding. Rabbinic scholars from the United States and Canada have also come to Poland the past several years to teach in Polish seminaries. These programs, however, have tended to avoid issues related to the Holocaust. To my knowledge no programming has taken place as yet around the March 1998 Vatican document on the Holocaust, *We Remember*.²⁸ Polish Bishops also spoke out for the removal of the small crosses placed on the so-called “field of ashes” at Birkenau and the numerous crosses erected by Kazimierz Switon near the site of Auschwitz I. On the other hand, they have strongly supported the retention of the large cross that still stands near the site of the Auschwitz Convent. During the Auschwitz Convent controversy itself, some Polish bishops and lay leaders supported the relocation of the convent. But without the decisive intervention of Pope John Paul II, I doubt they would have won the day.²⁹

But recent years have also witnessed the emergence of religio-nationalism in important Catholic circles, including among Catholic members of the Polish parliament. Radio Marya, founded by a member of the Redemptorist Order, whose appeal is primarily to an older, rural population that has suffered economic hardship under the program of economic “shock therapy,” continues to broadcast material reminiscent of the religio-nationalism of the 1930s. Though the bishops do not formally approve of this station, it is clear that Radio Marya enjoys a measure of support in important Catholic sectors, including the Episcopal sector. Another example is Father Henryk Jankowski, the former chaplain to the Solidarity movement, who has used his church in Gdansk for religio-nationalist sermons that repeat Nazi-era accusations against Jews while urging a pure (i.e., no Jews) political system in the country. Jankowski has also sold hardcore antisemitic materials at his church. While the archbishop of Gdansk banned Father Jankowski from preaching for one year and has prevented him from traveling abroad, Jankowski, like Radio Marya, is not without support in the broader Catholic community.

In conclusion, the future of Catholic memory of Poland’s Jewish heritage and wartime suffering is still in doubt. There are good people in Poland whose Catholic convictions make them work tirelessly for the preservation of that memory. But, equally, it is not clear at this juncture whether in the end their efforts will succeed. Poland’s post-Communist self-identity, including the Catholic aspect of that identity, is still a work in progress. Whether the forces of memory or the forces of narrow nationalism will eventually triumph remains very much an open question.

Notes

1. For sources on Poles under Nazi occupation, see Richard C. Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles under German Occupation, 1939–1944* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986); United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Poles* (Washington,

- D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1996); and John T. Pawlikowski, "The Nazi Attack on the Polish Nation: Towards a New Understanding," in *Holocaust and Church Struggle: Religion, Power, and the Politics of Resistance*, ed. Hubert G. Locke and Marcia Sachs Littell, Studies in the Shoah, vol. 16 (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1996), 33–44.
2. See E. Curaczyński, *Wojna i okupacja: wrzesień 1939–kwiecień 1943* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1974), 17. Also see N. Levin, *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry, 1933–1945* (New York: Schocken, 1973), 163, 193; and L. Poliakov, *Harvest of Hate: The Nazi Program for the Destruction of the Jews of Europe* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1979), 263.
 3. Quoted in J. Gumkowski and K. Kleszczyński, *Poland under Nazi Occupation* (Warsaw, Polonia Publishing House, 1961), 59.
 4. Cited in K. Popieszalski, *Polska pod niemieckim prawem* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Zachodniego, 1946), 189.
 5. Yehuda Bauer has noted this dimension of the Nazi invasion of Poland. He writes, "German policy in Poland was radically genocidal, aiming at the elimination of the Polish nation as such" (*Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* [New York: Macmillan, 1990], 1: 670). While the Nazis did not aim at wiping out all Polish citizens, as they did in the case of the Jews, their goal was the annihilation of the nation.
 6. Jerzy Kloczkowski, *A History of Polish Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 298–299.
 7. Piotr Wróbel, "The Catastrophe: The Impact of World War II on Poland," lecture delivered at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., 30 September 1999, commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Nazi invasion of Poland. Wróbel's museum address has been published as "The Devil's Playground: Poland in World War II" by the Canadian Foundation for Polish Studies of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in Montreal.
 8. John Keegan, *The Battle for History: Re-fighting World War Two* (Toronto: Vintage Books, 1995), 111., as quoted in Wróbel, "The Catastrophe," 2. The research of Professor Jan Gross on the pogrom at Jedwabne, presented at the Yeshiva University conference, April 2000, may force some reconsideration of this perspective. For more on the Jedwabne issue, see "W 59 rocznicę zagłady Żydów w Jedwabnem," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 11 July 2000.
 9. "Museum Hosts Evening with Jan Nowak—Secret Courier for Polish Underground," Update (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), November–December 1999, 7. A transcript of the entire interview is available from the museum (audio cassette).
 10. Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997).
 11. Israel Gutman, "The Victimization of the Poles," in *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis*, ed. Michael Berenbaum (New York: New York University Press, 1990).
 12. For an overview of the Polish government-in-exile and the Home Army's position on the Jews, see Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust*, 152–181.
 13. Cited in Ireneusz Caban and Zygmunt Mankowski, *Związek Walki Zbrojnej w okręgu lubelskim, 1939–1944*, vol. 2 (Lublin: Wydawn. Lubelskie, 1971), 60.
 14. Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christians Rescue Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
 15. See Nechama Tec's compelling biography, *Into the Lion's Den: The Life of Oswald Rufeisen* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

16. Władysław Bartoszewski, *The Blood Shed Unites Us: Pages from the History of Help to the Jews in Occupied Poland* (Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, 1970); and Władysław Bartoszewski, *Warsaw Death Ring, 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, 1968); also see Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewin, *The Samaritans: Heroes of the Holocaust* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970). Bartoszewski eventually played a prominent role in the post-Communist transition of the 1990s.
17. Vladka Meed, *On Both Sides of the Wall* (Washington, D.C.: The Holocaust Library, 1999).
18. Cited in Irene Tomaszewski and Tecia Werbowski, *Żegota: The Rescue of Jews in Wartime Poland* (Montreal: Price-Patterson, 1994), 47.
19. Berenbaum has played a major role in the development of the museum's permanent exhibition and has generally supported including the stories of the non-Jewish victims as integral to the narrative of the Holocaust. See Michael Berenbaum's edited volume, *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis* (New York: New York University Press, 1990).
20. Michael Berenbaum, *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 161.
21. See Ewa Kurek-Lesik, *Gdy klasztor znaczył życie: Udział Żeńskich Zgromadzeń Zakonnych w akcji ratowania dzieci żydowskich w Polsce w latach 1939–1945* (Cracow: Znak, 1992). For the English translation, see Ewa Kurek, *Your Life Is Worth Mine: The Story Never Told Before of How Polish Nuns Saved Hundreds of Jewish Children* (New York: Hippocrene, 1996). For a summary of Kurek-Lesik's findings in English, see her "The Conditions of Admittance and the Social Background of Jewish Children Saved by Women's Religious Orders in Poland, 1939–1945," *Polin* 3 (1988): 244–275.
22. Ronald Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism: Poland, 1933–1939* (Chur, Switzerland: Hardwood, 1994); and Anna Landau-Czajka, *W jednym stali domu: Koncepcje rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej w publicystyce polskiej lat 1933–1939* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo NERITON and Instytut Historii PAN, 1998).
23. Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, "Poles and Jews and Auschwitz," *GP Light* 76 (August 1999): 1, 8, and 11.
24. Jan Błoński, "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto," in "*My Brother's Keeper*?" *Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust*, ed. Antony Polonsky (London: Routledge, 1990), 34–48.
25. As cited in Adamczyk-Garbowska, "Poles and Jews and Auschwitz," 11.
26. Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catholics Remember the Holocaust* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 14, cited in Adamczyk-Garbowska, "Poles and Jews and Auschwitz," 11.
27. *Ibid.*
28. In several publications I have pointed out weaknesses in *We Remember*. Nonetheless, it is a mandate for Holocaust study and education throughout the Catholic world. This ought to include Poland. See John T. Pawlikowski, "We Remember: Looking Back, Looking Ahead," *The Month*, 2nd new series, 33, no. 1 (January 2000): 3–8; and John T. Pawlikowski, "The Vatican and the Holocaust: Putting *We Remember* in Context," *Dimensions* 12, no. 2 (1998), 11–16.
29. See Władysław T. Bartoszewski, *The Convent at Auschwitz* (New York: George Braziller, 1990).

PART IV



*Poles through
Jewish Eyes*

*Poland and the Polish Nation
as Reflected in the Jewish
Underground Press*



DANIEL BLATMAN

**Polish-Jewish Relations in the First Month of Occupation
through the Prism of Contemporary Diaries**

On 3 September 1939, just two days after the German invasion of Poland, the president of the Jewish community in Lwów, Victor Chajes, recorded the following entry in his diary: “A central committee to assist soldiers, widows, and orphans has been established in Lwów. The Jews wanted a separate committee but I did not allow this. There is only one. . . . I annexed Jewish men and women to this joint committee. . . . Two days ago (anonymously, as a Polish Jew) I sent 100 crosses to soldiers from Lwów who were going to war.”¹

As the Soviet armies crossed the old eastern frontier border and entered Poland on 17 September, Chajes, who had been deputy mayor of the city since 1930, a banker, and one of the most conspicuous Jewish public activists in Lwów during the interwar period, added the following entry: “The Russian bombers are destroying almost all the cities of Poland. Stalin may enter Poland any day, since he must have concluded a secret agreement with Hitler, and will occupy half of Poland without resistance. It is going badly for my homeland.”²

Chajes is not representative of Polish Jewry at large. His dual identity, which he notes on more than one occasion in his diary—the sense of belonging to Poland, its people, and its culture, while affiliating strongly with the Jewish community—was typical of a certain sociocultural stratum in interwar Polish Jewry. However, this identification with Poland and the grim fate the country befell in September 1939 surfaced among Jews in various social groups and political movements. “The country is full of patriotic fervour,” wrote the Hebrew teacher Chaim Kaplan in his diary on 1 September 1939. He continued: “All classes and all nationalities, even those that suffered persecution at the hands of

the Poles in the time of peace, are ready to sacrifice their strength and wealth for the sake of the Fatherland. . . . As for the Jews, their danger is seven times greater. . . . It should therefore not be surprising that the Jews show their devotion to their fatherland in a demonstrative fashion.”³

Even before the phenomenon of the Nazi Final Solution became a daunting obstacle in Polish-Jewish relations, Kaplan noted that the shared hostility to the German invaders did not necessarily modify the attitude of many Poles: “The Poles complain against Germany, and justifiably, for she wishes to steal their native land from them and make them into slaves. But one question concerns me: Why didn’t the Poles protest when Germans decided to force the Jews, citizens of this country from earliest times, to leave Poland and to rob them of the land of their birth?”⁴

The economist and statistician Ludwik Landau also recorded contemporary observations of Polish-Jewish relations at the beginning of the occupation. Active and well placed in Polish intellectual circles before the war, Landau, who had close ties with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), wrote an extremely important diary during the war years while in hiding on the Aryan side of Warsaw. During the first months of occupation, Landau devoted much of his entries to a discussion of the various factors that affected daily interactions between Jews and Poles. Observing the attitude of inhabitants of Warsaw toward the Jews, he stated that the Jews’ tragic plight at the onset of the occupation led to an eruption of antisemitic manifestations on the one hand and to manifestations of pity and consideration on the other. By early 1940, however, Landau realized that Polish society was now paying the price for the anti-Jewish policies that ruling circles had been crafting from the mid-1930s on. It was not the extreme and raucous antisemitic circles that perturbed him; rather, he was primarily concerned about the impact of institutionalized, governmental antisemitism on segments of Polish society: “It is difficult to appreciate to what extent the official antisemitism is accepted by the population. No doubt, the seeds of the OZON [Camp of National Unity⁵] policy bring today their fruits and abet the trends of the invaders. I have seen when a passing-by scoundrel passionately pummeled and kicked a Jewish waggoner, pretending to defend the horse against ill-treatment. There are cases when teenagers attack Jews, and particularly women, most often to rob them. There are cases, however, when non-Jewish passers-by defend Jews resolutely.”⁶

Emmanuel Ringelblum also placed Polish-Jewish relations at the beginning of the occupation in a broad context and did not merely diagnose the many negative phenomena that surfaced. His writings from the beginning of the war gave numerous examples of manifestations of violence, incitement to hatred, and derision on the part of Poles in view of the Jews’ suffering and distress, as well as of Poles’ participation in looting Jewish property. However, he also describes several indications of Poles’ sympathy for and commiseration with their agonized Jewish neighbors.⁷ In his work on Polish-Jewish relations during the war, Ringelblum noted the relationship that arose between Polish antisemites and the

new players on the scene, the German occupiers, as well as the danger that this combination represented for the Jews: “As early as October [1939] there were a considerable number of antisemitic elements who collaborated with the Germans in waging war on the Jews. This collaboration was manifested in many ways and it encompassed larger or smaller domains, depending on external circumstances.”⁸

The responses of these personalities, who differed in worldviews and public status, reflect the efforts of Jewish intellectuals and public figures from the very beginning of the occupation to understand and explain what the new era augured for relations between Jews and their Polish neighbors. Their attitudes covered a broad spectrum: from a sense of partnership in fate vis-à-vis a common enemy to the observation that Polish hostility toward Jews was too profound to vanish just because the Germans had occupied Poland and deprived it of independence. The Jewish underground press would also reflect these trends of thought, although differently than the diarists.

The Underground Press: The Voice of an Alternative Society

From the beginning of the German occupation, the struggle to keep the Polish population informed was the main battlefield between the occupier and the evolving Polish underground. In almost every town, the Polish press was stifled and succeeded by a Polish-language German newspaper published by the occupation authorities. This journalistic endeavor, which Poles called the “mindless press” (*prasa bez poglądów*), was eventually extended to the country’s national minorities—*Gazeta Żydowska* for the Jews, *Krakowskie Wisti* and *Lwiwskie Wisti* for the Ukrainians.⁹ By December 1939, there was a perceptible need for reliable information that was not meant to propagandize and distract.¹⁰ The first underground journal, *Polska Żyje* (Living Poland), made its debut in October 1939 and was quickly joined by dozens more.¹¹

For the Polish underground, the press performed several main functions. Here one could read Polish literature that was not published in other ways; here one could find articles by personalities and figures from Polish history. The underground press was also a vehicle of expression for ordinary, nameless citizens who used its pages to describe what the occupation was doing to their families and villages.¹²

The volume, intensity, and diversity of the Polish underground press was immeasurably greater than that of any other underground press in occupied Europe. The advent of the underground press was living proof of the existence of a different Poland—a Poland that did not succumb to the demoralization, the atmosphere of corruption, and the atomization that the Germans were instilling in the body of Polish society. The press was the mouthpiece of an underground that, by its means, disseminated the ideas of freedom and liberation to the entire population of the occupied country. It sustained the independent public and political discourse in Poland and hosted a rich ideological debate about the future

of Poland, the minorities problem, the Germans' anti-Jewish policies, and other matters. In this sense, the press articulated the "free politics" that continued to exist under the mantle of the rigid, murderous German occupation. Apart from any aspect of militarism or armed resistance, the press carried a social message. Thus, more than focusing on anti-Nazi struggle, the underground press functioned as an agent of articulation and preservation of the Polish social and national framework.¹³

The Jewish underground press in Warsaw made its first appearance in the early summer of 1940, at roughly the time that the Polish underground press advanced to a new phase in its development. The turning point for the Polish press was the war on the western front and its results. Until then, the occupier's press had almost total control of political and state information. The main Polish-language German newspaper in Warsaw, *Nowy Kurier Warszawski*, was printed in 150,000 copies on weekdays and 300,000 on weekends. The Poles gave this paper two derisive nicknames, *szmatlawcza* and *szmaty* (both denoting "rag"), exactly as the Jews termed the *Gazeta Żydowska*.¹⁴

During the war on the western front (May–June 1940), reports appeared about Polish warfare against the Germans and afterwards about the organization of the Polish Army and its integration into the British forces. *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, the main underground paper at that time, was published by Polish armed resistance circles, the Union for Armed Struggle (ZWZ); subsequently, it was the main underground publication of the Armia Krajowa. In the middle of 1940, a mission in Poland of the government-in-exile (the Delegatura) was established and publications of underground political groups, foremost those identified with the Polish socialists, began to appear alongside the military underground press.¹⁵ It was then that the status of the Polish underground press in the occupied country was transformed. It became a legitimate vehicle of expression, equal to the occupier's Polish-language German press in its ability to provide rapid and up-to-date information. It also began to function as a mouthpiece of the "other Poland," the underground Poland that fought against Germany in the west.

The Jewish underground press began to appear at precisely this time, and, unsurprisingly, its pioneers were the underground activists of the Bund, the Jewish socialist party that maintained relations with underground activists of the PPS. In the first two issues of the Bundist *Biuletyn*, they provided reportage about the founding conference of the Polish socialist underground and extensive coverage of the war on the western front, the Petain government that took shape after the defeat of France, and additional information about the international situation. Concurrently, initial information about the Jews' lives and their hardships and sufferings at the Nazis' hands was published. Eventually, this would become the main information on the topic.¹⁶

Thus, one may say that the Jewish underground press obtained its inspiration from its Polish counterpart. It is worth bearing in mind that much of the information published in the Jewish press, especially after the ghetto was sealed,

reached the editors and writers by means of the Polish underground press. However, a unique integration occurred in the Jewish underground press between political information and news picked up from radio broadcasts from London or Moscow, on the one hand, and the most detailed and up-to-date information possible on events in Jewish communities across Poland, including the Germans' anti-Jewish policies, the ghettos, the labor camps, and deportations, on the other hand. This press, like its Polish big sister, was a forum for free and open political debate among rival ideologies and ideological groups. Its dual role—partly the organ of an underground political group and partly an objective source of information—made it an authentic vehicle of expression for Jewish society in the ghetto. It breached the isolation and disengagement that the Nazi occupiers attempted to impose on the Jews and preserved the social values that were in perpetual danger of extinction.¹⁷

Between Hostile Neighbors and Partners in Fate

For as long as it existed—from the spring of 1940 to January 1943—the Jewish underground press in the Warsaw ghetto followed the lives of Poles and Jews under the Nazi occupiers' yoke and monitored relations between the people. This was one of the most important topics for many of the underground activists who wrote in and published the underground press. Its importance was not only political, i.e., multinational partnership in struggle against the Nazis. The Jewish underground activists considered it much more important to examine Jewish-Polish relations in the setting of daily life, in the *shtetl*, where the Jews were not isolated from their neighbors by ghetto ramparts, or in Warsaw, where walls kept the people apart. It was a test in which the answer was multifaceted and equivocal: Did the Polish population, persecuted and struggling under a rigid occupation regime, consider the Jewish population, a collective in continual existential danger, its partner in suffering, in fate, in national interests, in the dream of a free and egalitarian future Poland?

The press of the non-Zionist left—the Bund and the small group of Trotskyists in the ghetto—gave special emphasis to the Germans' repressive policy toward the population of Poland. As early as the summer of 1940, it provided painstakingly accurate reportage of arrests, deportations of Poles to Germany for forced labor, and murders of large numbers of Poles in various parts of the country. Alongside descriptive accounts of the harsh events that were unfolding—about which the correspondents culled information from broadcasts of the government-in-exile in London or the Polish underground press—commentary and explanations appeared. According to the conventional explanation—true to these groups' ideological doctrines—the sufferings inflicted on Poles and Jews by the occupier were related to the nature and essence of the occupier and not necessarily to the identity of the victim. All peoples that, according to the Nazi racial theory or the cynical, oppressive policy of Stalinism, were doomed to lives of slavery and extinction would meet this fate. In the spring of 1941,

for example, the Bund newspaper described the grim phenomenon of deportations and population displacement throughout occupied Poland:

From the Soviet occupation zone, 400,000 people in all, Poles and Jews alike, have been deported to the Soviet interior. . . . Between February 19 and February 21, 2,000–3,000 people were deported [by the Germans] from Bydgoszcz alone. . . . The deportees [Poles from Zagłębie] were housed, irrespective of sex, occupation, and age, in an unheated factory hall. . . . Amidst the wailing of women and children, attacks of nerves of the elderly, several dead bodies, and the narrow area on the other side of a partition where people take care of their needs en masse, irrespective of sex, as the Germans sentries laugh insultingly, a mass of 1,500 displaced persons are living. . . . In early February, the Germans again began to deport Jews to the Generalgouvernement. . . . The Germans looted all the property [of the displaced persons].¹⁸

The physical segregation of Jews and non-Jews entailed, at least for those whose Polish identity was no less important, if not more important, than their Jewish identity, an effort to explain what had become of the crumbling Polish-Jewish partnership. The small group of Assimilationists in the ghetto said the following in this matter:¹⁹

The Jewish public in Poland must understand that the uniqueness of its persecution by the Germans is simply a consequence of the Nazi program. Therefore, this fact gives the Jews no special privilege. It does not entitle them to crown themselves with the halo of martyrdom and in no case does it justify recognition of the heroism that the Jews would like to attribute to themselves.

The Jewish public must understand and make up its mind that the Jews of Poland are first Polish citizens and members of the Polish people (and only afterwards Jews), and that only certain social privileges vis-à-vis the state can justify the halo that the Jews wish to place around themselves because of the Germans' programmatic persecution.

. . . Every Jew, without exception, must make sure that his stance—in these difficult times—is worthy of that of an honest Pole.²⁰

The attitude that deemed Polish suffering a national suffering, indivisible among the ethnic or religious constituent groups of the Polish nation, rested on two ideological premises, one related to class and the other couched in cultural-national terms. Despite their differences, both the non-Zionist left and the Assimilationists ruled out any attempt to separate the Jews' plight from the general grim reality of the occupation. The Jewish ghetto, as the journal of the Trotskyist group in the ghetto defined it, is "but one link in the endless chain of afflictions and humiliations of Polish society."²¹ Collaborators with the Germans, the Assimilationists' journal stated, as it assailed the Jewish police and

the ghetto's affluent and pleasure-seeking class, "are selling their brethren for a pot of lentils . . . and even an honest Pole, irrespective of his religious affiliation, does not lend them a hand."²²

Such viewpoints are very important for understanding the worldview of non-Zionists in the ghetto, including those who considered Poland their country even after the war. The notion of Polish-Jewish suffering as just another product of the Nazis' repressive machine, a notion which the Bund and other groups on the left, including the Assimilationists, put forward, cannot be explained as a case of obtuseness or disregard of the Jewish fate in the war. By September 1940, the Bund journal acknowledged that Nazi Jewish policy was different, in essence and in goals, from the oppression applied to other national or political groups. In Poland, the Germans "will have room only for such Poles who are loyal, who will kiss the German lash, and will allow only those Poles to live. . . . The Jews, in contrast, are to vacate Europe altogether. . . . The Nazis' plan for the Jews in Poland is clear and cynical: to uproot them totally."²³

Groups such as the Bund and other non-Zionist leftists were firmly convinced during those years that, following the defeat of Fascism, the war would ordain a new political and social reality in Poland. I would define this notion as a kind of "nostalgia for the future." After Victory Day, the basic values of historical Poland—respect for human rights, political equality, and freedom for all citizens—would be restored. The future would witness the resurrection of past values and the revitalization of Jewish-Polish relations, which had been disrupted by the illnesses of antisemitism, reactionism, and Fascism, both German and Polish. The Assimilationists' journal defined the matter in the following way: "The Poland to come into being will be a democratic Poland, a homeland and a mother for all its citizens irrespective of religion and nationality. . . . The Allies' victory spells the liquidation of all chauvinistic regimes and [the advent of] democracy world wide. . . . While aspiring to this glorious future, which is very close to us . . . every citizen shall endure in a manner befitting an honest Pole."²⁴

The issue of antisemitism was the subject of a very penetrating discussion. Even political circles that felt the strongest affinity for Poland could not overlook the conspicuous presence of this phenomenon during the war. The attention of the press, Zionist and non-Zionist alike, was drawn to the question of Jewish-Polish relations under Nazi occupation.

In September 1941, the newspaper of the Gordonia youth movement published a detailed account of Jewish life in Żelechów (Lublin District), which had a Jewish population estimated at five thousand on the eve of the war.²⁵ The most interesting aspect of Jewish life in Żelechów—a matter that commanded the author's attention—was the change that occurred in Polish-Jewish relations after the occupation began. Even during the occupation, the course of life was different in this modest-sized town than in the large cities. Żelechów had no ghetto and lacked the quarantines, fences, and vigilant gendarmes that typified this institution. Jews and Poles continued to encounter each other in the market

square on the traditional market day. However, things changed markedly relative to the prewar period:

The market square bustles and churns with the noise and shouting of the crowd. The Jews and Christians who congregate at the shops, shacks, and stalls, bargain stubbornly and enthusiastically, shove each other, and even grab merchandise from each other's hands. In narrow alleyways, Jews besiege a sack of potatoes or a cup of butter clutched by a peasant; they snatch things out of each other's hands and inflate prices by their own actions. No longer can a peasant be forced to accept terms dictated to him by a Jewish customer; now he, the peasant, rules the roost. He seems to find these new conditions, created for his benefit, tasteful and pleasing. . . . And the Jews pay up—because the peasant threatens not to come at all next time. Then, [he says,] "You Jews will starve to death!"²⁶

The press presented another account from Jewish life in the ghettos of Tomaszów-Mazowiecki. Both ghettos established in this city had Christian residents who had not vacated their dwellings when the ghettos were formed. The newspaper *Yugent shtime* describes how these Christians—Poles and Volksdeutsche—entered the ghetto and profited handsomely from the Jews' distress.²⁷

This kind of reportage illuminates an important aspect of relations between Jewish society and the surrounding society in peripheral towns. These daily situations—encounters between Jews and Christians in the marketplace, in the street, or in shops, in locations where Jews were not severely and rigidly quarantined—reveal the weakness of Jewish society in the most painful way. Such accounts portray Jewish society as a community mired in existential struggle not only against the harsh Nazi policy of persecution but also against an estranged, cynical, and opaque surrounding society that exploited the Jews' weakness to make easy windfall profits.

The Bund dealt at length with the issue of antisemitism as a political phenomenon. This is hardly surprising, since the salience of antisemitism made it difficult for the party to continue defending its views concerning the shared interests of Jews and Poles resisting the Nazis. According to the Bund's basic attitude, antisemitism was the product of a Nazi policy intended to foment hatred and conflict between Jews and Poles. Thus, a Bund journal stated the following in December 1941:

One cannot . . . disregard the fact that the ceaseless antisemitic propaganda of Hitler's people is leaving indelible traces in the minds and psyches of Poles. Antisemitism, and it alone, is the principal method invoked by Hitler's men to enslave the peoples. . . . Wherever their footsteps fall, the war with the Jews begins the day after, [and] so begins the effort to mobilize the local population for this war. . . .

Some newspapers in the Polish underground are giving Hitler's of-

officials a maximum of assistance in poisoning the souls and minds of the Polish masses with the toxin of antisemitism, and in persuading them that their greatest and only enemy is the Jew, not Hitler's people or the occupier, whose only task is war against the Jews.²⁸

The characterization of antisemitism as a political tool of fascist regimes was deeply rooted in the Bundist movement. According to this view, the Nazis exploited the masses' propensity to obey slogans and fight imaginary enemies in order to generate divisiveness and hatred and to vitiate their opponents' endurance. In all places and at all times, antisemites find allies among local groups that agree to collaborate with them. The groups in this case were the Polish nationalist circles, which had been treating Jews as enemies since the 1920s and 1930s and had learned nothing from the occupation and the defeat. However, even the Bundists had to admit—as they did with considerable courage—that the response to antisemitic manifestations throughout had not always received the attention it deserved among political circles that were not suspected of anti-Jewish hostility: “Let us say frankly that most of the leftist and democratic Polish underground press has treated the problem of antisemitism with silence. They have not given it the space it deserves. It has not warned the Polish public about deceitful ideological traps.”²⁹

Obviously, antisemitism in wartime Poland cannot be addressed from the political perspective only. The phenomenon at issue has extensive social breadth, historical background, and economic and cultural roots. In March 1942, one of the general Zionist newspapers in the ghetto published a sweeping and comprehensive analysis of Jewish-Polish relations during the war. In the newspaper's estimation, antisemitism in Poland had decreased on the whole. Various political circles recovered from the intoxication of the Nazis' anti-Jewish propaganda after they personally experienced the occupiers' repressive measures, especially in the western districts that had been annexed to the Reich. However, quite a few problems remained unsolved and were actually worsening; foremost was the fact that many Poles had taken over Jewish businesses and property when the Jews were ghettoized. These Poles now subscribed to slogans that called for a reduction in the postwar population of Jews in Poland, lest demands to return the booty be made. Another issue concerned the Jews' attitude toward the Soviets in the eastern territories and the depiction of Jews as anti-Polish factors in the annexed areas. Only a sincere confrontation with these problems could generate hope for a new climate in the lives of both peoples after the war. The newspaper then summarized its discussion:

It should be stated clearly and frankly that the notion of an “oversupply” of Jews is preposterous and unspeakable. We are not “unnecessary” citizens in Poland. . . . Jews have been in Poland since the time the Polish state was formed and are not foreign *arrivistes* who should be forced to emigrate. . . .

It is true that Jews will begin to emigrate immediately after the war.

However, it will be a voluntary emigration, just as non-Jews will emigrate voluntarily. One cannot speak of a forced emigration, since this would be nothing but a return to the antisemitism of OZON.³⁰

In sum, one may state that as long as it endured, the Jewish underground press continually explored and debated the issue of Polish-Jewish relations during the war and the effect of Nazi persecution on both peoples. The press represented the range of views that had been prevalent in prewar Jewish public life regarding Poland and the Jews. Importantly, the war and the occupation constituted an “earthquake” that affected all aspects of life in Poland, including this issue, which had been discussed at length in Jewish public and political circles until September 1939. Despite the divergent attitudes—influenced by diverse political and ideological views—that appeared in the press, they all operated under a common assumption: the view that the postwar future offered an opportunity (albeit, not a certainty) for a dramatic change of direction in Polish-Jewish relations and in the Jews’ ability to integrate into the reconstituted Polish state.

The coming of the Nazi Final Solution in the Generalgouvernement created a new reality again. I shall not discuss at length here the question of Polish attitudes toward the extermination of the Jews. We should only note that, at the very beginning of the deportations, the journal of the Dror movement published the following in response to the attitude of the “other side of the wall” toward the deportation of the Jews: “We want to believe in a different Poland. For the time being, however, the facts will do the talking. They speak not only the language of newspaper articles but also, and in the main, that of daily actions: denunciations [of Jews], gloating at their distress, mocking treatment of elderly people who have been sentenced to death, and singing of ‘Smash the Jews, Smash, Smash!’”³¹ Obviously, this is not the whole picture; one finds examples of the opposite kind as well. However, the effect of these manifestations on the shaping of Jewish collective memory of wartime Polish attitudes toward the Holocaust is cardinal.

Notes

1. Victor Chajes, *Gam yehudi gam polani—yomano shel Viktor Khayut* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1998), 268. It was the custom to give such icons to soldiers heading into combat for good luck.
2. Chajes, *Gam yehudi gam polani*, 269.
3. Chaim A. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan* (London: H. Hamilton, 1966), 2.
4. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, 7.
5. OZON, Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego, the National Unity Camp, was a party alignment that was organized in 1938 by pro-government elements and that adopted an antisemitic policy. Its leaders advocated economic struggle against the Jews and encouraged Jews to emigrate from Poland.
6. Ludwik Landau, *Kronika lat wojny i okupacji* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawn. Naukowe, 1962–1963), 1: 362–363.

7. See, for example, Emmanuel Ringleblum, *Ksovim fun geto* (Tel Aviv: Farlag I. L. Perets, 1985), 1: 28, 45, 78–79.
8. Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*, ed. Joseph Kermish and Shmuel Krakowski (New York: Fertig, 1976), 39.
9. Ewa Cytowska, *Szkice z dziejów prasy pod okupacją niemiecką*, (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawn. Naukowe, 1986), 8–9.
10. Landau, *Kronika lat wojny*, 81, 91.
11. Jerzy Jarowiecki, “Prasa w Polsce w latach, 1939–1945,” in *Prasa Polska w latach 1939–1945*, ed. Jerzy Łojek (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawn. Naukowe, 1980), 48.
12. Cytowska, *Szkice z dziejów prasy*, 20.
13. Jan Tomasz Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation: The General-gouvernement, 1939–1944* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 251–252, 255–256.
14. Stanisława Lewandowska, *Prasa okupowanej Warszawy, 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1992), 50.
15. Lewandowska, *Prasa okupowanej Warszawy*, 65–66; Cytowska, *Szkice z dziejów prasy*, 31.
16. *Biuletyn*, in *Itonut ha-mahteret ha-yehudit be-varsha*, ed. Joseph Kermish, Yisrael Białostocki, and Israel Shaham, 6 vols. (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979–1997) 1: 1–2, 6–9, 12–14, 21–22.
17. Jarowiecki, “Prasa w Polsce,” 120.
18. *Za Naszą i Waszą Wolność*, March 1941, in *Itonut ha-mahteret*, ed. Kermish, Białostocki, and Shaham, 2: 130–132.
19. Here I do not discuss the essence of this “assimilation”; I relate to it mainly in the sense of self-definition.
20. *Zagiew*, January 1942, in *Itonut ha-mahteret*, ed. Kermish, Białostocki, and Shaham, 4: 441–442.
21. *Czerwony Sztandar*, December 1940, in *Itonut ha-mahteret*, ed. Kermish, Białostocki, and Shaham, 5: 6.
22. *Zagiew*, January 1942, in *Itonut ha-mahteret*, ed. Kermish, Białostocki, and Shaham, 4: 442.
23. *Biuletyn*, September 1940, in *Itonut ha-mahteret*, ed. Kermish, Białostocki, and Shaham, 1: 77.
24. *Zagiew*, January 1942, in *Itonut ha-mahteret*, ed. Kermish, Białostocki, and Shaham, 4: 443.
25. Avraham Wein, ed., *Pinkas ha-kehilot—Polin*, vol. 7 (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1999), 199–201.
26. *Słowo Młodych*, September 1941, in *Itonut ha-mahteret*, ed. Kermish, Białostocki, and Shaham, 3: 352–353.
27. *Yugent shtime*, November 1941, in *Itonut ha-mahteret*, ed. Kermish, Białostocki, and Shaham, 4: 65.
28. *Za Naszą i Waszą Wolność*, December 1941, in *Itonut ha-mahteret*, ed. Kermish, Białostocki, and Shaham, 4: 271.
29. *Za Naszą i Waszą Wolność*, August 1941, in *Itonut ha-mahteret*, ed. Kermish, Białostocki, and Shaham, 3: 253.
30. *Unzer hofnung*, 1 March 1942, in *Itonut ha-mahteret*, ed. Kermish, Białostocki, and Shaham, 5: 300.
31. *Yedios*, 20 June 1942, in *Itonut ha-mahteret*, ed. Kermish, Białostocki, and Shaham, 6: 423.

CHAPTER 11

Jewish and Polish Perceptions of the Shoah as Reflected in Wartime Diaries and Memoirs



FELIKS TYCH

At the close of the 1990s, I began work on the Holocaust and its social environment in the light of Polish wartime memoirs and diaries. The first results of the project were presented in 1999 in Warsaw at an international Holocaust conference, sponsored by Yad Vashem and the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, as well as in a larger form in my recent book.¹ This essay on Polish and Jewish wartime memoirs begins from the premise that Jews confined to ghettos or in hiding had, for objective reasons (especially in the largest ghettos), a limited knowledge about events both on the so-called Aryan side and in other ghettos. The Poles, free to travel around the country, knew more of what was awaiting the Jews *outside* the ghettos. From the very beginning, Polish peasants inhabiting villages near the death camps knew what was going on behind the camp fences, and news of such horrors reached other parts of Polish society. This was not the case on the Jewish side, where news about the true destination of the deportation transports came only gradually.

Several wartime Jewish diaries confirm my hypothesis. A prime example is the excellent diary of Jakub Poznański, written inside the Łódź ghetto, where it is evident that he had a very inadequate knowledge about the outside world. Even the news about the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto, which took place a mere sixty-five miles away, reached him in a very fragmentary and misleading form: as a common Polish-Jewish uprising.² Diaries written in the Warsaw ghetto similarly lack information about the world *extra muros*, for obvious reasons. One could mention in this respect the manuscript of David Fogelman written in 1944.³ Even Emmanuel Ringelblum's work on wartime Polish-Jewish relations was based on a limited knowledge about the Polish scene.

Some Jewish diarists were conscious of their limited information and re-

proached the Poles for failing to disseminate early warnings about Treblinka. I am referring here to the unpublished diary of Stefan Ernst, written in 1944; he rejected Polish accusations that Jews were passive during the Holocaust. "It was harder for us," Ernst wrote, "locked inside the walls, than for you [i.e., Poles] to find out about Treblinka." He continued: "Any Pole who wanted to know was free to board the train to Malkinia [a railway junction near Treblinka] and then inform us . . . so we could know at once, not after the experience of two or three weeks and two thousands victims . . . Decimated, demoralized, exhausted, unarmed, and unable to fight."⁴

Take the example of Chełmno nad Nerem, the first death camp, which was active from December 1941. News about the death camp reached the Jews of annexed western Poland (the Warthegau) and the Warsaw ghetto (through the Ringelblum group) only after a Jew—the famous Shlamek—escaped from Chełmno.⁵ Peasants from neighboring villages knew earlier what was taking place in the nearby forest.

Polish Memoirs

When I began the project about Polish wartime memoirs, I wanted not only to learn more "from the horse's mouth" about Polish perceptions of the Holocaust but also to learn more about rescuers, about their motivations, their way of seeing those Poles who chose not to aid Jews, and also about those who were dangerous to the Polish rescuers. The rescuers, a topic extremely important for Holocaust research, still remains a relatively unexplored terrain. What kind of people, socially and politically, engaged in rescue activity? What motivated their behavior? Were their involvements with Jews in distress mostly accidental or deliberate? We know that both conditions occurred. But what were the proportions? We know that many antisemites were also among the rescuers. Did they rescue Jews for religious reasons or mostly for other reasons? How often was money the decisive factor? Since we cannot expect that Polish diarists and memoirists will admit they were remunerated, we have to look for this information in Jewish memoirs.

Another important reason for undertaking this research was related to the Polish reception of wartime Jewish diaries and memoirs. One can observe that most Polish readers have tended to doubt the credibility of Jewish memoirs critical of Polish attitudes and behavior. When Jewish memoirs and diaries record phenomena which were—as we know—quite common, such as extortion, blackmailing, informing, and participation in looting Jewish property or even in killings, they are very often characterized as anti-Polish. I wanted to examine this sensitive problem by utilizing sources that would be much more credible in non-Jewish eyes, those told by "non-suspect" witnesses. And such testimonies exist, sometimes even in print. One need only mention the extremely important diaries of Zygmunt Klukowski, a Polish doctor from the small town of Szczebrzeszyn in the southern Polish region of Lublin.⁶ Klukowski's diary constitutes an honest,

critical account of the attitudes of his fellow citizens during the killings and deportation of *Szczebrzeszyn* Jews.⁷

On the assumption that other Polish memoirs existed with similarly critical accounts, I discovered dozens of such texts lying unexamined in the manuscript departments of several Polish research libraries. I further discovered that hundreds of manuscripts written in the late 1940s and early 1950s, as well as memoirs subsequently submitted as part of public contests for wartime memoirs, lie in collections of different societies or in the archives of publishing houses. Only a small amount of these works have been published. The rest, mainly for political reasons, have remained in manuscript form, unknown to the broad public and even to researchers.

This unexamined body of Polish wartime diaries and memoirs contains extraordinarily rich information. This includes observations (1) about the motives of rescuers despite the death penalty for such deeds, (2) about the motives that restrained people from aiding Jews, and, finally, (3) about the motives and attitudes of those who approved of the Nazi Final Solution to the Jewish question. Digging into this material, one finds a whole range of motives at play. Some authors approved of the Nazi Final Solution out of a belief that Jews constituted an alien and hostile body in prewar Poland. The removal of Jews from Poland, it was believed, would be a beneficial outcome of the war; some regarded the Holocaust as a kind of merited punishment for the alleged mass collaboration of Jews during the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland in the first year of the war. Others favored Nazi Jewish policy for purely material reasons: to eliminate competition from Jewish shopkeepers and craftsmen as well as to retain ownership of Jewish property. We know from many sources that some even killed for this reason, as in the case of Henryk Grynberg's father. On the other hand, there are dozens of unpublished Polish wartime memoirs that are highly critical of the indifference or hostility of their fellow citizens toward the Jews.

In postwar Communist Poland, there was a ban, strictly observed by the State Censorship Office, on information about these controversial Polish attitudes toward the Jews under German occupation. It was only in the first months of the year 2000, more than ten years after the abolition of censorship in Poland, that a Polish daily published the first Polish wartime memoirs that openly approved of the deportations of Jews. I am referring to the diaries of the Polish writer Stanisław Rembek, well known before the war, and his description of the deportation of Jews from Grodzisk near Warsaw. It is interesting to note that when the book appeared in print, six months after excerpts had been serialized in a Polish newspaper, some of the incriminating antisemitic fragments had been excised in a case of private censorship.⁸

At stake here are not only the dark side of wartime Polish attitudes and the fact that they were concealed from the public in postwar Communist Poland. On the contrary, the recording of rescuers' stories never became a matter of educational work among Polish youth. Until recently, moreover, even the rescuers themselves refrained from publicizing their stories, probably because this

was not a very popular topic. For me this was one more reason to search for new sources documenting the heroic exploits of the rescuers.

But after reading about 450 published and unpublished Polish wartime memoirs, the most striking impression is the complete or near-complete silence about the Holocaust. In Poland, where almost every second city dweller was Jewish before the war, and where in the majority of small cities the Holocaust was executed before the very eyes of the local population, nobody could claim ignorance about the fate of Jews. Certainly, silence has different names and reasons. Was it a silence of indifference, of embarrassment, of helplessness? A silence caused by the impossibility of finding adequate words for such a monstrous crime, or simply a silence of precaution? There is one known case of precaution: Zofia Nałkowska, a famous writer, fearing that Germans would discover her diary, destroyed an important part sympathetic to the fate of Jews.

Jewish Memoirs

There are dozens of books and articles dealing with different methodological and heuristic problems of Holocaust memoirs and diaries. Historians are constantly debating the reliability of memoirs as a historical source. At one time, Raul Hilberg refrained out of principle from using Jewish sources in his historical works on the Holocaust. Were Jewish sources not reliable enough for him?

However, what would we know today about Jewish life in Nazi-occupied Poland were it not for these kinds of sources? When, precisely, did the Jews become cognizant of the Nazi Final Solution? How did they make a living when all the foundations of their existence were stripped away? How did Jews imagine their own future after the war? What conditions did Jews in hiding face? To what extent did wartime experiences change the attitude of Jewish survivors toward their social environment, toward their non-Jewish fellow citizens? What was the moral price paid for those who survived? If it were not for Jewish testimonies and memoirs, what would we know about the degree of indifference of most Poles to the fate of Jews? A few sentences can reveal the dimensions of the drama.

The testimony of Polish-Jewish writer Adolf Rudnicki is revealing. Writing immediately after the Second World War, he described the attitude of most of the Poles to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: “The glow [of the burning ghetto] could be seen from every corner of the city and at any time of day. But all that, including children burned alive, was dismissed with a shrug: ‘That’s in the ghetto,’ and the anxiety was gone. Yet this was happening on Nowolipie, Muranowska, or Świętojerska streets, tens of metres away. A hundred metres away in space, fifteen months away in time [the author is referring to the time that passed from the ghetto uprising to the 1944 Polish Uprising in Warsaw]. And that made all the difference.”⁹

It is revealing to mention in this context the wartime diaries of the famous Polish writer Maria Dąbrowska, whose entries concerning the Warsaw Ghetto

Uprising were heavily censored by the Communist authorities. In one, she complained about the annoying smoke that was reaching her apartment from the burning ghetto. In another entry, she expressed her satisfaction that Polish students would have easier access to the universities after the war since there would be no Jewish students with whom to compete.

One should note that everything is nonetheless relative, including the effect of the surrounding Gentile population on the Jewish fate. In hundreds of Jewish memoirs one finds narratives of escaped Jewish individuals and families who, suddenly outside the ghetto, felt safe around those persons who were merely indifferent to the fate of the Jews. In this changed situation, such indifference was, in a way, friendly, posing no danger. The real danger derived from informers and extortionists.¹⁰

The testimonies of both rescuers and Jewish survivors indicate that Polish rescuers had to conceal their activities as much from fellow Poles as from the Germans. Ludwik Landau, the author of one of the most important wartime diaries, refers to rampant blackmailing and informing on several occasions. He also noted that the Polish underground carried out several executions of persons denouncing or blackmailing Jews.¹¹

One of the first testimonies from a Holocaust survivor, published in November 1944 in the form of a letter to the editor in liberated Lublin, described the situation of hidden Jews during the war in the following manner:

There were very many cases of giving the hiding Jews away. The “illegal” Jews were much more afraid of the local population than of the Germans, who lacked both the intuition and the knowledge of Jewish affairs. . . . How many more people would be saved, had it not been for the attitude of a part of society. . . . How many times a mean informer would frustrate the painstaking and selfless sacrifice of another Pole who risked his life for his Jewish friend or even an unknown Jew, equipping him with a forged I.D., helping him escape, relocate or find a job. Each of these actions alone carried a threat to the rescuer’s life. And then, after several months of struggle, a villain came along and with one word turned to ruin the painstakingly erected structure that would be crowned with the proud inscription, “I saved a man.”¹²

A fellow historian once commented that as far as Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust are concerned, there is a Polish truth and a Jewish one. Even if we regarded such a statement merely as a metaphor related to present-day controversies over wartime Polish-Jewish relations, one can hardly subscribe to such a view. There are not two truths, one on each side of the Polish-Jewish divide. The border lies inside both Jewish and Polish memory. For some writers, the extreme attitudes dominate the whole scene, while others try to portray the real proportions between various attitudes. A Holocaust survivor, Michał Borwicz (Boruchowich), recorded the following observation in 1946: “The Ger-

mans did all they could to allow the scum to float to the surface. The scum acts openly, which is why it is so easy to see. The 'righteous' ones cannot be seen because they have to hide their righteousness. . . . Yet they exist. . . . When a stranger passes a slice of bread to prisoners of a camp being marched under escort, he does it as inconspicuously as he possibly can. . . . On the other hand, the dregs are noisy. They are permitted to be. The one who is hiding a Jew has to do it in secrecy because he is risking his own and his family's life."¹³ But this is precisely "the reason why nobody must know about it. But when it comes to agents, informers and blackmailers, everybody knows about them."¹⁴ There is no trace here of a biased Jewish point of view. The same author adds bitterly that even after the war, as he was writing his memoirs, it was not much in vogue among Poles to admit that they had been hiding Jews.¹⁵

There is nonetheless one aspect of the problem that comes close to the assertion about "two truths." It is a factor that is rarely noticed in Jewish memoirs; namely, that the Poles, too, were victims of the German occupation. They were not equal victims from the point of view of Nazi policy and the threat to their survival. Yet they were victims all the same. Despite the fact that both Poles and Jews shared a common enemy, most wartime memoirs, both Jewish and Polish, hardly give an impression of solidarity between the two peoples, of what the Germans call "Schicksalgemeinschaft." The reason was simple: both were victims, but from the existential point of view, they were *unequal victims*.

The great majority of Poles regarded the Jews as an alien element. In fact, this was also the official policy of the Polish government before 1939. There was a certain continuity in this approach: the underground Polish administration, established by the Polish government-in-exile, did not consider the Jews as part of their responsibility. It is revealing that one can hardly find a critical approach about such attitudes in the postwar memoirs of leading members of the Polish resistance.

The reasons for the insufficient attention paid to the plight of Poles in Jewish memoirs is also self-evident. To the Jews, starved to death in the ghettos and then murdered in an industrial manner, the situation of the Poles appeared to be actually comfortable. A great majority of them preserved the right to live, a right the Jews were denied.

An analysis of Jewish testimonies from Poland, recorded immediately after the war, reveals how dramatically Polish-Jewish relations deteriorated as a result of the Holocaust. Some Polish political writers and even some historians attribute this deterioration to two factors: (1) the alleged widespread collaboration of the Jews with the Soviet administration in eastern Poland in 1939 through 1941 and (2) the relatively large presence of Jewish survivors in the Polish communist administration after the war. A survey of Jewish and Polish war memoirs indicates, however, that this deterioration had occurred already during the war, as a demoralizing effect of the Holocaust and the Jewish disappointment with the attitudes of the Poles.

Under the impact of the Final Solution, the majority of Poles did not desire

a return to the prewar situation, with a large Jewish presence in Poland. Nor did they desire a future in which a large Jewish population would enjoy full equal rights. The best evidence that the latter view was shared by a large part of Polish society is the fact that the few Jews who survived the Holocaust could not safely return to their homes in villages and small towns, where they had felt secure before the war. The resoundingly negative attitude of most Poles in wartime and the immediate postwar period is a leitmotif in most Jewish wartime memoirs.

Many Jewish testimonies collected immediately after the war contain the recurrent line: “We had to move to a bigger town because they were killing Jews, because they threatened to kill us.” And these were no hollow threats. There are hundreds of such accounts preserved in the Jewish Historical Institute’s archives and in published memoirs, marking a new phenomenon in the whole history of Jewish life in Poland. This was a consequence of both the transformation of Polish-Jewish relations during Second World War and the aftermath of the morally destructive effects of the Holocaust on a large proportion of its witnesses.

At the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw alone, we have approximately 7300 early testimonies of Holocaust survivors. And there are even more Polish wartime memoirs. These memoirs and diaries constitute a major historical source on which a reliable, quantitative analysis of different attitudes in typical situations concerning the Holocaust and its social environment can be conducted. Such an analysis should be the next stage in our research on wartime Polish-Jewish relations. For only by examining complimentary sources—Polish *and* Jewish memoirs and diaries—can we learn more about the complexity of Jewish-Polish relations during the Holocaust and its aftermath.

Notes

1. Feliks Tych, *Długi cień Zagłady* (Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 1999).
2. Jakub Poznański, *Pamiętnik z getta łódzkiego* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1960), 59.
3. David Fogelman, “Pamiętnik pisany w bunkrze,” in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw, Poland (hereafter cited as AŻIH), 302/25.
4. Stefan Ernest, “Dziennik z 1944,” AŻIH, 302/85, 181.
5. See the Ringelblum Archive, *Listy o zagładzie*, vol. 1, ed. Ruta Sakowska (Warsaw: Wydawn. Naukowe PWN, 1997), xix–xxi, 7, 37, 112, 113, 116, 118, 121, 122, 125, 127, 129–131, and 134–203.
6. Zygmunt Klukowski, *Dziennik z lat okupacji* (Lublin: Lubelska Spółdzielnia Wydawn., 1958), which was published in English as Z. Klukowski, *Diary from the Years of Occupation, 1939–1944*, trans. George Klukowski (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).
7. Klukowski, *Dziennik z lat okupacji*, especially 277 and 290–291.
8. Stanisław Rembek, *Dziennik okupacyjny* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Agawa, 2000).
9. Adolf Rudnicki, “Dzienniki,” *Kuźnica* 1 (1945).
10. See, for example, Blanca Rosenberg, *To Tell at Last: Survival under False Identity, 1941–1945* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

11. Ludwik Landau, *Kronika lat wojny i okupacji* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawn. Naukowe, 1962), 2: 414.
12. The author of this letter was, according to materials housed in the Jewish Historical Institute's archives, an 18-year-old Jew from Warsaw who escaped from the Warsaw ghetto to Lublin, where he remained in hiding until the liberation.
13. Michał Borwicz, *Uniwersytet zbirów* (Cracow: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna, 1946), 67.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.

Polish-Jewish Relations in the Writings of Emmanuel Ringelblum



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From his student days at Warsaw University until the tragic end of his life in 1944, Emmanuel Ringelblum placed the problem of Polish-Jewish relations at the center of his scholarly interests. This chapter will survey the evolution of Ringelblum's views on Polish-Jewish relations and consider how they changed under the impact of the Holocaust. Certain questions demand particular attention. What insights into Ringelblum's evaluation of Polish-Jewish relations emerge from his prewar scholarship? How did his political views affect his critical judgment? How did he assess Polish-Jewish relations at various points in the war?

In his prewar writings on Polish-Jewish history, Ringelblum never for a moment forgot the political implications of his scholarly research. Following in the footsteps of his intellectual mentor, Isaac Schiper, Ringelblum tried to counter two starkly different perceptions of Polish-Jewish relations. The first was the myth of Poland as a land of asylum and refuge, distinguished by age-old traditions of liberalism and tolerance. The second was the opposite myth of eternal antisemitism, the notion that Polish-Jewish relations were rooted in a history of unbridgeable antagonism and mutual alienation. The truth, Ringelblum believed was more complicated. Polish-Jewish relations reflected a constant interplay of rivalry and cooperation, religious alienation and close personal ties, economic tension and mutual collaboration. It was the job of the historian to explain this story, undercut long-held prejudices, and thereby build mutual understanding between Jews and Poles. Ringelblum sincerely believed that one reason for Polish-Jewish tension was a lack of mutual knowledge. He was an optimist who was convinced that Poles and Jews could overcome their differences and that historians could help bring the two peoples closer together. When World War II began, amidst a brief interlude of Polish-Jewish cooperation, Ringelblum began

to chronicle the history of the occupation in the hope that he would be serving not only future scholarship but also future understanding between the two peoples. Once the mass murder started, however, he confronted a starkly different reality.

From the very beginning of his career as a historian, Ringelblum saw the writing of history as a mission that carried important political and national responsibilities. Indeed, one should use the word “career” quite advisedly. Like other young Jewish historians of the interwar period, Ringelblum had no hope of landing a university job, and even finding publishers for his books was a major ordeal. But as he wrote in 1926, in a journal he edited, the *Yunger Historiker*, “We are performing a task of immense social significance, a task whose goal is not just to get to know the Jewish past but also to lay the foundation for the struggle that the Jewish public in Poland is carrying on for its national and social liberation.”¹ In the tough battle that Jews had to wage for justice and equality in the new Polish state, historians could furnish “ammunition” for the struggle: show that far from being alien parasites, the Jews, by their contribution to the Polish economy and their participation in struggles for independence, lived in Poland by right and not on sufferance.

Like other historians in his circle, the *Yunger Historiker krayz*, Ringelblum saw the writing of history as a collective effort that would bring together scholars and ordinary Jews.² In this regard, local and regional history became especially important. Ringelblum and other YIVO (Institute for Jewish Scientific Research) historians encouraged ordinary Jews to gather old chronicles (*pinke-sim*), to learn the history of their own towns, and to photograph old cemeteries and synagogues.³ The very process of historical research and “engaged tourism” (*landkentenish*), Ringelblum and other YIVO scholars hoped, would help create a new secular Jewish sensibility and buttress an emerging Yiddish secular culture.⁴ *Zamling* (the collection of documents and folklore) would also ensure that future generations would not have to rely on gentile sources and unfriendly official documents to study Jews; it signaled the determination of a stateless people to protect their identity and their national dignity. (Indeed, the secret Oneg Shabes archive that Ringelblum organized in the Warsaw ghetto was a direct continuation of this YIVO imperative of engaged scholarship.)

These efforts to interest the masses in history also served another purpose: to remind Jews of their ties to their surroundings, to their region, and to their neighbors. Where they lived was “home.” They were an integral part of the Polish landscape. They belonged as much as the Poles. By the same token they could not know themselves if they failed to study their relations with their non-Jewish neighbors. In the past, Ringelblum wrote in 1931, Jewish local histories had focused too much on rabbis and wealthy merchants. He called for new approaches that integrated social and economic history and considered the Jews in the context of the larger regional system. In his review of a collective history of Pruzhany, published in 1931 by teachers and students at the local Yiddish secular school, Ringelblum noted with approval that the Pruzhany collective avoided

the common mistake of writing their non-Jewish neighbors out of local Jewish history.⁵

Ringelblum quickly found out that in the highly charged atmosphere of Poland in the 1930s, even scholarly work on early Polish-Jewish history could be political dynamite. Thanks to the help of Professor Marcelli Handelsman and the Warsaw Society of Friends of History, his first book, on the history of Warsaw's Jews up to 1527, was published in 1932 (with the help of a small grant from the Warsaw city government).⁶ But some of his assertions, such as that of a late fifteenth-century pogrom allegedly incited by Juan Capistrano, and his allegations of princely venality led to bitter attacks in a stormy meeting of the society in 1933.⁷ The prestigious *Kwartalnik Historyczny* published a savage review—with clear antisemitic overtones—by a prominent legal historian, Professor Józef Siemiński.⁸ One cannot help but note that parallel fate that linked the Polish nationalist scholar and the young Jewish historian. Like Ringelblum, Siemiński devoted much of his life to the preservation of archives—in this case Polish archives—as an indispensable resource for the safeguarding of national memory and identity. He was murdered in Auschwitz in 1941, just three years before the Gestapo killed Ringelblum, his family, and thirty-four other Jews on the Aryan side of Warsaw.

In this first book Ringelblum repeatedly emphasized the interconnectedness of Polish and Jewish history. He noted:

Recent studies of the inner life of the Jews have been dispelling the widely held myth of a Chinese wall that separated the Jewish community from the Christian community. Research on the history of Warsaw Jews shows us that each world penetrated the other. The results of this mutual interrelationship can be seen in every sphere. From Christians Jews borrowed fashions (stroje) clothing, family names, first names, habits and customs. Often they adopted the language of the surrounding country (Germany, France, Spain, etc.) elsewhere they enriched their own language with liberal borrowings from gentile speech (Yiddish in Poland). By the same token Jewish culture and especially popular culture developed under the strong influence of the Christian world.⁹

Certainly this keen sense of Jewish-Christian interconnectedness was a major reason for Ringelblum's interest in the history of medicine and the social and cultural role of Jewish physicians.¹⁰ In early modern Poland, Ringelblum argued, Jewish physicians were the most likely to straddle two worlds. It was the physician who, with his access to non-Jewish education, often served as a conduit of secular culture into the Jewish community:

The Jewish physicians were the only representatives of secular education in the Jewish community (oyf der yidisher gas). Young Jewish students rarely studied philosophy. . . . What practical sense would that have made? . . . So the doctors were the only ones that brought light and knowledge into the Jewish world. . . . That meant bitter battles with the

rabbis and with the kehilla. . . . The kehilla takes revenge, not only on the living but also on the dead. These battles played themselves out in a lot of ways. The Jewish doctor becomes like his Christian colleague, especially when . . . most of his clients are Christian. He shaves his beard, he wears the same clothes as the gentiles, and he writes prescriptions on the Sabbath. In short he breaks through the wall [of tradition].¹¹

This sense of Jewish-Polish interconnectedness had to be impressed on Poles as well as on Jews. Ringelblum felt it was important to remind Polish historians that, like it or not, Jews were an integral part of Polish history. In a 1930 review of a history of factory workers in Poland, Ringelblum complained that all too often Polish scholars wrote Polish history as if Jews did not exist. When they did mention Jews, it was to engage in unfair antisemitic attacks.¹² In his book on the participation of the Jews in the Kościuszko Uprising of 1794, Ringelblum outlined another task for the Polish-Jewish historian: to revise the Polish view of Jews as an “undifferentiated other.”¹³ The Jewish historian could show Poles that Jews were a varied and complex community. They could demystify a group that was intimately and intricately bound up with the life of the country.

The Jewish historian also had the important responsibility of reaching out to Polish educated society. In 1926, in the first issue of a journal that he founded with Raphael Mahler, *Yunger Historiker*, Ringelblum emphasized that “when a Jewish historian reads an objective historical talk in front of Polish colleagues—future high school teachers—even if the talk concerns the very distant past—he is contributing to the coming together of Polish and Jewish society.”¹⁴ This reaching out to Polish society was a goal that Ringelblum continued to pursue for the rest of his life. In late 1942 the Oneg Shabes archive issued a bulletin in the Polish language—*Wiadomości*—aimed as much at Poles as at Jews. In this journal the Oneg Shabes warned the Polish population not to become too complacent as they watched the murder of their Jewish neighbors; their turn could be next.¹⁵ Ringelblum’s last great work on Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War was written in Polish and was certainly directed at a Polish readership.

Just as Ringelblum wanted to demystify Jews in the eyes of Poles, he also wanted Jews to rethink their relationship to the non-Jewish world. Ringelblum had little patience with the idea that antisemitism was inevitable and eternal. He praised Raphael Mahler, in his review of Mahler’s essay on Yehezkiel Kaufmann’s *Gola ve-nikur*, for demolishing the “false idea of eternal antisemitism. . . . Kaufmann wants to propagate a religious-nationalist ideology that is based on the zoological hatred between peoples.”¹⁶ Ringelblum himself attacked Philip Friedman in a 1929 review for implying that antisemitism had been a fundamental feature of Christian-Jewish relations. Modern historical research, Ringelblum reminded his readers, undermined this thesis. Jews often lived side by side with Christians. They played together, drank together, and even sinned together.¹⁷

But even though Jews were interlinked with Poles and Poland, they were still a separate people who had every right to their own national identity and culture. Jewish historians had to remind both Jews and Poles that the nineteenth-century dream of assimilation no longer made sense and should give way to a relationship based on mutual respect. Writing in the youth press of the *Left Poalei Tsiyon* in the 1920s, Ringelblum echoed his mentor Isaac Schiper's call for a revision of the rosy view of Polish-Jewish relations in early modern Poland, a view that had been developed by assimilationist historians such as Alexander Kraushar and Hilary Nussbaum. Kraushar and Nussbaum, Ringelblum complained, had used history to justify their political and cultural agenda. In return for Polish tolerance, they implied, Jews should assimilate to Polish culture and reject Jewish nationalism and separatism.¹⁸ In that same article Ringelblum praised Schiper for pioneering work that broke with this assimilationist tradition and used Polish-Jewish history to help construct a new, assertive Jewish identity.

Implicit in Ringelblum's historical work before the war was the argument that ultimately the solution of the Jewish problem in Poland would be determined not by antisemitic prejudice but by fundamental reforms of the nation's political and economic system. In an interesting work on failed attempts to productivize the Jewish population in the eighteenth century, Ringelblum tried to argue that the effort to solve the problem of Jewish destitution and poverty in the eighteenth century foundered on the deep-seated dysfunction brought about by serfdom.¹⁹ The same theme reappeared in his wartime writings. Solving the Jewish question required Poland to undertake fundamental structural reforms—in this case, the replacement of the capitalist system.

Like many other younger Jewish historians in Poland, Ringelblum was a dedicated member of the *Left Poalei Tsiyon*.²⁰ It was a party he joined as a teenager, and he remained a faithful member until the end. What the party lacked in numbers, money, and mass support it made up for in the dedication of a small cadre of workers and young intellectuals that included historians such as Emmanuel Ringelblum, Raphael Mahler, Artur Eisenbach, and Bela Mandelberg. Here is not the place to analyze a complex ideology that combined Marxism and Zionism, the slogan of revolutionary struggle in the Diaspora with territorial concentration in Palestine.²¹ It was pro-Soviet and strongly Yiddishist. A major difference between the *Left Poalei Tsiyon* and the *Bund* is that while both fought for the rights and culture of the Yiddish-speaking masses in Poland, the *Left Poalei Tsiyon* strongly believed that these masses were part of a worldwide Jewish people undergoing a complex process of social transformation, emigration, and territorialization. Territorial concentration in Palestine—and, many hoped, in Birobidzhan—was a vital precondition of healthy economic and cultural development. On the one hand, most of the Jewish masses would stay in Poland—as it was their right to do so. On the other hand, their future would be determined in part by new models of Jewish community and culture developing outside of Poland—such as in the Soviet Union and Palestine. One task

of the politically engaged historian was to facilitate this process of cross-fertilization.²²

Until the eve of World War II the party tried to maintain a razor-fine balance between the *do* (here) and the *dortn* (there), between Palestine and the Diaspora. (It also had to negotiate an equally precarious balance between Palestine and the Soviet Union.) It is highly revealing that when the party split for a time in the mid 1930s Ringelblum stayed with the Zrubavel, Buchsbaum, Zagan faction, which opposed closer ties to the World Zionist organization and to pioneering Zionist youth movements. Ringelblum, like his mentors, feared that the party would turn its back on the Jewish masses in Poland and soften its militant identification with world revolution. By 1937 the party had changed its position and returned to the world Zionist organization. But Ringelblum's stance during the split affords some important insight into his political instincts. He took his radical politics quite seriously.²³

Of course, it would be wrong to rush to the conclusion that Ringelblum the historian was a mere apparatchik who faithfully mirrored the party line. In the party press he staunchly opposed calls from within the party for a boycott of the YIVO and its alleged fetish of bourgeois science and ivory-tower scholarship.²⁴ He valued what he called "historical objectivity" and in the Oneg Shabes archives he strove to include collaborators from different political groups. The research guidelines that he prepared for the Oneg Shabes archives are rigorous and comprehensive.

But it would also be a mistake to discount entirely the impact of the party's ideology on his historical writings. The late Nakhman Blumental went too far when he praised Ringelblum for completely transcending party biases.²⁵ Indeed, as the war progressed and as Ringelblum struggled to find shreds of hope and optimism, the party's tradition and ideology became ever more important to him. In a letter to Adolph Berman, written in his underground bunker in January 1944, Ringelblum spoke in guarded terms about "Miss Partowa"—his party, the Left Poalei Tsiyon. It was in these terrible times, he wrote, that he realized again just how much the party meant to him, the movement in which he spent his entire adult life.²⁶

One does not have to look hard to see the impact of Ringelblum's political views in his wartime writings. Despite some misgivings, he was pro-Soviet and he did little to hide his aversion for the Bund, his party's major nemesis in interwar Poland. His prewar antipathy to the "Jewish bourgeoisie" emerged as a constant theme in his ghetto diary; he compared the Warsaw Judenrat to the hated *kahal*, in czarist Russia, that protected the interests of rich Jews by oppressing the poor.²⁷ He was not completely fair in his treatment of Adam Czerniakow, the head of the Warsaw Judenrat. He bitterly resented the alleged favoritism shown by Czerniakow to prominent converts in the ghetto. Ringelblum had little sympathy with the counterargument, made by Czerniakow and Judenrat member Abraham Gepner, that to boycott converts such as Professor Herszfeld and Józef Szeryński would be a demonstration of disloyalty to Poland in a time of

national emergency. Indeed, Gepner reacted angrily to Ringelblum's attacks on the Judenrat's reception of converts and accused him of a lack of Polish patriotism.²⁸

One can also see the imprint of his political culture in his discussion of the Poles. Ringelblum used the conceptual framework of "generic fascism"—the last-ditch defense of a dying capitalist system—to explain both Nazi and Polish antisemitism. In both cases he emphasized the instrumental nature of antisemitism, how it was manipulated from above to serve the interests of a dying capitalist system. As late as May 1942 he wrote that if the German people learned of the mass murder of Jews, they might pressure Hitler to stop it.²⁹ Ringelblum used the same conceptual framework of generic fascism to explain the upsurge of Polish antisemitism in the 1930s. He was too quick to see it as a doctrine cynically imposed from the top down to defend existing interests.³⁰

Ringelblum's analysis of the overall political situation in prewar Poland was also flawed. It was true that the crisis of the peasantry was a major national problem, but his assertion that the lack of agrarian reform was a major reason for Poland's social and economic weakness was too simplistic.³¹ Ringelblum also erred in his assertion that ordinary workers had a better record than other Poles in saving Jews.³² This is not borne out by more recent research.³³ To be sure, these flaws in Ringelblum's analysis are far outweighed by his determination, from the very onset of the war, to lay the groundwork for a serious and thorough study of Polish-Jewish relations. But they do remind us that to a certain extent Ringelblum's conceptual frameworks reflected the influence of his political views.

Ringelblum's prewar writings on Polish-Jewish history often stressed that the true story of Polish-Jewish relations often lurked behind the visible evidence of legal decrees and political intent. How they worked in practice was often quite different from how they were meant to work in theory. A case in point was his own research into the history of Warsaw Jewry between 1527 and 1795—when in theory there should not have been a Jewish community in Warsaw at all. In his critique of assimilationist historians, Ringelblum had argued that one had to look behind liberal edicts of toleration to see how they were undermined by the harsh realities of religious hatred and economic rivalry. But the opposite was also often true. The edicts of non-toleration of Jews often failed to prevent Jewish settlement in a given city. Decrees that banned Jewish trade often fell short of their goals, either because of the self-interest of the *szlachta* (Polish nobility) or for other reasons. The shtetl monographs of the Oneg Shabes archive are full of comments on Poles who circumvented the economic boycotts of the late 1930s.

Ringelblum saw Polish-Jewish economic relations between 1939 and 1941 as a continuation of this long-standing conflict between, to use his own words, "gray theory" and the "tree of life" (*ets khayim*). Economics trumped antisemitism. The combination of economic self-interest and Jewish resilience sabotaged the Nazi determination to strangle Polish Jewry through ghettos, starvation

rations, and punitive economic decrees. The ghetto developed important “export markets” with the Aryan side, and Polish-German economic ties flourished.³⁴ It was little wonder, therefore, that Ringelblum regarded the massive smuggling that helped keep the Warsaw ghetto alive as a major milestone in Polish-Jewish cooperation.³⁵ Yes, he admitted in a May 1942 diary entry, it attracted characters of the “lowest type.”³⁶ But nonetheless he endorsed the proposal by noted attorney Leon Berenson for a postwar monument to the “unknown smuggler.”

Many documents of the Oneg Shabes archive describe how the establishment of ghettos helped isolate Jews from Poles and tore asunder the web of daily contact. But the archive also offers ample testimony that when it came to trade, even ghetto walls failed to break Polish-Jewish relationships. One particularly interesting reportage by Peretz Opoczyński, “Goyim in Geto” (Gentiles in the ghetto), describes how Jews regarded the Poles who sneaked into the Warsaw ghetto to trade. Even though the Jews knew that these Poles took advantage of their desperate situation to make handsome profits, they still appreciated their presence in the ghetto. They saw it as a form of moral support, a sign that they were not entirely isolated and forsaken. Opoczyński stressed that the Poles took a personal risk by stealing into the ghetto, and this was a major boost to Jewish morale. When Polish women smugglers would give money to Jewish children for their prayers “to the Jewish God,” Jews saw this as a small link, however tenuous, to the past.³⁷

Unfortunately, much of what seemed important in 1940 and 1941—such as smuggling—had become tragically irrelevant by late 1942. From the very beginning of the war, Ringelblum understood how vital it was to encourage writing “from inside the event,” writing that would not be skewed by the distorting lens of retrospective recollection and selective memory. To collect material, to write down impressions, and to write them down immediately—these were the watchwords of the Oneg Shabes. Memory was tricky, Ringelblum insisted, especially in the ghetto. Under the pressure of unprecedented events, Jewish society changed at lightning speed. In wartime, months turned into days and years turned into months. By December 1939 the tough prewar days seemed like a picnic. A year later, after the Jews were herded into a ghetto, the pre-ghetto period of the German occupation evoked a certain nostalgia. After the deportations to Treblinka began in July 1942, then even the ghetto hell of 1940 and 1941 seemed like the “good old days.”³⁸ Ringelblum realized, even before he was aware of the Final Solution, how quickly trauma would efface memories of all that had preceded it, how unimportant the “everyday” would seem when viewed through the prism of greater suffering. All the more vital, therefore, was the need to capture the everyday of Jewish society under German occupation, to meld thousands of individual testimonies into a collective portrait.

One can see that the same principles held true in the study of Polish-Jewish relations. In 1939 or mid-1941 Ringelblum obviously did not foresee the onset of physical annihilation. He was hoping, at least in part, to create a usable

past for the postwar era. But he knew that one should not wait to collect material and he was right. By November 1942, say, the study of the Jewish role in the siege of Warsaw or the September campaign had taken a backseat to more pressing and tragic questions. Polish sympathy to expelled refugees in 1940 or expressions of warmth and friendship when Jewish friends and neighbors entered the ghetto in November 1940 had now been overshadowed by the indifference and even hostility that became so painfully evident in 1942. Had the war ended in mid-1941, then the picture of Polish-Jewish relations conveyed by the Oneg Shabes archive would have been of complex ambiguity but not of unbridgeable national hatred. Indeed, one important member of the Oneg Shabes archive, Abraham Lewin, wrote as late as 7 June 1942 that the war had exerted a favorable influence on Polish-Jewish relations.³⁹

In his essay on the Oneg Shabes archive, probably written in early 1943, Ringelblum called the collection of monographs on provincial towns “the most important treasure” of the archive.⁴⁰ One reason for this assertion was that Ringelblum knew their value for the future study of Polish-Jewish relations.⁴¹ He understood that there was a different texture to Polish-Jewish contact in small towns than in big cities; now that German expulsions had ended the Jewish presence in many small towns, it was important to collect as many eyewitness accounts as possible. These monographs, which mostly deal with the 1939–1941 period, reflect the complexity of Polish-Jewish relations before the great break of 1942, before the onset of mass annihilation. There are several accounts of rabid Polish antisemitism, but also many essays that record Polish sympathy and kindness. Certain essays note how, even before the war, many Poles found ways of getting around the economic boycott and kept trading with Jews. Many materials describe the fateful moments of rupture and separation when expulsion forced the Jews and Poles to part. Here and there Jewish refugees reported how they returned to their former towns and found sustenance and support from their gentile neighbors.

These *shtetl* monographs are but one example of Ringelblum’s determination to use the archive to build a better future, to put postwar Polish-Jewish relations on a firmer foundation. For these reasons Ringelblum understood how important it was to document the September 1939 campaign. He doggedly collected every scrap of information he could about Jewish heroism on the battlefield and about Jewish civilians who fought fires and tended the wounded during the siege of Warsaw. He hoped that, after the war, September 1939 would be an even more glorious symbol of Polish-Jewish understanding than the 1863 uprising (although some of the most interesting documents in the Oneg Shabes archive show the jarring and painful contrast between common sacrifice on the battlefield and vicious antisemitism in the POW [prisoner of war] camps).

Before the beginning of mass murder, therefore, Ringelblum approached the problem of Polish-Jewish relations from much the same perspective that had informed his prewar scholarship. The Jews had a future in Poland, he believed, and historians could help bridge differences between the two peoples. In this

spirit, as soon as the war began, he had to absorb and understand a vast amount of often contradictory material.⁴² On the one hand, there was a great deal that was positive: the marked decline of antisemitism in the summer of 1939; the correct and loyal attitude of most Polish military units and relief agencies in 1939; dozens of accounts by Jewish refugees of help received from Polish soldiers and civilians. Ringelblum was also impressed by examples of rabid antisemites who called a truce in their Jew-baiting in order to keep their distance from the common enemy. On the other hand, there was no lack of negative material: an upsurge in antisemitism as Warsaw capitulated; strained relations between Jewish and Polish soldiers in German POW camps; the indifference of Polish bystanders to the 1940 pogrom in Warsaw; a growing tendency of Poles to take advantage of Jewish friends who had entrusted them with property; the realization that after the war Poles who had inherited Jewish shops and businesses would be in no hurry to return them.

Amid this welter of contradictory observations, one particularly disturbing pattern stood out from the very beginning of the German occupation: the disparity between the “personal” and the “civic” behavior of the Polish population. Many Poles showed great kindness to individual Jews and to starving Jewish children. On the other hand, even shared suffering at the hands of the common enemy did not soften their tendency to regard Jews in the abstract, as an alien, even hostile body, quite outside the sphere of Polish moral responsibility. In other words, Polish kindness to Jews all too often rested on individual rather than on civic or political considerations—notwithstanding the Jewish record in September 1939. This became especially clear during the notorious March 1940 pogrom.⁴³ While most Poles had nothing to do with the anti-Jewish violence, Ringelblum was bothered by the passivity and indifference of Polish onlookers. Few seemed to care that such anti-Jewish violence played into German hands and enabled the Germans to score important propaganda points at the Jews’ expense.

From the very beginning of the war, Ringelblum understood that ugly accusations of Jewish collaboration with the Soviets provided many Poles with a ready-made excuse to see the Jews as a disloyal, alien element. Until 1941 Ringelblum tended to approach this explosive issue carefully; his writings reflected the intellectual caution of a historian who understood how much this question would weigh on future relations between the two peoples. Polish charges of wholesale Jewish collaboration with the Soviet invaders stood in stark counterpoint to Ringelblum’s hope that the September campaign was the beginning of a new chapter. But until the beginning of the mass murder, Ringelblum approached this problem as an issue that deserved serious analysis and study. The war would end, charges and counter-charges would fill the air, and historians could help provide some perspective on this and other sensitive issues. After all, similar controversies had raged over Jewish-Polish relations in Vilna and Lwów in 1919.

In this spirit of trying to gather as much material as possible for future discussion and assessment, Ringelblum, as a historian, was quite ready to record

Polish complaints that Jews had acted disloyally to Poland. He doubtless had also read several Jewish accounts, given to the Oneg Shabes archive, that seemed to corroborate some of these Polish claims.⁴⁴ In April 1940 Ringelblum mentioned Jewish testimonies, from Białystok and Zamość, that described how Jews had jeered Polish officers and former civil servants. He also described a conversation he had with a Polish writer who had been friendly to Jews. The writer had returned from Soviet-occupied Poland and had seen how a Russian soldier and a freshly baked Jewish commissar had searched the suitcases of two Polish students. Suddenly the Jew spied a crucifix in the suitcase; it had been given to the student by his mother. The Jewish commissar threw it away, but the soldier retrieved it and gave it back to the student. “You understand,” the writer told Ringelblum, “I can understand something like this, but is it a great surprise if an uneducated 17 year old becomes an antisemite? Why must the Jews be more Catholic than the pope?” Ringelblum noted this without comment or protest, except to add that many Jews were also coming back with similar stories.⁴⁵

When the mass extermination of the Jewish population began, however, a marked change came about in Ringelblum’s handling of the problem. This was no longer a quarrel that could be understood by reasoned and patient analysis. This was no longer 1940, when mass expulsions of Poles from the Warthegau and brutal German and Soviet repression of the Polish intelligentsia gave many Poles ample reason to think that their fate was as bad as the Jews’. Instead, an enraged Ringelblum saw the scepter of the Żydokommuna (Judeo-communist) as a convenient alibi that Poles used to rationalize and excuse their passivity and indifference to the mass murder of their Jewish neighbors. He now dismissed the Polish complaints of Jewish collaboration with the Soviets as exaggerations and as “groundless nonsense” (*nisht geshtoygene mayses*).⁴⁶ The Żydokommuna had become one of the most reliable staples of German propaganda, and most Poles had fallen for the bait.

After the beginning of mass murder, Ringelblum faced a painful inner conflict between his determination to remain an objective historian and his grief at the mass murder of his people. He had hoped that historians like himself could build bridges between Poles and Jews; but how many Jews would be left? Ringelblum’s introduction to his last work, on Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War, reflected his inner turmoil—and his sense of enormous personal responsibility:

When a sofer—Jewish scribe—sets out to copy the Torah, he must, according to religious law, take a ritual bath in order to purify himself of all uncleanness and impurity. This scribe takes up his pen with a trembling heart, because the smallest mistake in transcription means the destruction of the whole work. It is with this feeling of fearfulness that I have begun this work. . . . I am writing it in a hideout on the Aryan side. I am indebted to the Poles for having saved my life twice during this war. . . . I, in my own person, am concrete evidence of the lack of truth

in the assertion made by some Jewish circles that the entire Polish population rejoiced over the destruction of Polish Jewry and that there are no people on the Aryan side with hearts that bleed and suffer over the tragic fate of the Jewish people of Poland. On the other hand Polish circles may be hurt when I say that Poland did not reach the same level as Western Europe in saving Jews. I am a historian. Before the war I published several works on the history of the Jews of Poland. It is my wish to write objectively, *sine ira et studio*, on the problem of Polish Jewish relations during the present war. In times so tragic for my people, however, it is no easy task to rise above passion and maintain cool objectivity.⁴⁷

For anyone seriously interested in the study of Polish-Jewish relations during the war, Emmanuel Ringelblum's masterly essay "Polish Jewish Relations during the Second World War" remains an indispensable source. Written in an underground bunker on the Aryan side of Warsaw, Ringelblum's work, even when read fifty years later, still radiates considerable moral authority. Rarely has a historian set out to write a study under more dramatic circumstances. When Ringelblum began this book in September 1943 he had just made a dramatic escape from the Trawniki labor camp, smuggled out by two intrepid couriers, one Polish and the other Jewish. He was packed into a crowded hideout together with his wife and son and thirty-four other Jews. He was forced to become exactly as he described other Jews in hiding: a helpless child, totally dependent on his Polish protectors for everything. While thirty-seven people passed their time in enforced idleness, often arguing, sometimes even screaming, while they lived through the paralyzing fright of a possible capture, Ringelblum sat in a corner of the bunker day after day, writing page after page. "The noose was tightening around necks of Warsaw's remaining Jews . . . [and] we lived in constant fear of denunciation"—these phrases taken from Ringelblum's book aptly described his own situation.⁴⁸

The Ringelblum essay was a unique synthesis of the immediacy of contemporaneous testimony with the analytic perspective of retrospective historical analysis. The book reflected the tension between the imperative of historical objectivity and shock of the enormous crimes that he witnessed not as a bystander but as a direct victim. Detached historians could make necessary distinctions between perpetrators and bystanders, between Polish and German antisemitism, between active complicity and indifference. For a member of a victimized people to do so required a major effort of intellectual discipline.

Ringelblum recognized that the Polish people could not have averted the Holocaust or saved most of their Jewish neighbors. He paid tribute to their national pride and their highly developed sense of national honor. He took great care to note the terrible risks that Poles took to hide Jews.

All the more telling, therefore, are his accusations of indifference and moral abandonment by the Home Army as well as by large sections of the population.

Żegota aside, Polish help to Jews was largely a private matter, conducted by heroic individuals who took on terrible risks that he in no way minimized. But the record of Polish behavior on the civic level, on the public level, failed the important tests of solidarity and basic human decency. In standing up to the Germans, the Poles showed great courage. Confronted with the mass murder of their fellow citizens, however, they turned away. On the one hand, the Poles' lack of moral support greatly complicated the Jews' ability to resist. Perversely, the Poles then hurled this lack of resistance in the faces of surviving Jews and taunted them for their lack of pride and honor. But even in the relatively simple matter of suppressing the blackmailers and informants who plagued Jews on the Aryan side, the underground state could not be bothered. Ringelblum wrote: "The Polish people and the Government of the Republic of Poland were incapable of deflecting the Nazi steamroller from its anti-Jewish course. But the question is permissible whether the attitude of the Polish people befitted the enormity of the calamities that befell the country's Jewish citizens. Was it inevitable that the Jews, looking their last on this world as they rode in the death trains speeding from different parts of the country to Treblinka or other places of slaughter, should have to see indifference or even gladness on the faces of their neighbors?"⁴⁹ His final verdict was harsh: "Polish Fascism and its ally, anti-Semitism, have conquered the majority of the Polish people. It is they whom we blame for the fact that Poland has not taken an equal place alongside the Western European countries in rescuing Jews."⁵⁰

But to the very end, Ringelblum remembered that as a historian he bore important responsibilities to future generations. Written in Polish, this last book was aimed as much at Poles as at the handful of Jewish survivors who would emerge after the war. It represented the last action Ringelblum could undertake in the fight for a better Poland.

Notes

1. Emmanuel Ringelblum, "Dray yor seminar," *Yunger historiker* 1 (1926). See also Emmanuel Ringelblum, "An interesanter onheyb," *Literarische bleter* 27 (1931).
2. On this circle, organized by Ringelblum in 1923, see Raphael Mahler, "Der krayz 'Yunger Historiker' in varshe," in *Historiker un vegvayzer*, by Raphael Mahler (Tel Aviv: Yisroel-bukh, 1967), 303. In 1925, immediately after the founding of the YIVO, Ringelblum wrote to both Max Weinreich and Eliyahu Cherikover and asked them to accept the krayz as a YIVO affiliate.
3. Lucjan Dobroszycki, "YIVO in Interwar Poland: Work in the Historical Sciences," in *The Jews of Poland between the Two World Wars*, ed. Yisrael Gutman et al. (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1989), 496–497.
4. See Raphael Mahler's introductory remarks to the academic journal *Bleter far geshikhte* 1, no. 1 (Warsaw, 1934). See also E. Ringelblum, "Fun der reaktsiye," *Landkenthnish* 1 (1933).
5. "We feel that the writers see proud working Jews. They don't feel that they're guests in Pruzhany. Rather they regard themselves as long established veterans who have

- put down deep roots in the local area thanks to their work and toil” (Emmanuel Ringelblum, “An interesanter onheyb,” *Literarische bleter* 27 [1931]).
6. Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Żydzi w Warszawie od czasów najdawniejszych do ostatniego wygnania w r. 1527* (Warsaw: Renoma, 1932). As Isaac Schiper bitterly noted, Poles were ready to help publish this book while the Warsaw Jewish Community Council (*kehile*) showed absolutely no interest whatsoever. See Isaac Schiper, “Di elste geshikhthe fun varshever yidn,” *Haint*, 9 September 1932.
 7. Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Ksovim fun geto* (Tel Aviv: I. L. Perets Farlag, 1985), 2: 174–175.
 8. *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 47 (1933): Tom I; *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 47 (1933): Tom I.
 9. Ringelblum, *Żydzi w Warszawie*, 129.
 10. Many of Ringelblum’s articles that first appeared in *Sotsyale Meditsin* on the history of Jewish medicine were reprinted in Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Kapitlen geshikhthe fun amolikh yidishn lebn in poyln* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral-Farband Fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1953), 183–389.
 11. See Emmanuel Ringelblum, “Apikorses un frumkayt tsvishn yidishe doktoyrim,” in Ringelblum, *Kapitlen geshikhthe*, 221.
 12. Emmanuel Ringelblum, “A nay bukh mit alte ligns,” *Kooperativ bavegung* 8 (1930).
 13. Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Żydzi w Powstaniu Kościuszkowskim* (Warsaw: Księgarnia Popularna, 1938), 34.
 14. Emmanuel Ringelblum, “Dray yor seminar,” *Yunger historiker* 1 (1926).
 15. See, for example, the sixth issue of *Wiadomości* (9–15 January 1943). “Today nobody has the illusion that the German murder will end with the Jews” (Israel Shaham, ed., *Itonut ha-makhteret ha-yehudit be-varsha* [Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1997], 6: 594).
 16. Emmanuel Ringelblum, “Bleter far geshikhthe,” *Arbeter tsaytung* 45 (1934).
 17. E. Ringelblum, “A solide geshikhthe arbet,” *Literarische bleter* 39 (1929).
 18. Emmanuel Ringelblum, “Di yidishe arbetershaft un di geshikhtsvishnshaft,” *Di fraye yugnt* 1 (1924).
 19. Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Projekty i próby przewartwowania Żydów w epoce stanisławowskiej* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Spraw Narodowościowych, 1934).
 20. See Jacob Leshchinsky, “Emmanuel Ringelblum,” *Forverts*, 20 December 1953 (a New York newspaper); Jacob Shatzky, “Emmanuel Ringelblum der historiker,” in *Zhurnal tsum tsenyorikh yoyvl fun Dr. Emmanuel Ringelblum arbeter ring tsvayg 612* (New York: privately published, 1957). Leshchinsky noted that “as left wing Zionists, it was natural that they would take an interest in Jewish economic problems (and history). For the Bund the solution to the Jewish problem was simple: bring on democracy and socialism and, presto, all Jewish headaches will disappear! A left Zionist had to somehow find a way to combine these two clashing theories” (Ibid.).
 21. The definitive study of the Left Poalei Tsiyon in Poland is Bina Garncarska-Kadri’s *Bhipusei dereh: Poalei tsiyon smol be-polin ad milhemet ha-olam ha-shniya* (Tel Aviv: I. L. Perets Farlag, 1995).
 22. See, for example, Uriel (Raphael Mahler), “Di kultur badaytung far di yidishe masn in dem kamf farn territorialn arbeter tsender,” *Arbeter tsaytung* 50 (1935).
 23. In 1934, while discussing Yehezkiel Kaufmann’s *Gola ve-nikur*, Ringelblum wrote, “The Jewish bourgeoisie has not escaped the process of Fascisticization that has affected the bourgeoisie of other nations. Fascism represents a break with the progressive ideals of the 19th century and signifies in many respects a return to the middle

- ages. The Jewish bourgeoisie is taking the same road. In the period of 'Sturm und Drang,' the Jewish bourgeoisie 'fought' for 'progressive' ideals. But current attitudes of the Jewish bourgeoisie towards religion exemplifies the [turn that this class is taking]. . . . Mahler succeeds in demolishing Kaufmann's groundless theory that religion kept the Jewish people together." Emmanuel Ringelblum, "Bleter far geschikhte," *Arbeter tsaytung* 35 (1934).
24. Emmanuel Ringelblum, "Der YIVO un di yidishe arbetershaft," *Arbeter tsaytung* 32 (August 1931).
 25. Dr. Nakhman Blumental, "Der historiker-tsu der ferter yortsayt," *Arbeter tsaytung* 3 (1948).
 26. Emmanuel Ringelblum's letter to Adolph Berman, January 1944, Adolph Berman Collection, Archive of Kibbutz Lohamei Ha'getaot, Beit Lohamei Hagetaot, Israel.
 27. Ringelblum, *Ksovim fun geto*, 1: 335.
 28. *Ibid.*, 1: 232.
 29. *Ibid.*, 1: 373.
 30. *Ibid.*, 2: 241.
 31. *Ibid.*, 2: 241–242.
 32. *Ibid.*, 2: 349.
 33. See, for example, Feliks Tych, *Długi cień zagłady* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1999), 50.
 34. Ringelblum, *Ksovim fun geto*, 2: 267. "The Jews, Ringelblum wrote, were able to overcome all the economic barriers . . . and continued their pre-war production for the needs of the Aryan market. They had overcome the [pre-war boycott of the Polish antisemites] . . . and also the current invaders who wanted the Jews to starve en masse in the ghetto. *Economic life knows no differences of nationality and race*" (*Ibid.*, 279, emphasis added).
 35. In his summary of the problem of smuggling, written in late 1943, Ringelblum concluded that smuggling was one of the "finest pages in the mutual relations of both people during the present war" (*Ibid.*, 278).
 36. Ringelblum, *Ksovim fun geto*, 1: 364.
 37. Peretz Opoczyński, "Goyim in geto," Ringelblum Archive, Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw, pt. 1, no. 323 (hereafter cited as Ringelblum Archive). "The bridge that linked Jew and gentile," Opoczyński wrote, "was made of bad material—speculation—but it served a good purpose—to save many Jews from starvation. . . . [T]hese Polish smugglers [worried about their own pockets] but still served a national purpose: to maintain the ties between loyal citizens of Poland and stretch out a brotherly hand to the persecuted. Thereby they sow the seeds of morality in a time of major moral degeneration" (*Ibid.*).
 38. Ringelblum, *Ksovim fun geto*, 2: 87.
 39. Lewin stated: "The majority of Poles have been gripped by philo-semitic feelings. . . . I see Polish-Jewish relations in a bright light. I think that this war will wash this earth of ours clean of much filth and savagery. . . . There will be no refuge here for anti-Semitism, at least not for public aggressive anti-Semitism. They will be ashamed to deal in it. I believe that the Polish people too has been purified by the terrible fire that has swept the face of the earth. Let us not forget: the Poles are in second place in the table of tragic losses among the nations, just behind the Jews." Abraham Lewin, *A Cup of Tears* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 124.

40. Ringelblum, *Ksovim fun geto*, 2: 88.
41. Ringelblum wrote in this essay that “there is a widespread opinion [among Jews] that antisemitism has increased sharply during the time of the war and that most Poles are happy about the misfortunes that have beset the Jews in the cities and small towns of Poland. . . . But the attentive reader of our materials will find hundreds of documents which show the opposite. In more than one report from a shtetl he will read about how warmly the Polish population treated Jewish refugees. You will find hundreds of examples of peasants hiding and feeding Jewish refugees from nearby shtetlekh” (Ringelblum, *Ksovim fun geto*, 2: 86).
42. In early 1942 Ringelblum composed guidelines for the study of Polish-Jewish relations. See Ringelblum Archive, pt. 1, no. 492. These guidelines include dozens of different questions and reflect Ringelblum’s determination to avoid hastiness and oversimplification in the study of Polish-Jewish relations. The last set of questions concerns Polish reactions to the news of Chelmno and Vilna. Mass murder had already begun, but Ringelblum was only beginning to guess its true scope.
43. For a recent study of this pogrom, see Tomasz Szarota, *U progu zagłady: zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie* (Warsaw: Wydawn. Sic, 2000), 25–82.
44. An extreme example of this kind of testimony was the account of a 22-year-old Jewish refugee who had fled to Vilna in 1939 and who had returned to Warsaw in late 1941. It was the kind of testimony that could have been furnished by any rabid Polish antisemite. “Under the Bolshevik occupation Polish antisemitism increased markedly. In large part the Jews themselves are responsible for this. They used every occasion to jeer the Poles and to yell, ‘Your Poland is gone.’ Jewish Communists denounced Poles, Jews disarmed Polish soldiers and spit in their face” (Ringelblum Archive, pt. 1, no. 932).
45. Ringelblum, *Ksovim fun geto*, 2: 444–445.
46. *Ibid.*, 2: 261.
47. I have used the translation in Emmanuel Ringelblum’s *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*, ed. Joseph Kermish and Shmuel Krakowski (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 1–2.
48. Ringelblum, *Ksovim fun geto*, 2: 309.
49. Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*, 7.
50. *Ibid.*, 247.

CHAPTER 13

Metaphysical Nationality in the Warsaw Ghetto

NON-JEWS IN THE WARTIME WRITINGS
OF RABBI KALONIMUS KALMISH SHAPIRO



HENRY ABRAMSON

One of the most unusual documents to survive the Holocaust is the collection of sermons delivered in the Warsaw ghetto by Rabbi Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro between September 1939 and July 1942, with annotations dating to January 1943. Discovered in a metal milk container by a construction worker clearing the rubble of the ruined Warsaw ghetto, the writings were transferred to the Jewish Historical Institute and then found by Baruch Duvdevani, an employee of the Jewish Agency who traveled to Poland in 1956 with the express purpose of discovering Hebrew manuscripts. The text was brought to Israel and published in 1960 under the Hebrew title *Esh kodesh* (Holy Fire).¹ It remains one of the few resources for understanding how the large Orthodox Jewish population of Eastern Europe responded to the challenge of the Nazi onslaught.

In this regard, *Esh kodesh* has several advantages over other documents authored by Orthodox Jews relating to the Holocaust. Unlike a memoir, often written long after the war, *Esh kodesh* does not suffer the distortions of hindsight, as Rabbi Shapiro's growing realization of the enormity of the Holocaust is hesitatingly revealed in each successive weekly entry. Perhaps the most poignant example of this is the entry for Hanukah 1941 (15–22 December, p. 138–139), in which he argues that despite the terrible suffering in the ghetto, “those people who say that such persecutions never befell the Jews are in error—during the time of the destruction of the Temples, at Betar, etc., we had [persecutions] such as these.” A year later, on 15 December 1942, Rabbi Shapiro added the

following note at the bottom of the page: “Note: only persecutions such as those which were inflicted until the end of 5702 [fall 1941] existed prior to these times. The grotesque persecutions, however, and the terrible, grotesque deaths that the unnatural wicked murderers created for us, the house of Israel, from the end of 5702—according to my knowledge of the words of our Sages of blessed memory and the histories of the Jews in general—there was never anything like this. May God have mercy on us and rescue us from their hands in the blink of an eye.”²

Another unique aspect of *Esh kodesh* is that, unlike a journal or diary, it is a document that was intended for, and reflects, public use. As a record of weekly sermons, it gives a clear indication of the public position of a major Hasidic leader.³ Unlike secular writers, who may write from the perspective of any number of ideological shadings of opinion from Bolshevism to Revisionist Zionism, Rabbi Shapiro, as a Hasidic leader, wrote within a well-defined set of parameters characteristic of that movement (e.g., that God exists, that God is aware of human history and is able to intervene, that God rewards good and punishes evil, etc.). Furthermore, since these writings were delivered orally on a weekly basis, we may derive from them a fairly clear picture of at least one response to the Holocaust that is representative of Hasidic Jewry in Poland. No comparable document has survived the war.⁴

On the other hand, *Esh kodesh* is an exceptionally opaque document, making it very difficult to exploit as a source of historical information.⁵ To begin with, it is written using the arcane language of traditional Hasidic literature, with fragmentary and oblique references to passages in the Talmud and Kabbalistic literature. Even readers steeped in this tradition, however, will be stymied in their efforts to garner significant information about the history of the ghetto, since Rabbi Shapiro never mentions the words “Nazi” or “German” and rarely refers explicitly to a particular *Aktion* or decree.⁶ This is not to say that he chose to ignore the specific events of the ghetto. It can be demonstrated that his weekly sermons were clearly intended to address the concerns of his congregation in a very concrete manner. On a first reading, however, the newcomer to *Esh kodesh* will perceive that the nature of suffering in a general and theoretical sense—and strategies for dealing with it on a psychological and theological plane—is the central theme of an overwhelming number of the entries.⁷ A major reason for the absence of explicit information is the fact that these lectures were delivered on the Sabbath. Discussing depressing *realia* would not have been in keeping with the sanctity of the holy day.⁸

Nevertheless, given the important communal function of these weekly sermons, the Piaseczno Rebbe (as he is known to his followers from the seat of his dynasty in Piaseczno, a town some fourteen kilometers outside Warsaw) uses various devices to address the worries of his hasidim, heroically strengthening their resolve without transgressing the prohibitions against improper speech on the Sabbath. One of the most prominent devices is to place the contemporary scene in historical context, or, more precisely, biblical context. While there are no explicit references to either Poles or Germans or other contemporary nationalities

in the text, *Esh kodesh* is still richly populated with peoples: Moabites, Persians, Babylonians, Canaanites, Emorites, and so on. Three in particular deserve special attention for this chapter: Egyptians, the ancient Greeks, and the biblical nation of Amalek.

It would be a distortion of *Esh kodesh* to argue that each of these nations has a specific and exclusive analogue in the twentieth century. It seems that the Piaseczno Rebbe used these designations as metaphors for aspects of cultural tropisms, serving to break up an otherwise monolithic view of non-Jewish nationalities. Rarely, in the entire corpus of the Piaseczno Rebbe's work, do explicit references to twentieth-century politics appear, and even when they do appear, they tend to be very general in character, such as this brief passage from *Esh kodesh* (Parashat Zakhor, 28 February 1942, p. 164): "Many times Jews have endured suffering only in order that the wicked ones of the nations be destroyed, and some Jews happened to be taken with them, as we have seen in the last war. Jews suffered, and afterwards we saw that it was all from Heaven, for the purpose of destroying the wicked kingdom of the antisemitic Russian Tsar, which no one could have anticipated beforehand."

Rather than attempting to connect each biblical nationality to twentieth-century peoples—for example, the Emorites to the Hungarians, the Moabites to the Lithuanians, and so on—it would be more helpful to place these references within the context of Hasidic approaches to non-Jews in general. The contrast between nationalities only appears against the background of general Hasidic essentialism, which places non-Jews in a supporting role in the cosmic drama of creation. An important aspect of Rabbinic Judaism which is reflected in Hasidic philosophy is the fulfillment of a specific purpose for the Jewish people, to be a "light unto the nations," as it were.⁹ To this end, according to the Talmud, Jews were given 613 commandments to fulfill, whereas the non-Jewish nations were given the far less onerous task of upholding only seven.¹⁰ Moreover, while the biblical nations had distinct characteristics, in a manner reminiscent of nineteenth-century *Völkismus*, the Talmud argues that these distinctive features had long ago been muted by demographic shifts in the ancient world.¹¹

That said, it appears that the *Esh kodesh* describes two types of non-Jews. The first is a reflection of a more nondescript character who neither cares for the Jews nor expresses any sympathy for their suffering and may even harbor a passive anti-Jewish animus. The Piaseczno Rebbe tends to use the term "Egyptian" to describe this type, as will be discussed below. The second type of non-Jew described in *Esh kodesh* is an intensely evil character, possessed of a supernatural, contra-rational hatred of the Jews and the religion they represent. The biblical nation used to describe this type of non-Jew is, overwhelmingly, Amalek. First identified in Genesis 36:12 as a descendant of Esau, Amalek is associated with pathological hatred of the Jews since they attacked the Israelites immediately after their miraculous exodus from Egypt (Exodus 17:8). They reappear occasionally in the Bible, invariably in the same context, as sworn enemies of the Jewish people.¹²

It is important to bear in mind that the insular Hasidim, influenced by an essentialist philosophy and with a fundamentally pessimistic view of non-Jewish intentions toward the Jews, viewed the Poles with considerable suspicion. This is particularly true given the antisemitic atmosphere prevalent in the prewar years, a subject which the Piaseczno Rebbe comments on (briefly and uncharacteristically) in *Mavo ha-she'arim* (p. 55):

In all our previous troubles, there was always at least a refuge for us. In one land they considered us expendable and spilled our blood out like water, yet in another land we were free people and nobles. If we were to only flee the land of blood, we could bring ourselves into the hands of its foe and king, with praises. Such is not the case today, when it is as if the entire world has risen against us—this one raises the axe before our eyes, and this one prepares to stab us with the spear. This one expels us while the voice of the murderer is heard: “send the foreigners out of our borders,” while this one closes the doors to its land before us, saying “do not let the foreigners set foot in our land.” Every people relaxes in their own tranquillity, enjoying the productive goodness of their land with joy, while we, faces blackened and hearts confused, must wander about, with fear and suffering, insulted, degraded and pursued without refuge, every step a danger for us, every morning presenting new dangers for us.¹³

The brief “honeymoon period” between Poles and Jews, described in Emmanuel Ringelblum’s study of the Warsaw ghetto, is not reflected in *Esh kodesh*, nor is there any discussion of non-Jews behaving kindly toward the Jews.¹⁴ Ringelblum, an acculturated Jew with a leftist philosophy, was possessed of a sufficiently “good” appearance (that is, “Aryan,” in the lexicon of the ghetto) such that he was able to take off his armband and leave the ghetto.¹⁵ The greater social distance separating Poles and Hasidim, distinctive by their isolationist beliefs as well as by their distinct dress, would have mitigated against close relations. Against the backdrop of a Hasidic *Weltanschauung* that is characterized by a general suspicion of non-Jewish intent, particularly in the late 1930s and the war years, the categorization of non-Jews as “actively hostile” or “passively hostile” is not surprising.

The following passage, taken from *Esh kodesh*, is instructive. The biblical context is Exodus 10:1–2, in which God says that he will “toy” with Egypt. The Piaseczno Rebbe contrasts this with a well-known passage in the Talmud in which the angels begin to sing after the Egyptians are drowned in the Sea of Reeds, and God chastises them, saying, “My handiwork is drowning in the sea, and you wish to sing songs of praise?” (*Megilah* 10b).

At the sea, when the ministering angels sought to sing songs of praise to God, the Holy One exclaimed, “my handiwork,” for God does not

rejoice in the downfall of the wicked. Yet here, *hitalalti—I toyed* in their downfall! This is because it is written *go back and encamp . . . so that the Egyptians will know that I am God*, whereas in our passage it states *and you will know*—that the Jewish people will know that *I am God*. There are many times when the Jewish people are afflicted in order to cleanse them and arouse fear of God in them. Under those circumstances, when the time of their redemption approaches, God says, “it is a cause of rejoicing and happiness to Me when I afflict the Egyptians and not the Jewish people,” and the Jewish people thereby attain knowledge of God. This was not the case at the sea, where the intent was to make the Egyptians aware *that I am God*, and their awareness is not such a cause for Divine rejoicing. It is not as important to God that the Egyptians be aware of Him, as it is for the Jewish people to be aware of Him, for this is the foundation of all creation, “in order that they should know Him,” as is well known. In any case the Jews were no longer afflicted, consequently the Holy One took no pleasure in the downfall of the Egyptians.

With this we may better understand the question raised by our Sages of previous generations, the memory of the righteous and holy is a blessing: why was Pharaoh punished? After all, he had no free will, *I have hardened his heart*. In light of the foregoing, if the Jewish people experience a protracted period of punishment, and though they have engaged in much soul-searching and have been unable to find any guilt in themselves, then such punishment is intended to heighten their awareness and fear of God. Therefore Pharaoh could also be punished, in order that the Jewish people know that *I am God*. (Parashat Bo, 13 January 1940, p. 19)¹⁶

In this passage, the Egyptians were punished solely for the purpose of instilling greater fear of God in the Jewish people. Their agency, the exercise of free will, was apparently irrelevant to their punishment, for its purpose was to edify Jewish sensibilities. In this context, the Egyptians were merely tools for the unfolding of a dialogue between God and the Jews, thus necessitating that the Egyptians receive punishment. In another context, however, it is the Jews who bear the cost. Writing on the first anniversary of his only son’s death (he was killed in the early weeks of the war by shrapnel from a German bombing raid), the Piaseczno Rebbe refers to the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 (in the biblical event, the Patriarch Abraham had intent to slaughter his only son, but his hand was stayed by an angel): “Since the test of Abraham and Isaac was in the form of will and thought, which were not completely fulfilled in deed, because the angel said to Abraham, *do not send forth your hand upon the lad*—each time that the Jew is killed by a non-Jew, which is the opposite, deed without thought, this represents a completion of the binding of Isaac. [The biblical account] was the beginning, in thought and will, and now is the completion in deed.

The binding of Isaac and the subsequent murder of every Jew afterwards constitutes one event.”¹⁷ Here, the Piaseczno Rebbe clearly describes the murder of Jews as an expression of Divine Will. The human agency is irrelevant, and the murderers are described without animus, simply as the instrument by which the cosmic drama unfolds.¹⁸

This type of non-Jew contrasts sharply with the description of Amalek in the text. Whereas the Egyptians, generally described, are passive tools of the Divinity, other non-Jews have an active, malicious role, as in the following passage from *Esh kodesh* (Parashat Ki Tavo, 21 September 1940, p. 61, emphasis in the original):

It is possible that just as it is written in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Peah* 1:1 [5a]), “they say to the serpent, ‘what pleasure do you derive from biting? The lion tears and eats, the wolf tears and eats—you, what pleasure do you derive?’” [The snake responds,] “if Heaven were to command me to bite, I would not bite.” That is to say, all the animals kill to satisfy their own needs and thereby benefit, but this is not so with the serpent—he does not do it to satisfy his own need and benefit. This alludes to a person who acts without the intent of personal benefit. . . .

It seems plausible that when God punishes a person by means of a carnivorous, predatory animal, causing it to choose human flesh over animal flesh, the judgment of Heaven is cloaked in the laws of nature. It is the nature of every living thing to eat and to seek its sustenance. Such is not the case when a person is punished by a snake—this is a revelation of unmitigated judgment, without cloaking it in the laws of nature, for it did not seek to consume its victim, and thus had no benefit from the attack. It is judgment, pure and simple. This is the sense of the Talmudic passage cited above: when one sees the snake after its curse, one sees the revelation of unmasked judgment, and one realizes that were it not for the fact that it was cursed, it would have produced much good; a supernatural benefit would result for us. *According to this, when we see, God forbid, how they torture us and afflict us in ways from which they derive no benefit, being torture for its own sake, that this is the revelation of judgment without the cloak of the guise of nature.*

The “serpent” described here is Amalek, whose genius is that he is able to diminish the intensity of Jewish religious fervor, as the Piaseczno Rebbe expresses in a Kabbalistic passage from the *Esh kodesh*, written on 17 January 1942:

We learn from the *Sha’ar ha-Kedushah* of Rabbi Hayim Vital, the memory of the righteous and holy are a blessing, that the Evil Inclination is derived from the four elements. Anger comes from fire, pride comes from air, etc., and laziness comes from earth. In the holy work

Imrei Elimelekh it is stated that the Evil Inclination's burning desire to perform a transgression can be transformed into holiness and utilized to awaken a burning desire to fulfill a commandment. Such is not the case with the cold Evil Inclination, derived from Amalek, which cannot be transformed into holiness, see there. The Evil Inclination uses the four elements for evil, and the Evil Inclination of Amalek, derived from earth, as it is written, *the bread of the serpent is earth*, and it is written, *cursed are you*. We must understand—wouldn't it be possible to transform [this coldness] into the laziness to commit a transgression [thereby transforming the Evil Inclination of Amalek into holiness]? This is impossible because the cold Evil Inclination undermines faith, and thus is intrinsically evil. That is to say, as long as the "shell" of Amalek is not expressed in laziness and sloth, to undermine faith, then it is possible to use the four physical elements [of the Evil Inclination] for holiness. Since a person's faith is undermined with coldness, Heaven forbid, then he cannot transform his *laziness* to transgress into holiness, nor can he transform his *burning desire* to transgress [into holiness], may the Merciful One rescue us.

What is the relationship between laziness, the element of earth, and the cooling of faith? How does the evil inclination of Amalek use this to damage faith, Heaven forbid? We have already discussed how the faith of a Jew is derived from the spirit of holiness within him, which allows him to have a faith that transcends his intellect and reason. The Evil Inclination can use laziness and sloth, however, to affect the heart, mind and entire body, making it heavy and dragging it down, preventing it from exaltation and elevation, and cleaving to holiness. In this fashion, his faith is damaged, may the Merciful One rescue us. When a person experiences tremendous suffering, which breaks him and casts him down, it also damages his faith. Initially, though he does not entertain thoughts that are contrary to faith, Heaven forbid, he does experience spiritual exaltation due to his decline. He is prostrate, and it is as if he has become a stone, unfeeling in heart and mind, little by little, damaging and misleading thoughts occur to him, may the Merciful One rescue us.

This describes the principal role of the forces of Amalek in *Esh kodesh*: to tempt the Jews to abandon their traditional, Hasidic observance of the Torah. This is accomplished by seducing the Jews with secular knowledge:

[B]efore Amalek began to fight you, there were some lowly people among you who were impressed by the secular wisdom which Amalek took pride in, and made this attractive to you. This caused the "cooling off" of Torah and the wisdom of Torah, saying "the wisdom of the world is also beautiful," and "they also have noble characteristics," and "this

knowledge has worldly value,” and so God introduced Amalek to you, with all his attendant worldly wisdom, and also revealed all of his wickedness, the impurity of his heart, his murderous nature, and his putrid wisdom infected you. You have already seen the reality of the essence of secular knowledge. God has already revealed the consequences of this in medieval Spain, when Jews were drawn after their secular knowledge and philosophy, and they were then persecuted with severe tortures and expelled.

The Torah alludes to this in the verse, *remember what Amalek did to you*, “to you,” meaning to your inner selves, when he encountered you on the way. The encounter was in the intellectual realm, and he “cooled” you, planting in your minds the notion that his wisdom was attractive, Heaven forbid. Now you see and feel with intensity just how attractive his wisdom is. (*Esh kodesh*, Parashat Zakhor, 23 March 1940, pp. 29–30)

In other words, Jews were infected with harmful ideas from the secular world, a malicious plan to lure the Jews away from the purity of their Torah studies. Elsewhere, the Piaseczno Rebbe couches this argument in the context of the Maccabean revolt, describing the dangerous, spreading popularity of “Greek wisdom.”¹⁹ The result is the devastation of traditional Polish Hasidic society, both in the spiritual and physical sense:

Who is unmoved, seeing the extent of Jewish suffering today, both physical and spiritual? Who cannot become depressed, seeing that there are no primary schools, and no *yeshivah*, no places of Torah study and no gatherings of Torah study? This destruction of the houses of God not only affects our current situation, but has dire meaning for the future. We will have lost the young men who study Torah. Some of them have been lost to horrific deaths and starvation, may the Merciful One rescue us, and some of them have been compelled to go out and search for food. Where will we find young men to learn Torah if they are not learning now? Some of them could not withstand the test, and went out on the Sabbath to the market, transacting business due to their hunger. Can we imagine that these boys and young men, who for years moved in the markets and the streets, bartering or going door to door begging for crumbs of bread, during the week and on the Sabbath? Are these the boys who will one day return to the schools and *yeshivot* as in former times?!

Furthermore, we all know how for several years many children of pious families, to our great distress, have grown distant from Torah and their fathers’ ways and have become secularized, may the Merciful One rescue us. Despite this, however, God has placed within the hearts of children from ordinary families, the desire to draw close to Torah, and they have even been able to withstand the trials of our current existence,

and have developed into observant Jews and *Hasidim*. [In the past] these young men have replaced the loss of the camp of those who worship God and the houses of the pious. Today there are many boys who abandon tradition amidst great suffering and affliction, but not a single boy from humble origins returns to tradition, for the simple reason that there are no places of gathering for Torah study. There are no houses of study, large or small, which formerly would have awakened an interest and drawn young men such as these to Torah study and Hasidic worship. The simple truth is, the underlying reason for the current abandonment of tradition is the tremendous, bitter suffering of the Jewish people, making life practically unbearable, may the Merciful One rescue us. Consequently, when God has mercy and saves us, who will be left? Heaven forbid, there will be no one to fill the classrooms, and there will not be a sufficient number of students to establish a *yeshivah*, and the ranks of those who are faithful to the word of God will be tremendously diminished. We will not only be missing the general population, with its youth and Torah students, rather the entire Jewish people will be devastated. (*Esh kodesh*, Parashat Ekev, 16 August 1941, pp. 112–113)²⁰

Thus *Esh kodesh* describes a world in which there are two kinds of non-Jews: those who are diabolically intent on destroying the Jewish people and those who passively stand by, allowing the destruction to take place—a dark vision which we may assume was shaped by the horrific experiences of the Nazi occupation, since there is little mention of non-Jews in his prewar writings. The telos of the former is the destruction not only of the Jews, but of Judaism and Hasidism as well. The passive bystanders have an enigmatic role in creation, mindlessly acting out a part dictated by the inscrutable Divine Will. To argue that the nation of Amalek refers to the Nazis and their collaborators from various nationalities seems fair, particularly given the much-touted German-Jewish synthesis of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and Rabbi Shapiro's critique of modern, secular thought. To argue that the references to the Egyptians are Hasidic shorthand for Poles or any other Slavic nation, on the other hand, would be to engage in unsupported conjecture, with no solid basis in the text. A conclusion of uncertainty remains, nevertheless, a conclusion, and this view of Poles would be consistent with the fragmentary evidence contained in *Esh kodesh*. More than this cannot be said, but the writings of the Piaseczno Rebbe shed at least some light on the Hasidic view of non-Jews from within the depths of the Warsaw ghetto.

Notes

In his last written statement, Rabbi Shapiro asked that any publications of his work bear testimonial to his family. In keeping with his wishes, this article is dedicated to his mother, Hanah Brakhah, daughter of Rabbi Hayim Shmuel ha-Levi; his wife,

Rahel Hayah Miriam, daughter of Rabbi Yerahmiel Moshe; his son, Rabbi Elimelekh Ben Tsion; and his daughter-in-law, Gitl, daughter of Rabbi Shlomo Hayim. Rabbi Shapiro also prayed that his daughter, Rekhil Yehudis, taken in the Aktion of 14 August 1942, be returned to him. She was most probably murdered in Treblinka, and thus this article is written in her memory as well. I am grateful for the careful reading of my colleague Rabbi Shlomo Ackerman, with whom I am collaborating on an annotated translation of *Esh kodesh*. All translations appearing here are my own, in most cases adapted from our work in progress. All errors of fact or interpretation are my responsibility alone.

1. Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro, *Esh kodesh* (Tel-Aviv: Va'ad Hasidei Piasetsnah, 1960). On the discovery of the text, see Baruch Duvdevani's brief foreword to *Esh kodesh* (unnumbered page); Duvdevani also testified regarding his experience at the Eichmann trial, District Court Session 26 (3 May 1961), which may be found at www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-aldolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-026-03.html.
2. References to Shapiro's *Esh kodesh* in this chapter will be made by date, page number in the Hebrew original, and, where relevant, the name of the weekly *parashah*. The destruction of the Temples and the massacre at Betar refer to events in ancient Israel.
3. Biographical treatments of Rabbi Shapiro's life may be found in Aharon Sorasky's essay appended to the end of Shapiro's *Esh kodesh*, as well as at the end of later (undated) printings of Rabbi Shapiro's 1932 work, *Hovat ha-Talmidim*, and in the English edition of that work, translated by Micha Odenheimer (*A Student's Obligation: Advice from the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto* [Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson, 1995]). Sorasky's essay also appears, together with extensive supporting documentation and photographs, in *Zikhron kodesh le-ba'al "esh kodesh": Rabi Kalonimus Kalmish mi-Piasetsna hy"l* (Jerusalem: Va'ad Hasidei Piasetsnah, 1994). See also Mendel Paikazh [Piekarz], *Hasidut Polin me-gamot rayoniut ben shtei ha-milhamot u-be-gezerot T"Sh-TSh"l* (Jerusalem, 1979).
Two of Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro's works appeared during his lifetime: *Hovat ha-Talmidim*, cited above, and the privately circulated *Kuntres bene mahashavah tovah* (reprint, Tel-Aviv: Va'ad she'arit ha-pleitah shel hasidei ve-talmidei ha-admor ha-kodesh mi-piasetsnah zts"l hy"l, 1989). Two other of his works, intended as sequels to *Hovat ha-Talmidim*, were included in the cache of writings along with *Esh kodesh*: (1) *Sefer hakhsharat ha-avreikhim*, (2) *Mavo ha-she'arim*, and (3) the Rabbi Shapiro's diary of personal spiritual matters, *Tsav ve-ziruz*; these three works were published in one volume (Jerusalem: Va'ad she'arit ha-pleitah shel hasidei ve-talmidei ha-admor ha-kodesh mi-piasetsnah zts"l hy"l, 1962). His prewar sermons, collected under the title *Sefer derekh ha-Melekh*, were originally published in an abbreviated form and then in an expanded, revised edition (Jerusalem: Va'ad Hasidei Piasetsnah, 1995).
4. The closest comparison may be made to Rabbi Yisakhar Shlomo Teikhtal's *Em ha-Banim Semeiha*, originally published in Budapest in 1943 (5703) and recently appearing in English translation under the title *Eim Habanim Semeichah: On Eretz Yisrael, Redemption, and Unity*, trans. Moshe Lichtman (Jerusalem: Kol Mevaser Publications, 2000). The major difference between *Esh Kodesh* and *Em ha-Banim Semeiha* (besides their content: *Em ha-Banim Semeiha* understands the Holocaust as a clear indication that traditional opposition to Zionism must be abandoned) is

that *Em ha-Banim Semeiha* is public only in that it was published as a coherent monograph. *Esh Kodesh* was not composed in the atmosphere of relative security afforded to Rabbi Teikhthal in Budapest.

5. It has, on the other hand, been the subject of several theological and literary studies. See Nehemia Polen, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1994), Mendel Paikazh [Piekarz], *Ha-teudah he-hasidit ha-sifrutit ha-aharonah al admat Polin: Divrei ha-rebi mi-Piasechna be-Gito Varsha* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), and Pesah Shindler, *Hasidic Responses to the Holocaust in the Light of Hasidic Thought* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House, 1990).
6. An exception to this general rule, also from Shapiro's *Esh kodesh*, is Parashat Toledot (11 November 1939, pp. 10–11), in which he refers to how “they even cut off the beards of Jews,” written after the Nazis engaged in widespread capture of observant Jews and the shearing of their beards and sidelocks on the streets.
7. See my articles, “The Prince in Captivity: Reading Hasidic Discourses from the Warsaw Ghetto as Social and Intellectual History,” *Journal of Genocide Studies* 1, no. 2 (London, 1999): 213–225; also “The *Esh kodesh* of Rabbi Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro: A Hasidic Treatise on Communal Trauma from the Holocaust,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 37, no. 3 (Montreal, 2000): 321–335.
8. See the Code of Jewish Law, *Shulhan Arukh*, Orah Hayim 307:1.
9. Isaiah 49: 6.
10. See the Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 56a–b. Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro discusses one of the ontological implications of this distinction in a footnote to *Mavo ha-she'arim*, 21b.
11. Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 54a.
12. See Samuel I: 14–15, for example. Haman, the wicked villain of the book of Esther, is explicitly described as an “Agagite” (Esther 3:1), therefore a descendant of an Amalekite king as well. For the Rabbinic treatment of the Amalekite nation, see, for example, the Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 20b.
13. Unlike *Esh kodesh*, entries in Shapiro's *Mavo ha-she'arim* are not dated. From the context of this passage, it is reasonable to assume, however, that it was composed in the late 1930s, perhaps after Kristallnacht, in reference to the German-Polish dispute at the border over expelled Jews, or the infamous St. Louis episode.
14. Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1982).
15. See Emmanuel Ringelblum's *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974).
16. Emphasis in the original. The theological implications of this passage are considerable, but well beyond the scope of this article. For the moment, however, it should be pointed out that the element of the suffering of the Jews as punishment for their sins is not a major theme in *Esh kodesh*.
17. “Be-ha-yortsayt ha-rishonah shel b'ni, ha-Rav he-Hasid ve-ha-kadosh zts”l, yom bet d'Sukot,” in Shapiro's *Esh kodesh* (18 October 1940), pp. 72–73.
18. Once again, the theological position taken in this passage is unusually bold. A deeper treatment of the Piaseczno Rebbe's understanding of theodicy and the problem of evil will be found in the commentary to the translation that Rabbi Shlomo Ackerman and I are completing, with the working title “Torah Discourses from the Years of Wrath: The Wartime Writings of Rabbi Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro, 1889–1943.”

- See also the theological studies of Polen, *The Holy Fire*; Schindler, *Hasidic Responses to the Holocaust*; Paikazh [Piekarz], *Hasidut Polin me-gamot rayoniut ben shtei hamilhamot u-be-gezerot T"Sh-TSh"h*; and Paikazh [Piekarz], *Ha-teudah he-hasidit ha-sifrutit ha-aharonah al admat Polin: Divrei ha-rebi mi-Piasechna be-Gito Varsha*.
19. See Shapiro, *Esh kodesh*, Hanukah, 15–22 December 1941, pp. 138–139; and Parashat Matot, 10 July 1942, pp. 188–192.
20. At the conclusion of this *parashah* is a note, evidently added in early January 1943: “I said and recorded these words in 5701 [1941]. At that time, even though there was much bitter suffering, some of which is apparent in my words, nonetheless at this time it was still possible to lament them and relate a small portion of them in words, to experience anguish over the survivors, to cry regarding the future, how will the schools and *yeshivot* be built once again, and so on, even to strengthen the survivors, and encourage them to study and fulfill Torah. This is no longer the case, now at the end of 5702 [fall 1942], because the holy communities have all but been irrevocably destroyed. Even the few who survive are overcome with this Egyptian servitude, crushed and living in mortal fear. They no longer have the ability to express lament over their troubles, and there is no one left to encourage, no heart to awaken to Divine Service and Torah study. Prayers are only recited under difficult conditions, and the observance of the Sabbath, even for those who truly wish to observe it, is exceptionally onerous, and how much more so is it difficult to cry regarding the future, and regarding the establishments that have been devastated, at a time when (may God have mercy and save us) no spirit or heart remains. It is up to God alone, to have compassion and save us in the blink of an eye, and reestablish the devastated. Only with the final redemption and the resurrection of the dead will the Blessed One be able to rebuild and heal. I beseech you, God, have mercy and do not delay our salvation” (*Esh kodesh*, Parashat Ekev, 16 August 1941, pp. 112–113).

PART V



*The Destruction of
Polish Jewry and Polish
Popular Opinion*

CHAPTER 14

Ringelblum Revisited

POLISH-JEWISH RELATIONS IN
OCCUPIED WARSAW, 1940–1945



GUNNAR S. PAULSSON

*T*he most sensitive barometer of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War must surely be the experience of those Jews who put their lives in the hands of their Polish fellow-citizens by living illegally “on the Aryan side.” As Emmanuel Ringelblum put it in September 1943, while he himself was hiding in a bunker in “Aryan” Warsaw:

For those who go day by day to the steam-boiler in Treblinka, to the gas-ovens in Sobibor, to the crematorium in the Lublin concentration camp or to the death-chamber in Bełżec, the attitude of the Polish community one way or the other is irrelevant; but to those few who are still alive in some underground cave, in a secret hide-out in some suburb, or living as “Aryans” “on the surface,” these questions are not merely theoretical. Whether this small remaining handful of Jews will be able to hold out against the tide of German hatred . . . will depend largely upon the attitude of the Polish community.¹

Ringelblum concluded that Polish attitudes were mixed. Reflecting on the “blessed arm of Underground Poland,” which had twice saved him from death, he wrote: “I myself am concrete proof that the contention of some Jewish circles that the whole Polish population is supposedly delighted over the fate of the Jews, that there do not exist on the Aryan side people with heart, who are pained by . . . the tragedy of the Jewish people in Poland, is far from the truth.”²

But, while paying tribute to the “thousands of noble souls” who had risked their lives to help Jews, he believed that Poland had not equaled the record of

the Western countries in this respect. "In Western Europe," he wrote, "and especially in Holland, the Aryan population hid Jews, regarding it as not only a humanitarian act, but also as a civic duty directed against the German occupier. According to entirely reliable information from people who have come from Holland in the last few months, a significant proportion of the Dutch Jews have hidden among the local population, which as a result of appeals of the resistance organizations and the Church treat the Jews with great sympathy."³ According to Ringelblum's calculations, Poland, on the other hand, had sheltered only 30,000 of its more than three million Jews. He ascribed this deficiency to various factors: "German terror, mass arrests and house searches, severe penalties for hiding Jews, in an atmosphere of antisemitism created by the ONR [National Radical Camp, a party of the extreme right] and German propaganda, created unfavourable conditions for the mass concealment of Jews."⁴ Most Poles, he felt, were indifferent, while "hundreds, perhaps thousands" in Warsaw alone occupied themselves with blackmailing Jews or betraying them to the authorities for profit.⁵ Above all, he maintained, "Polish fascism, allied with antisemitism, has conquered most of Polish society." He ended his book with a famous jeremiad: "The stupidity of the Polish antisemites, who have learned nothing, is to blame for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jews who might, in defiance of the Germans, have been saved. Let the accusation fall on their heads that they did not rescue tens of thousands of Jewish children, who might have been placed with Polish homes or institutions. It is their fault that Poland gave asylum to only at most 1 percent of the [Polish] Jews, victims of Hitler's persecutions."⁶

But at the same time, Ringelblum acknowledged that under the circumstances his conclusions could only be preliminary: "I write while this murderous war still continues, when it is not yet known what will happen to the rest of the European Jews. The material for this study is still very fresh; it has not yet matured sufficiently for a historian's objective judgement. We lack much of the official material, press reports, etc., with which it will be necessary to complete this work after the war. The views expressed here represent the opinion of certain progressive circles among the survivors of a whole nation, and as such will be a contribution for a future historian of the Polish Jews during the Second World War."⁷

Ringelblum's notes and observations nevertheless sketched out the essentials of a complete and objective study of Polish-Jewish relations. Such a study would not rely on opinions (since opinions, even if widely held, might well be wrong), but would rest on a broad variety of sources. It would have to be comparative (there is no use in simply drawing attention to human virtues and vices, since all peoples have virtues and vices), and it would have to be quantitative (since generalizations about groups of people are either statistical or suspect).

Numbers, Ringelblum perceived, were at the heart of the matter; he therefore tried to frame his assessment in numerical terms. Poles had rescued Jews, true enough, but not many: only 1 percent at most. The majority—presumably,

that is, at least 50 percent—had been conquered by fascism and antisemitism. He essayed some absolute numbers: “It is hard to estimate the number of Jews hiding in the country. In Warsaw they speak of 10–15,000 hidden Jews; some people estimate 25–30,000, which in my opinion is considerably exaggerated. Supposing that 15,000 Jews are hiding in the capital, . . . at least 10,000–15,000 Polish families in Warsaw are helping Jews to hide, which comes out to 40–60,000 people, counting four people to a family.”⁸ Ringelblum then further supposed that the Jews hiding in Warsaw constituted half of those in hiding in Poland as a whole, arriving at the estimate of 30,000 cited above.

As a conscientious scholar, Ringelblum was thus careful to frame his accusations in the form of testable hypotheses: the numbers he proposed can be measured and weighed against the evidence, and his conclusions can be discussed in that light. I write here, I hope, in the same spirit as Ringelblum when he wrote, “I crave to write objectively, *sine ira et studio*, despite the fact that in these so tragic moments of my nation it is not easy to rise above passions and preserve cold objectivity.”⁹ In this essay I shall try to serve as Ringelblum’s hoped-for future historian, marshaling resources that were not accessible to him and putting his hypotheses to the test. Only summary treatment will be possible here; for a fuller treatment, I refer the reader to my forthcoming monograph and other publications.¹⁰

Sources and the Question of Numbers

The most important source for my study is one that Ringelblum paradoxically had rather close to hand, though he lacked the means to use it. This is the archive of the Jewish National Committee (Żydowski Komitet Narodowy, or ŻKN), the Zionist umbrella-group, whose chairman was Ringelblum’s friend, correspondent, and political ally, Adolf Berman. The ŻKN archive had to be kept in the greatest secrecy at the time; after the war it remained in Berman’s private papers and was donated to the Ghetto Fighters’ House after his death. There it lay untouched for many years.

Of greatest interest in the ŻKN archive, for the present purpose, are lists of people in hiding to whom ŻKN was channeling money between October 1943 and July 1944. Ringelblum was certainly aware of this activity, but not of its full extent, since at the time he wrote (his manuscript is dated September 1943) it had not yet reached its fullest development. Teresa Prekerowa also turned up similar lists pertaining to the Bund (1,736 people, dated March–June 1944) and to one of the cells of Żegota, code-named “Felicja” (508 people, dated December 1943–June 1944).¹¹ In all, after all duplications and name variations have been accounted for, these lists contain more than 4,000 distinct names and represent, taking family groups into account, more than 6,000 individuals.

Besides providing an insight into the workings of the Polish and Jewish aid organizations, these records also permit good estimates to be made of the total number of Jews in hiding in Warsaw. When the lists are compared against

the names of Jews known to have been living on the Aryan side at that time, mostly gleaned from survivor accounts, it becomes clear that the 4,000 named individuals represent only about one-fifth of the whole.¹² On this basis it could be estimated that 20,000 Jews were in hiding at that time, and this would be in agreement with the view of Bartoszewski and others.¹³ But for various reasons, partly explained below, I prefer a somewhat lower number, approximately 17,000.

These 17,000 people who were still in hiding, more or less on the eve of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1944, were only the remnant of a still larger group of Jews who either had escaped from the Warsaw ghetto or had never entered it or had come to Warsaw to hide. To arrive at an estimate of the total number of Jews in hiding, we have to add, first of all, the 3,500 or so who gave themselves up in the summer of 1943 in the notorious Hotel Polski episode;¹⁴ and then, of course, the thousands who were caught, left Warsaw, or died of what may be termed accelerated natural causes. I would estimate these various forms of attrition at about 6,500: this is consistent with the frequency with which such cases are reported by memoirists, with estimates of attrition obtained by tracking individuals through the organizational lists and with other measures. It is also reasonably consistent with Ringelblum's estimate that "tens" (*kilkadziesiąt*) of Jews were being caught each day, and with other similar contemporary estimates. Finally, it is an estimate that fits, as it were, between Scylla and Charybdis: any smaller, and the rate of attrition would be implausibly low; any larger, and we would have trouble explaining how so many Jews could have managed to escape in the first place.

It can therefore be asserted with reasonable confidence that the number of Jews who found hiding places in Nazi-occupied Warsaw at one time or another was in the neighborhood of 27,000, of whom about 3,500 fell into the Hotel Polski trap, another 6,500 were caught, died, left Warsaw, or returned to the ghetto while it still existed; and 17,000 were still alive in mid-1944. Each of these figures can be taken as accurate to within about 10 percent, one way or the other.

It would seem, therefore, that the estimates which Ringelblum dismissed as "considerably exaggerated" were in fact correct: there were between 25,000 and 30,000 Jews in hiding in Warsaw. Ringelblum's impression to the contrary was based, as I have noted, on early returns: he did not know how many Jews the aid organizations would ultimately have under their wing; and, not having access to the wealth of survivor testimonies and other postwar sources, he could only guess at what proportion of Jews they were reaching.

From the proportion of Warsaw cases among survivor testimonies in the files of the Department of the Righteous at Yad Vashem, and other sources, it appears further that Warsaw accounted for about one-quarter of the Jews hiding in Poland, not one-half, as Ringelblum had guessed. Thus Poland had given asylum not to 30,000 but to about 100,000 Jews, 3 percent rather than 1 percent of the prewar total.¹⁵ This, of course, does not obviate his conclusions. As to Warsaw, the 27,000 Jews in hiding, while a considerable number in absolute terms,

still represented only a small proportion, less than 6 percent, of the 490,000 who passed through the Warsaw ghetto.¹⁶ Therefore, Ringelblum's implied question still stands: Why did so few Jews manage to escape?

Obstacles to Escape

In fact, not all of the 27,000 did escape. About 2,300, mainly converts, stayed out of the ghetto when it was closed. A further 2,500 or so came to Warsaw to hide, because Warsaw offered the anonymity of a big city or, conversely, friends or underground contacts who could help. Only about 22,000 of the Jews on the Aryan side got there by fleeing from the Warsaw ghetto.

Flight was not the immediate or most obvious response to ghetto conditions. Between the closing of the ghetto in November 1940 and the start of the Great Deportation in July 1942, only a trickle of Jews escaped, bringing the total number in hiding on the eve of the deportation to about 5,000, a little over 1 percent of the ghetto population. In short, practically no one tried to escape before 22 July 1942; the great majority of escapes took place after that date. The chief reason was that until people became convinced that the ghetto was doomed, leaving it was not only dangerous but solved nothing: it only added the problem of a clandestine life to the problem of economic survival that a Jew faced in the ghetto. The ghetto faced an economic problem at this stage, for which an economic solution was found in the form of the smuggling industry, which provided food for those who had money and an export market that helped pay for it.

Smuggling was, of course, not a solution for everyone: every month, thousands of Jews died because they could not afford food at black-market prices. But such people rarely came from those circles that had contacts on the other side: they were paupers, orphans, and refugees who found themselves among strangers within the ghetto, let alone outside it. In short, those who had the means to contemplate life on the other side also had the means to survive within the ghetto, at much less risk. Those who did not had no one to turn to on either side of the ghetto wall.

It was true throughout occupied Europe that the initiative for going into hiding almost always came from the Jewish side: help was rarely offered unless it was asked for. But even those Jews who maintained contacts with Polish friends during the main ghetto period rarely asked their friends to hide them, not wanting to put them at risk; and their friends generally helped by smuggling or by helping them raise money. The few Jews who stayed out of the ghetto or escaped early did so because of special circumstances: they were, for example, orphaned-child smugglers who were used to moving about on the Aryan side and had no means of support within the ghetto, or people who had already established a false Aryan identity before November 1940, usually to circumvent the Nuremberg law prohibiting mixed marriages.

These special cases aside, then, the thought of leaving the ghetto hardly

occurred to anyone before July 1942 as a practical or desirable option. Ringelblum himself does not consider such a possibility in his *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*.¹⁷ If anything, social pressure worked against escape. According to Michał Borwicz: “One of the most serious errors . . . was the hostile attitude to the acquisition of ‘Aryan papers.’ Until the time of the big deportations this was regarded as a kind of desertion. The consequence of this attitude was that during the most tragic period there were not enough workers on the ‘Aryan side’ and there was not even the minimum point of support outside the walled-in ghettos.”¹⁸ I believe that Borwicz’s judgment is too harsh, at least with respect to Warsaw: several thousand Jews did live on “Aryan papers” there, and, as it proved, did provide a “point of support” for the others who escaped later. Moreover, an attitude that encouraged solidarity can be regarded as an error only in hindsight. Nevertheless it did inhibit escape.

Mass Flight

Everything changed dramatically with the start of deportations. Ringelblum wrote, “The date when the ‘resettlement action’ began, 22 July 1942, marks the beginning of mass Jewish crossing to the Aryan side.”¹⁹

The number of Jews in hiding more than doubled during the fifty-three days that the action lasted, but it remained true that the vast majority of the ghetto’s Jews did not attempt to flee. Ringelblum bemoaned this fact in retrospect: “Everyone I talk to says the same thing: ‘We shouldn’t have allowed the deportation to happen. We should have gone out into the street, set fire to everything, blown up the walls and fled to the other side. The Germans would have taken their revenge. It would have cost tens of thousands of victims, but not 300,000. And now we are ashamed, for ourselves and in front of the whole world, that our policy of compliance has proved worthless.”²⁰ But Ringelblum’s judgment is also too harsh and, like Borwicz’s, a product of hindsight. The deportation caught the Jews off guard and was over before a coherent response could be framed. Conflicting rumors circulated. The true nature of the deportation became apparent only gradually, and even when the facts became known they were often not believed. With the onset of the deportation, the ghetto gates were closed, smuggling stopped dead, and it became very difficult to leave; and within the ghetto there was chaos, as people desperately tried to evade the roundups, rescue family members from the Umschlagplatz, and somehow provide for daily necessities. Most Jews had no way to arrange escape, and those who had such possibilities were reluctant to leave their families behind. Finally, numerous alternatives to escape seemed to be available. Jews tried to get jobs in the German-owned shops; others entered into fictitious marriages with people who had exemptions; or they built hiding places within the ghetto. These efforts to evade the deportations were modestly successful, as by the time the 1942 *Aktion* (deportations) ended on 12 September perhaps 30,000 Jews remained in the ghetto

illegally, in addition to the 35,000 Jews whom the Nazis had officially spared. The number on the Aryan side had reached about 11,000.

The bulk of escapes from the ghetto thus took place only after the end of the 1942 Aktion; but by then the ghetto population was already severely depleted. Ringelblum wrote that “it was estimated that over a period of several months, hundreds of people left the Ghetto daily,” usually with the work parties that crossed the ghetto wall legally each morning for work assignments on the Aryan side.²¹ “Hundreds” proves to be an exaggeration: during the last seven months before the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising about 10,000 people managed to leave, an average of about 50 a day. Another few thousand escaped during and even after the uprising, often by hiding in abandoned parts of the ghetto and then crossing the wall at night; or they escaped from labor camps or jumped from the deportation trains. In all, some 13,000 of the 65,000 Jews who remained in the ghetto after 12 September 1942, about 20 percent, made their way to the Aryan side. And the rate of escape was still accelerating in the final weeks before the ghetto uprising: if the final liquidation of the ghetto had been later in coming, the number who escaped would have been still greater.

Warsaw and the Netherlands Compared

What are the comparable figures for the Netherlands, where, as we have seen, Ringelblum believed that “a significant proportion of the Dutch Jews ha[d] hidden among the local population”? There were 140,000 Jews in the Netherlands when the country fell to the Germans in 1940 (160,000 if part-Jews are included), of whom 20,000–25,000 are estimated to have gone into hiding: 14–18 percent of the total.²² Dutch Jews began to seek hiding places on a significant scale at about the same time as those in Warsaw, with the onset of deportations from Amsterdam in July 1942; but the relatively slow pace of the deportations (1,000–2,000 per week, compared with 6,000 daily from Warsaw) and the existence of many classes of exemptions (at the time of the last deportation from the Netherlands, in September 1944, there were still 14,000 Jews living legally in Amsterdam)²³ meant that the chance of going into hiding continued for much longer. Thus, because of the suddenness of the deportations in Warsaw, without parallel in the Netherlands, mass flight was delayed until September 1942, too late to save the great majority; but once it did get under way, about the same number of Jews went into hiding in Warsaw as in the Netherlands, comprising a larger percentage of the Jews remaining alive, and they escaped at a faster rate. Therefore, we might reasonably stand Ringelblum’s comparison on its head and ask why (contrary to common sense) escape seemed to be more difficult in the Netherlands than in Warsaw. A number of factors should be considered.

The comparative slowness of the deportations from the Netherlands made it easier for Dutch Jews to escape; but on the other hand, it also meant that there was no dramatic demonstration of Nazi intentions. Nevertheless, the Dutch Jews

knew because the Schutzstaffel (SS) had uncharacteristically acknowledged that 425 young Jews deported to Mauthausen in 1941 had been killed; and they knew that others who had been arrested had disappeared “into the night and fog.” Their apprehension can be gauged from the fact that when the SS summoned 4,000 Jews for deportation on 13 July 1942 only 962 presented themselves, even though reprisals were threatened against hostages.²⁴ The rest presumably went underground. The difference in the rate of deportations therefore does not give a clear answer.

It might seem obvious that it was physically more difficult to escape from the Warsaw ghetto, with its guarded gates and three-meter wall topped with barbed wire, than from Amsterdam’s “open” ghetto. But the Warsaw ghetto was centrally located and there was considerable legal and illegal traffic across the wall, while the Dutch Jews were incarcerated, prior to deportation, in the remote holding camps at Westerbork and Vught, from which it was much harder to get away. Escape in the Netherlands meant deciding to go into hiding before being sent to the holding camps, a decision nearly as difficult as the one to stay out of the ghetto in Warsaw. Also it was harder to acquire Aryan papers in the Netherlands than in Warsaw: the underground was less developed, and a Dutch collaborator had devised a system of documentation that was not easy to circumvent. These practical, almost accidental differences probably account sufficiently for the slightly lower rate of escape in the Netherlands.

The factor of assimilation might be another obvious difference between the two countries, and one that should have favored the Dutch Jews. They (but not the 40,000 or so Jewish refugees from Germany) were highly integrated into Dutch society and had many friends and contacts, while the Polish Jews, even in Warsaw, lived to a large extent in a world of their own, a situation that had existed for hundreds of years by mutual consent. But if the Polish Jews had their own sense of national identity, their acculturation was nevertheless well advanced. Most Jews under thirty had for economic reasons been educated in Polish-language state schools, and even older Jews had had to deal for twenty years in Polish with a Polish state and in a Polish economic sphere. Certainly, nearly all Warsaw Jews were fluent in Polish by the outbreak of war, even if their native language was Yiddish and their Polish was accented and not always idiomatic. Even highly assimilated Polish Jews had had relatively few social contacts with Poles before the war, but business or professional contacts between the two communities were extensive. Practically all Warsaw Jews, even the most unassimilated, had indirect contacts with Poles through friends or family members.

In the Netherlands, on the other hand, more than a quarter of the Jews were recent refugees from Germany and had few contacts with Dutch society. Thus the factor of assimilation did not work in favor of the Dutch Jews to nearly the extent we might have supposed.

There were many other barriers, both psychological and real, which inhibited escape; among them might be a non-Aryan appearance, lack of money, and many practical difficulties. It was, of course, dangerous to defy the Nazis;

the fear of discovery or betrayal accompanied Jews in hiding at every moment, and even the prospect of undertaking such a life was frightening. These barriers existed in different degrees in both countries. But they remained barriers only so long as it was not realized that the alternative to escape was certain death. Once the truth was known, it became clear that any chance of survival on the Aryan side, however slight, was better than no chance at all.

Life and Death on the Aryan Side

How slight was this chance though? As Ringelblum himself pointed out, he had no way of knowing what the fate of the Warsaw Jews would be, and he was aware that any final assessment would have to await a postwar accounting. Such an accounting can now be attempted.

I have noted that about 10,000 Jews either fell into the Hotel Polski trap or were caught, betrayed, or left Warsaw. Yet another trial faced the Jews of Warsaw, the Polish Uprising of 1944. By an unfortunate coincidence, the areas where the largest concentrations of Jews were hiding—the territory of the former ghetto (made available as new housing after the destruction of the Jews), the central districts of the city, and the northern district of Żoliborz, where the Polish intelligentsia were concentrated—were all caught up in the fighting, so that Jews formed a disproportionate number of the 200,000 people killed in the uprising. To judge from the fates of people mentioned in survivor accounts, more than 5,000 Jews died in the fighting (and perhaps 100 were murdered by hostile Poles; others died as a result of being excluded from shelters).²⁵

The minority of Jews who were hidden in right-bank Warsaw were liberated when the Red Army advanced to the Vistula in September 1944, but the rest had still further hurdles to overcome. A few tried to hide in bunkers in the city's ruins. Very short of food and water and facing a hard winter, they suffered terrible losses; only about 200 were still alive to greet the arrival of Soviet troops in January. Most Jews who survived the uprising, however, shared the fate of the city's Polish population, which was herded into transit camps in Pruszków and other nearby towns. About a third were then sent to labor or concentration camps in Germany, while the rest were scattered in the Polish countryside, where peasants and townspeople were expected to look after them.

After the war, the surviving Jews of Warsaw remained scattered. Warsaw had largely been destroyed in the 1944 uprising, and Warsaw Jews therefore tended to go to collecting points in Łódź, Lublin, and other centers to try to find relatives. Thousands found themselves in Germany or even Sweden at the end of the war and, knowing that their families had not survived, never returned to Poland. It is therefore difficult to estimate the ultimate number of survivors from Warsaw. Several different methods of calculation, however, seem to converge on a figure of about 11,000.²⁶

The Dutch Jews who went into hiding also did not have an entirely easy time of it. Like the Warsaw Jews, they were hunted by the local police as well

as the Germans and were victimized by blackmailers and denouncers (perhaps fewer blackmailers but more denouncers; Anne Frank was among those denounced). The prewar Dutch National Socialist Movement—quite a large party, with 8 percent of the prewar popular vote—provided a ready pool of political collaborators, an element absent in Poland. (The Polish fascists—the ONR and its offshoots—committed many sins during the war, including individual murders of Jews, but collaboration with the Nazis was not among them.) Of the 20,000–25,000 Jews who went into hiding in the Netherlands, it is estimated that about 16,000 survived.²⁷

The overall numbers therefore seem to support Ringelblum's contention that things were better for the Jews in the Netherlands. But for the comparison to be valid, the playing field must be leveled. Two major events in Warsaw, the Hotel Polski trap and the 1944 uprising, accounted for more than 8,000 Jewish victims and had no counterpart in the Netherlands. Nor did the Dutch Jews have to suffer the aftermath of the uprising. A better standard of comparison, therefore, is to start with the total number of Jews in hiding in Warsaw (27,000), remove from the equation the 3,500 or so victims of the Hotel Polski trap (leaving 23,500), then consider how many remained on the eve of the 1944 uprising (17,000). On this basis we can estimate that if attrition had continued at the same rate until September 1944, when the Netherlands was liberated, out of the 20,000–25,000 Jews in hiding in Warsaw who escaped the Hotel Polski trap there would have been 16,000 survivors. *Ceteris paribus*, the numbers for Warsaw and the Netherlands are the same.

As was the case with the question of escape from the ghetto, the question of survival rates does not lend itself to straightforward comparison. The factors cited by Ringelblum—"German terror, mass arrests and house searches, severe penalties for hiding Jews, in an atmosphere of antisemitism"²⁸—would seem a priori to lead to the conclusion that he reached, that conditions in Poland were, in comparison with the countries of Western Europe, unfavorable to hiding Jews; yet the empirical data do not seem to support the same conclusions. Ringelblum was quite right to draw attention to these factors, but either they did not have the consequences he anticipated, or else they were offset by other factors.

Some factors were more or less accidental, or in any case do not have a moral dimension. For example the terror, house searches, mass arrests, and severe penalties for hiding Jews were to an extent counterproductive for the Nazis. In their attempt to terrorize the population, they decreed severe penalties—death or imprisonment in a concentration camp—for a very great variety of activities, such as black-marketing, possession of a radio, curfew violations, failing to register at the municipal offices, and so on. At the same time, official rations were set so low that buying food on the black market became essential for survival, while at the official wages no one could afford the black-market prices. Therefore, Polish families had to supplement their incomes illegally, and hiding Jews for money was no riskier than many other ways of making a living. If, for the sake of argument, we accept Waław Zajączkowski's estimate that 3,000 Poles

were killed for helping Jews, a figure which nearly everyone thinks is too high, and also Prekerowa's estimate that at least 160,000 were involved in this activity, then the odds against being killed for it were more than 50 to 1; whereas, in all, about 1 Pole in 13 died during the war. On the face of it, then, Poles who hid Jews were four times safer than those who did not!²⁹ (Having said that, living with the source of danger day in and day out was psychologically far more wearing than, for example, selling bread rolls on the street. The conclusions that can be drawn from this observation are also up for debate: for example, it could be argued on the same basis that the risk of betrayal was evidently less than has been thought. More will be said about this below.)

Also counterproductive were the mass arrests of Poles, either as hostages or for forced labor in Germany; this brought about a labor shortage within the General Government. This in turn created the need for Jewish work-parties outside the ghetto, and with that the most significant chances for Jews to escape. The destruction of the Jewish labor force finally led to a black market for labor, giving Jews living on Aryan papers a chance to support themselves with under-the-counter jobs or by illegal trade.

In short, irrational German policies in Poland created a strange environment which might be called totalitarian anarchy, in which order and calm prevailed on the surface and complete chaos not far below it. In this chaos, all kinds of illegal activity, which for Jews included mere existence, could flourish.³⁰

Antisemitism

There is no good reason to believe that "Polish fascism"—the extremist elements represented by such groupings as the OWP (Camp of Great Poland) or NSZ (National Armed Forces)—had indeed "conquered the majority of the Polish nation." Werner Rings has observed that across Europe such parties fairly consistently had the support of about 2 percent of the population, and the same was the case in prewar Poland—but antisemitism extended far beyond the boundaries of the radical right.³¹

The mainstream attitude of the Catholic Church in the 1930s, particularly its conservative wing, can probably be taken as a benchmark of popular attitudes in intensely Catholic Poland.³² The following commentary from 1943 is fairly characteristic of the tone that the Catholic press took all too often: "The Jews fed parasitically on the body of the nations of Europe, universally hated and despised. They fought against everything, but only underhandedly, never openly, never with arms in their hands. They were the cause, the motor, of three-quarters of the wars fought in Europe, . . . but they most diligently erased the traces of their influence."³³ This paranoid rant is drawn not from a "fascist" newspaper but from *Prawda Młodych*, the youth organ of the moderate Catholic grouping FOP (Front for the Rebirth of Poland), edited by Władysław Bartoszewski and with most of the programmatic material contributed by Zofia

Kossak-Szczucka—both of them Righteous Gentiles and heavily involved in helping Jews!

In fairness, the comment just quoted was preliminary to commending the Jews for the ghetto uprising, and FOP was otherwise consistent in advocating help to the Jews. When she was criticized for this sort of utterance (found also in her famous pamphlet *Protest!*), Kossak-Szczucka maintained that this tone was needed to appeal to those who might not be moved by their conscience to help: evidently she felt it necessary to parade her antisemitic credentials to win over a segment of her readership.

Like FOP, the bulk of the Catholic clergy, many if not all of the convents in Warsaw, and Catholic institutions such as the orphanage of the Boduen Fathers did extend aid to Jews when they could, without altering their views. A number of memoirists report instances when the people who were caring for them decided to confess to their priests the “sin” of hiding Jews: in most but not all cases the advice they received from the priests was that they were doing a good and noble thing.³⁴ Individual cases aside, Catholic antisemitism in Poland did not extend to advocating or practicing genocide.

But it is not so easy for the Catholic Church (and the nationalist Catholics who followed its line) to divest itself of all responsibility for the fate of the Jews. What can be laid at the door of the Catholic Church is that by its many years of rabid anti-Jewish agitation before the war, and by continuing to give signals such as the example cited above, it left the faithful so confused that many people could readily believe that hiding Jews was a sin. And people who were disinclined to help, or even blackmailed Jews or turned them in, could find a rationalization for their actions in ideas they had heard so often from the pulpit. In short, the Catholic antisemites were in the position of someone who hands out petrol and matches and then denies responsibility for the ensuing conflagration on the grounds that he or she has always been against arson and has helped some of the victims. It is a line of argument that seems strangely out of place within a tradition that on other occasions recognizes the purgative moral power of the self-accusation, *mea maxima culpa*.

If FOP and the Catholic clergy at least did extend help to the Jews despite some unpleasant attitudes, the same cannot be said of the mainstream political right in Poland, which on the whole disgraced itself. Neither the National Party nor any other right-wing grouping, other than the tiny FOP, could overcome their dislike of the Jews sufficiently to participate in Żegota or even to approve of its formation. Some prewar antisemites concluded that since the great majority of Jews had been killed off by the Germans, Poland no longer had a Jewish problem, and therefore it was now permissible to show compassion toward the remnant. The National Party, however, disagreed:

Sometimes we are reminded of the existence of survivors in hiding of this once all-powerful minority, to whom as heirs of this estimable pre-war tradition “we should extend all possible aid” [an allusion to

Sikorski's radio appeal of 4 May 1943]. . . .

In percentage terms, we now [July 1943] have more or less the same number of Jews as pre-war Germany, and yet we regard the Jewish question as nearly solved, whereas in Germany . . . it was not regarded so nonchalantly! . . .

[After the war, the Jews] will play the role of the avant-garde of the Red Army, the role of organizers and leaders of the communist revolution. For this assignment the hiding-out remnants of the Jews in our country are preparing themselves most diligently. . . .

We will wholeheartedly condemn the bestiality of the Hitlerite villains, but we will not cease the economic and political battle with Jewry, [or be] softened by the crocodile tears of Jewish financiers and politicians, seeking to impose their authority on us.³⁵

The same organ referred to the Jews' "hundredfold-deserved fate."³⁶

As to hiding Jews, *Pobudka*, published by the Falanga faction of ONR, offered the following advice:

[Sometimes] individual Jews escape from the ghetto onto the Polish side and seek shelter in houses nearby. Christian hearts, sensitive to a neighbour's misfortune, easily forget old prejudices and reservations, and save a human being at the risk of their own lives. This beautiful response should, however, be tempered by caution. The Jews sometimes fear the Germans more than death! Caught later on, in many cases they do not hesitate to point out where they spent the night. As a result whole Polish families die for the sake of a single Jew. We could mention many concrete examples here. Therefore care and caution are essential!³⁷

I have not encountered a single such "concrete example" in my research, and I doubt that the author of this commentary had either. To be fair, most of the underground press was more humane and intelligent in its approach, and the official press was usually scrupulously "correct," though its comments were infrequent. Ringelblum believed that the Dutch regarded aid to the Jews as a civic responsibility; in Poland, at least the democratic and socialist press concurred. An organ of Sikorski's Democratic Party had its own interpretation of the state of the "Jewish problem" in Poland:

We must come around to an honest attitude to the dying. The Germans will someday answer before a tribunal of free nations for what they have done to the Jews. Let us not suppose, however, that our turn will not also come to give an accounting for our attitude to what happened before our eyes.

. . . [H]elp for all those who have to hide like hunted animals from extermination is not only an expression of human feelings and evidence of humanity, it is an elementary civic duty. Too few people . . . in Poland understand that the mass murders committed by the Germans are

not only a blow against Jewish society but a crime against the state, millions of whose citizens have been gassed.

Our analysis leads to a simple conclusion: Poles must unconditionally cut themselves off from the German crime, cut themselves off completely and absolutely. A passive posture is not enough, nor are the noblest feelings of outrage and disgust. An active posture is needed, counteracting the moral sickness injected by the enemy. The Jewish question lives, as a question of the nation's moral health.³⁸

As we have seen in the cited examples, even the right-wing press did, however backhandedly, “condemn the bestiality of the Hitlerite villains.” However wounding and offensively antisemitic the various utterances of the right may have been—and there were cases, especially in the countryside, when right-wing armed units committed bestialities of their own—it should be kept in mind that the extreme right in other countries got up to much worse things during the Holocaust. In reflecting on Western Europe, Ringelblum seemed not to understand fully, for example, the very active role of the Vichy regime in the destruction of the French Jews, or the part played by Nazi-style parties such as Mussert's National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands and the Rexists in Belgium. Poland's status as the “nation without a Quisling” owed in truth less to any superior moral qualities of the Polish right than to the extreme nature of the Nazi plans for Poland, plans which ruled out any collaboration; in other words, to historical accident. Elsewhere, Christian morality did not seem to interfere with collaboration: the outstanding example is Monsignor Tiso's Slovakia, but the Catholic clergy were deeply implicated in atrocities in Croatia and Lithuania as well, and a Lutheran pastor commanded one of the Einsatzkommandos. It was historical accident that pitched the Christian right in Poland against rather than for the Nazis, keeping it safe from the worst forms of temptation. In this sense Jan Błoński was right in saying that “God held back our hand.”³⁹

Organized Aid

Ringelblum was critical of the Polish underground. In October 1942 he wrote: “Very weak activity of progressive organizations. So far [only] for individuals.”⁴⁰ Indeed, an effort to aid Jews was only then beginning to be organized—the Temporary Committee to Aid Jews, the precursor to Żegota, had just been founded—and did not reach substantial proportions until a year later. The same was true in the Netherlands, however. The corresponding Dutch organization, the Landelijke Organisatie voor Hulp aan Onderduikers (LO), was set up in December 1942 and, according to Bob Moore, “did not really become a major force until the autumn of 1943, by which time it was too late to help the majority of Jews.”⁴¹ He adds that “For most Jews, going underground was an ad hoc affair, unsupported by a central organisation,” as it was in Poland, too.⁴²

For that matter, the Jewish underground on the Aryan side was not organized any sooner. ŻKN came into existence at about the same time as Żegota and the LO, and neither it nor any of the Jewish political parties played much of a role in helping Jews to escape. Similar observations can be made about the effort to catch *szmalcownicy* (blackmailers): without doubt, it was too little and too late; but the Polish underground courts were not organized until the end of 1942, and they operated with an admirable regard for due process but very slowly. The first sentences against collaborators were not handed down until the spring of 1943, and the first against a *szmalcownik* in Warsaw not until July. The Polish underground relied in its investigations on its agents within the Criminal Police (Kripo) and thus was able to catch mainly the relatively small number of police spies who were engaged in blackmailing Jews (and who, not at all incidentally, also posed a threat to the Polish underground). Information about ordinary street blackmailers was very sketchy, on the other hand. Berman kept a file of reports on blackmailers, but it contains only about a dozen cases, and in most cases there is very little information—not even a name. Even fully equipped police forces in peacetime have difficulty in combating street crime, and it is not surprising that the Polish underground had a similar lack of success. Whether the will was there is another question, but it is not a question that can be answered on the present evidence.

Organized aid eventually reached perhaps a third of the Jews in hiding in Warsaw. Though neither the Polish nor Jewish organizations achieved much in the way of helping Jews to escape or to find hiding places, the spontaneous network of personal contacts did handle this task well enough. The underground document-forging operation was both effective and essential, and financial assistance, though meager, was no doubt welcome when it came. The Jewish component organizations of Żegota, relying on money from Jewish organizations abroad, supported many more Jews than Żegota itself and often had to subsidize Żegota when the funds provided by the Polish government-in-exile proved inadequate. Nevertheless, the cells of ŻKN and the Bund were mainly staffed by Polish volunteers, since not enough politically engaged Jews were able to move about freely “on the surface”; the balance between Jewish self-help and organized Polish aid, and between organized and spontaneous aid, was probably about what it should have been. There is little to suggest, at any rate, that large numbers of Jews were dying on the Aryan side for want of support from the Polish side.⁴³

The Extent of Spontaneous Help and Harm

Some assessment should be made, finally, of Ringelblum’s estimates of the number of people helping Jews in Warsaw (40,000–60,000) and of *szmalcowniki*—“hundreds, perhaps thousands.” Even with the documentation now available, both numbers are difficult to ascertain with any precision.

The average memoir mentions 7.5 different *melinas* (hiding places), each

tended by an average of 2.3 helpers. But memoirists also report an average of 4 Jews in each melina at any one time. Thus about 6,000 melinas were required to house 24,000 Jews, about the maximum that lived in Warsaw at any one time, tended by about 14,000 helpers. But Jews had to move so often because melinas were frequently “burnt” and then had to lie fallow for a time; Jews could not trade places among the same fixed set of hiding places. Therefore, there had to be more than 6,000 melinas. If burnt melinas had never been reused, on the other hand, their number would have had to be 7.5 times greater, or 45,000. The true figure must lie somewhere between these extremes. If we suppose that melinas were reused about half the time, then there would have been about 25,000 of them and about 50,000 helpers. Of these, impressionistically, one-quarter did not know that their tenants were Jews, so that perhaps 35,000 to 40,000 people were knowingly providing hiding places to Jews. This fits fairly well with Ringelblum’s estimate of 40,000 to 60,000. To this number we have to add the many people who lacked the means or the opportunity to provide hiding places, but who did extend other forms of substantial help. Many memoirists, for example, mention a “guardian angel” who hovered in the background and made arrangements of various kinds. In most memoirs, nearly as many such secondary helpers as melina-providers are mentioned, and there were others (such as those who provided forged documents) of whom they were unaware. We would be estimating conservatively to suppose that there were 15,000–20,000 such secondary helpers, bringing the total number of helpers to 50,000–60,000. I have elsewhere put forward estimates of 50,000–80,000 and 70,000–90,000; given the inherent uncertainty of these figures, such numbers are also possible.

If Warsaw accounts, as I have observed, for about one-quarter of the Jews in hiding in Poland, then the number of helpers in the whole country would, on the above estimates, come to somewhere between 200,000 and 240,000, with a slight possibility that the true number might be as high as 360,000 or as low as 160,000, as proposed by Teresa Prekerowa (see above). A really accurate estimate would require substantially more research, however.

The number of blackmailers is even harder to come to. Nearly every memoir mentions encounters with these criminals, often several such encounters. We may therefore estimate that there were perhaps 50,000–100,000 incidents of blackmail in all. Blackmailers were said to have been able to make a decent living out of their trade, and the minimum that could be described as a decent living in mid-1944 was about 8,000 zlotys a month, the income at that time of an average working-class family. The going rate for blackmail on the street at the time was 2,000 zlotys; therefore, the average blackmailer had to find at least four victims per month to make a decent living. If one stuck to this trade for a year, one would therefore have been responsible for about fifty acts of blackmail. Thus about 1,000–2,000 blackmailers would have been enough to account for the observed incidence of this crime. Again Ringelblum seems to have been on the right track.

Summing up the numbers, then: in a city of a million people, there were

roughly 50,000–60,000 people actively involved in helping Jews in significant ways and 1,000–2,000 people involved in significantly harming them. Between them, these two groups account for 5–6 percent of the population. The remaining 94–95 percent, whatever their thoughts or feelings about Jews, remained passive.

Here again the situation elsewhere in Europe was not much different. Though the exact proportions no doubt varied, the same overall pattern holds everywhere: a few people actively helped Jews, a few actively worked against them, and the great majority did nothing one way or the other.

Conclusions

In the final analysis, there is much less to choose between Poland and Western Europe than Ringelblum thought, but at the same time less moral credit to Polish society than its apologists would wish for. In this sense Jan Gross's work on the Jedwabne pogrom and other unsavory aspects of the Nazi occupation period tends along the same lines as mine, though we are dealing with the opposite ends of the spectrum: at its worst, the behavior of Polish society was not distinguishable from that of other places where outright massacres are long known to have occurred at that time; at its best, it was not distinguishable from that of Western Europe, where Jews were regarded as fellow citizens but nevertheless mainly ignored. Ringelblum's assessment was remarkably accurate within the limits imposed by his circumstances, but it must be revised in the light of what is now known. His knowledge of the situation in Western Europe was partial and his conclusions too optimistic, taking into account often exaggerated reports of opposition to Nazi rule and solidarity with the Jews, but ignoring collaboration and numerous other factors which impeded escape and survival. His knowledge of the situation in Poland was limited by the secrecy in which activities in support of the Jews were necessarily shrouded, whereas blackmailers, police agents, and vocal antisemites could conduct themselves more or less openly.

The survival rate of Jews in Poland was very low, though not quite so low as Ringelblum thought; but the reasons are to be found in the suddenness, brutality, and unprecedented nature of the Nazi onslaught; the very rapid rate at which deportations were carried out in comparison with Western Europe; and the practical and psychological obstacles that prevented most Jews from even attempting to flee. Two events, the Hotel Polski trap and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, account for more Jewish deaths in Warsaw than denunciation or collaboration did. One way of viewing this fact, however, is that Poland could have been the light among nations that its defenders make it out to be, but for the fact that the positive aspects of Polish culture, such as traditions of hospitality and Catholic moral teachings, were partly negated by the antisemitic agitation of the Catholic Church and the nationalist parties, which left the public confused and in some cases vulnerable to its baser impulses. Poland was morally less pure than the

Catholic Church would have wished, but the church itself, and its nationalist supporters, must take some of the blame.

That, however, is to judge Poland by moral absolutes; in comparative terms, Poland, or at least Warsaw, does not come off so badly as Ringelblum thought. Once the ghetto had time to respond to the deportations, the proportion of Jews who escaped to the Aryan side was, if anything, slightly higher than it was in the Netherlands, Ringelblum's standard of comparison. The rate of survival, after the special dangers facing the Warsaw Jews are taken into account, was also no worse. In both countries, the number of people actively working to help or harm Jews was small; the great majority remained uninvolved. But in Warsaw, at any rate (figures for the Netherlands are not available), many more people were involved in helping than in harming. Harm to the Jews took different forms in the two countries—in the Netherlands, collaboration and denunciation; in Poland, blackmail, antisemitic agitation, and, in Warsaw alone, perhaps hundreds of freelance murders (which time does not suffice to deal with here)—but the end result was much the same: many of the hidden Jews failed to survive.

As so often happens, conclusions about what ought to be the case on the basis of a priori assumptions (on which, in the absence of solid evidence, Ringelblum had to rely) must yield to the empirical demonstration of a complex and contradictory reality. This principle of historical indeterminism was well understood by Ecclesiastes: “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but time and chance happeneth to them all” (Ecclesiastes 9: 11–12).

Notes

1. Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*, ed. Joseph Kermish and Shmuel Krakowski (New York: Howard Fertig, 1976), 9. The ellipsis omits the words “and the Polish community's passive indifference,” which in this context would seem to prejudge the issue.
2. Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej*, ed. Artur Eisenbach (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1988), 27
3. *Ibid.*, 176–177.
4. *Ibid.*, 176.
5. *Ibid.*, 95.
6. *Ibid.*, 177–178.
7. *Ibid.*, 28. See also Tomasz Gąsowski, “Reading Ringelblum,” *Polin* 4 (1989): 442–448. Gąsowski draws attention to the work's subtitle in Polish, *uwagi i spostrzeżenia* (notes and observations), omitted from the English edition (Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations*).
8. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, 177.
9. *Ibid.*, 28.
10. See Gunnar S. Paulsson, “The Demography of Jews in Hiding in Warsaw, 1943–1945,” *Polin* 13 (2000): 78–103; “Hiding in Warsaw: The Jews on the ‘Aryan Side’ in the Polish Capital, 1940–1945,” (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1998); and *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940–1945* (working title, Yale University

Press, forthcoming). The chief source is a database of people in hiding compiled on the basis of the records of the Jewish National Committee (the “Berman Archive,” Beit Lohamei Hagetaot, Israel, 357–358) and similar lists for the Bund and the “Felicja” cell of Żegota (see note 11). The study also takes into account 84 published diaries and memoirs, approximately 300 unpublished relations and testimonies, and a wide variety of other material.

11. For lists of the “Felicja” cell of Żegota, see Teresa Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie, 1942–1945* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982), 416–436; originally published in Teresa Prekerowa, “Komórka ‘Felicji,’” *Rocznik Warszawski* 15 (1979); originals in the possession of W. Bartoszewski. For the Bund lists, see Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw, 30/III t.5.
12. To clarify: the organizational lists refer to Jews by their real rather than their assumed Aryan names, whereas memoirs and other postwar documents often use Aryan names, which many Jews retained after the war. In addition, women may have changed their names by marriage. Care was therefore taken to use only names that were known to be real. Variations of spelling (Rubinstein, Rubinsztajn, Rubinsztejn; Zeitlin, Cajtlin; etc.) were, of course, taken into account. Even so, some uncertainty attaches to the procedure of name-matching, so that the figures given here can only be approximate.
13. For example, see W. Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewin, *Righteous among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews, 1939–1945* (London: Earls Court, 1969), xlviii.
14. See Nathan Eck, “The Rescue of Jews with Aid of Passports and Citizenship Papers of Latin American States,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 1 (1957): 125–152; and Abraham Shulman, *The Case of Hotel Polski* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1982).
15. Only about half of these Jews survived.
16. See Tatiana Berenstein and Adam Rutkowski, “Liczba ludnościżydowskiej i obszar przez nią zamieszkiwany w Warszawie w latach okupacji hitlerowskiej,” *BŻIH* 26 (1958): 73–105.
17. Emmanuel Ringelblum’s notes and reflections on events in the Warsaw ghetto was first published in abridged versions in Yiddish (1948, 1952) and in English as *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum*, ed. and trans. Jacob Sloan (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958). The first definitive version appeared in Polish as *Kronika getta warszawskiego*, ed. Artur Eisenbach (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1988). It remains a fundamental source for the history of the Warsaw ghetto.
18. Michał Borwicz, “Factors Influencing the Relations between the General Polish Underground and the Jewish Underground,” in *Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust*, ed. Mein Grubsztajn (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1971), 346.
19. Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations*, 95.
20. Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Kronika getta warszawskiego, wrzesień 1939–styczeń 1943*, ed. Artur Eisenbach, (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1988), 422.
21. *Ibid.*, 97.
22. Bob Moore, *Victims and Survivors: The Nazi Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, 1940–1945* (London: Arnold, 1997), 146.
23. *Ibid.*, 104
24. *Ibid.*, 93
25. Paulsson, “Hiding in Warsaw,” 205–208 and 246–265.
26. *Ibid.*, 246–265.
27. Moore, *Victims and Survivors*, 260

28. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej*, 176.
29. Wacław Zajaczkowski, *Martyrs of Charity* (Washington, D.C.: St. Maximilian Kolbe Foundation, 1988), 27; Teresa Prekerowa, “The ‘Just’ and the ‘Passive,’” in *My Brother’s Keeper: Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust*, ed. A. Polonsky (London: Routledge, 1990), 73. Zajaczkowski is cited here only for the sake of argument; his clearly polemical and often antisemitic tone precludes his book from being taken as serious scholarship. Regrettably, no serious study of this important topic is available.
30. Cf. Kazimierz Wyka’s *Życie na niby* (Warsaw, 1947; reprint, Cracow: Wydawn. Literackie, 1984), the *locus classicus* of this idea.
31. Werner Rings, *Life with the Enemy: Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler’s Europe, 1939–1945* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 105. The largest party of the extreme right, the ONR, polled 1.2% of the popular vote in towns of more than 25,000 inhabitants (where its support was concentrated) in the municipal elections of 1938. As Jews made up about 25% of the population of these towns, and did not vote for the parties of the Polish right, it could be that ONR accounted for about 1.6% of the Polish vote (R. F. Leslie et al., *The History of Poland since 1863* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 198).
32. For a systematic study, see Ronal Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism: Poland, 1933–1939* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood, 1994).
33. *Prawda Młodych*, April–May 1943, in *Wojna żydowsko-niemiecka: Polska prasa konspiracyjna 1943–1944 o powstaniu w getcie Warszawy*, ed. Paweł Szapiro (London: Aneks, 1992), 218.
34. See, for example, Stefan Chaskielewicz, *Ukrywałem się w Warszawie* (Cracow: Znak, 1988), 34; and Michał Żylberberg, *Warsaw Diary* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1969), 88.
35. *Walka*, an organ of the National Party, 28 July 1943, in Szapiro, *Wojna żydowsko-niemiecka*, 299–300.
36. *Walka*, 5 V, 1943, in Szapiro, *Wojna żydowsko-niemiecka*, 122.
37. *Głos Polski*, 5 V, 1943, in Szapiro, *Wojna żydowsko-niemiecka*, 118.
38. *Nowe Drogi*, 7 II, 1944, in Szapiro, *Wojna żydowsko-niemiecka*, 342–343, emphasis in original.
39. Jan Błoński, “The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto,” in *My Brother’s Keeper*, ed. Polonsky, 47.
40. Ringelblum *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, 419.
41. Moore, *Victims and Survivors*, 171.
42. *Ibid.*, 172.
43. It is sometimes suggested that the Hotel Polski trap is evidence of inadequate Polish support for Jews in hiding; that is, that Jews surrendered because they were desperate and had nowhere else to go. See, for example, Abraham Shulman, *The Case of Hotel Polski* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1982). But this was true only of the few hundred “wild” Jews who went there without prior arrangements. The Hotel Polski scheme owed much of its plausibility to the fact that large sums were normally required to buy one’s way into it, so that those who fell into this trap were mainly people who had more than adequate resources and who often gave up secure *melinas* to take advantage of it. Objectively, even the wild Jews had a better chance of surviving if they knocked on a random door and asked for help than if they put themselves back in the hands of the Nazis. Why so many people—one-eighth of those in hiding—preferred, after all that had happened, to trust the authorities rather than the Poles can be explained only by psychological factors, not objective ones.

CHAPTER 15

Hiding and Passing on the Aryan Side

A GENDERED COMPARISON



NECHAMA TEC

By 1941, in Nazi-occupied Poland, the presence of illegal Jews on the so-called Aryan side signaled an opposition to the Nazi policies of Jewish annihilation. Concentrating on these illegal Jews, this chapter explores how gender might have affected their coping skills and strategies of survival. More specifically, I will examine four diverse but related sets of conditions that seem to have made a difference in the lives of these Jewish women and men. My discussion begins with a look at the laws directed toward Jews and is followed with a discussion of a few laws that applied to the non-Jewish native population. From there I begin to focus on some select characteristics of the Jewish women and men, ending with an examination of several emergent political and economic conditions that affected the lives of Jewish women and men.¹

In Eastern Europe, including territories that had been a part of prewar Poland, Jews were confronted by continuous brutal attacks that eventually led to forceful removals into ghettos which were located in the most dilapidated areas of urban centers. By 15 October 1941, a new law made any unauthorized Jewish move outside the ghetto a crime punishable by death.² The same punishment applied to Christians who helped Jews move to and stay in the forbidden Christian world.³

Widely publicized, this law became well known, and transgressions were promptly followed by executions which were also widely publicized.⁴ The Germans were efficient. To the continuous antisemitic propaganda, they added awards for those who would denounce Jews. The nature of these prizes varied depending on the locality and the demands for certain goods. They might have

included rye flour, sugar, vodka, cigarettes, clothing, and, in some instances, half the property of the apprehended fugitive.⁵ Some natives were lured by the rewards; others came under the influence of Nazi propaganda, absorbing the definition of Jews as subhuman.⁶ Still others made a business out of blackmailing Jews. Scattered evidence, based on individual cases and special samples, underscores the precariousness of the Jewish situation. In a group of 308 illegal Jews that I studied, an overwhelming majority (88 percent) were blackmailed, denounced, arrested, or came close to being arrested.⁷ Most concur that on the Aryan side, Jewish fugitives were faced with a seemingly inexhaustible array of obstacles and threats. As a part of an overall anti-Jewish campaign, the presence of such runaways was continuously emphasized. The Nazis urged non-Jews to deliver the fugitives, and the many pressures to apprehend Jews created a virtual Jew-hunt.

Additional dangers emanated from the body of German laws designed for local, non-Jewish populations. Most of these newly established regulations were more punitive toward men than women. For example, in Poland, in one of their early, oppressive moves, the Germans turned to the Polish elite (i.e., intellectuals and professionals, clergy and army officers). Some of them were murdered. Others were sent to concentration camps. In 1940, the majority of the early inmates of the just-completed Auschwitz were members of the Polish elite.

But the persecution of Poles was not limited to society's upper echelons. Following the annexation of parts of western Poland to the Reich, the Nazis began to Germanize the region. This involved removal of large segments of the native population. Such transfers happened forcibly, without regard to human cost. Some Poles lost their lives.

In addition, guided by their own economic needs, throughout the war the Germans continued to deport Poles to the Reich for work. Of an estimated 2.5 million who were thus used, many were worked to death, while others returned in wretched condition. Finally, too, during the German occupation, signs of political opposition brought swift and brutal suppressions.⁸

This more extensive persecution and distrust of male rather than female native populations, in all countries under the German occupation, including Poland, grew out of the Nazi affinity for and reliance on patriarchal principles. In line with patriarchal principles, men are seen as intelligent, rational, and dominant. In contrast, patriarchal ideology defines women as intellectually limited, emotional, and passive. Such varied perceptions of gender were partly reflected in Nazi laws that required all male adults to work, preferably in jobs that benefited the German economy. Such laws made the presence of young men on the streets automatically suspect. Authorities would invariably check men's documents. If these men had violated Nazi employment laws or engaged in "insignificant" work, they could be sent to Germany for forced labor. Men who were identified as Jews were executed. Those who were suspected of being members of underground groups were shot or imprisoned.

Some Nazi laws excluded non-Jewish mothers and housewives from com-

pulsory employment. Because women were thought of as politically unsophisticated, less intelligent, and more passive, little attention was paid to them. Unless women were caught in a raid designed to collect people for forced labor in Germany or as a reprisal against the killing of a German, their presence in the streets was ignored.⁹

Jews who lived on the Aryan side then were affected by two sets of laws: those that targeted the Jews and those that applied to native Christian populations. The nature of these laws added to the growing precariousness of illegal Jewish men. Time only stepped up the search for all escaping Jews and their gentile protectors. But, neither the presence of the Nazi laws nor their strong enforcement prevented some Jews from entering the Aryan side and some Poles from helping them.¹⁰ Inevitably, the ghetto runaways were substituting one set of dangers for another. Most of them knew about the lurking perils.

The unpredictability and threats that were a central part of illegal Jews created a special need for cooperation and mutual aid. In fact, of my sample of 308 Jews who stayed on the Aryan side, 95 percent had received help from others, mostly Christian Poles. When questioned more closely, even the 5 percent who thought that they had made it on their own had benefited from some kind of aid. In their case, sometimes a warning about danger or a one-night stay in someone's home might have made a difference between life and death. In short, the lives of those who came to the Aryan side required mutual cooperation. While these cooperative efforts did not guarantee survival, failure to locate people who would aid Jewish fugitives made survival virtually impossible.¹¹

It seems that those who gave up on the Aryan side were likely to do so when they became convinced that they had exhausted all options. The fate of Tola Szwarc's brother illustrates this fact. In 1943, after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, this teenager was herded into a cattle car destined for Treblinka. On the way, he jumped off the moving train and returned to Warsaw, his birthplace. Here, as a penniless fugitive, he made the rounds among Polish friends and acquaintances asking for help. None responded favorably. Time only multiplied the rejections. Finally, homeless, with no one to turn to, Tola's brother jumped off a tall building and died.¹² Jewish men in the streets of most towns were suspect because of the Nazi laws that applied to non-Jewish males and because of the laws that made the presence of Jewish women and men in the Christian world a crime punishable by death.

The lives of both Jewish women and men were also affected by some special characteristics and led to their distinct coping strategies. In Eastern Europe, only Jewish men were circumcised. A casual examination of a man could easily reveal his identity. In contrast, "women who were caught could get out of it. A woman could do that but not a man."¹³ Inevitably, the consequences of circumcision towered over the lives of illegal Jewish males, penetrating into all aspects of their existence.

Additional factors exerted pressures upon the lives of illegal Jews, women and men. Among these was their physical appearance. If an individual's features

conformed to the stereotypical Jewish look, it undermined his or her safety. Dark curly hair, black eyes, and a long, crooked nose were all a part of the stereotypical “Jewish look.” In contrast, straight blond hair, blue eyes, and a short nose came close to the idealized Aryan image.

In reality, the looks of most men and women fell somewhere between these two extremes. In the case of Jewish men, however, even slightly suspicious features, if they resulted in an arrest, could lead to other incriminating evidence. Not surprisingly, therefore, some of those whose appearance was “risky” wanted to avoid exposure and preferred to hide. Most likely, circumcision in the case of men, and physical appearance in the case of both men and women, had an effect on a person’s preferences for hiding or passing. But to become invisible Jews required Christian protectors who were ready to take the risks. Such protectors were rare.

For example, in Białystok, a Jewish appearance and an absence of a Christian protector resulted in the murder of Ania Rud’s husband; they were both members of the underground. Ania Rud explained: “Because he looked very Jewish, he stayed in the ghetto longer than I . . . He tried once to leave. He grew a moustache, but it was very dangerous for him; everybody looked at him. So, he went back to the ghetto. . . . [W]e decided that maybe he should reach the outside just before dark, so people wouldn’t notice him, . . . that he should try again . . . [but] the day before he was supposed to come out, the ghetto was closed. We saw it from the outside, the Ukrainians surrounded the place.”¹⁴ After the war, Rud heard that her husband had eluded the main deportation. For a while, he continued to hide in the almost empty, closely guarded ghetto. She never found out how he died.¹⁵ In contrast, Alexandra Gutter, whose appearance was Jewish, survived the war, in part because she had selfless protectors. She recalled, “While in hiding, I only walked into the streets in the evenings, when people couldn’t see me, because everybody recognized me as a Jew.”¹⁶

A Jewish appearance, although significant, was not the only reason for hiding. As a prominent surgeon, Alexandra Gutter’s husband was known to many people: patients, employees, coworkers, and many others. Any one of them could recognize him. Rather than risk being denounced, he opted for an invisible existence.¹⁷ Indeed, no one knows how many unexpected encounters had undermined the advantages that came from an Aryan appearance.¹⁸ Moreover, the protective shield offered by an Aryan look could evaporate even in a confrontation with strangers.

Alexandra Gutter told about one such case:

We had a friend who looked like a thousand Poles; he had no resemblance to a Jew. But he had to move around town because he had to make a living. Once, he was just walking the streets, and a Pole stopped him with a “Come into the courtyard.” He went in. The usual happened; the Pole threatened, made our friend pull down his pants, and then examined his documents. In the end our friend had to bribe the blackmailer.

Before leaving, our friend asked: "How did you ever recognize me?" "Well, you are the fifth one that I caught today. Some were Jews and some were not. After all, Christmas is coming and I need extra money. This is how I earn it."

You see, once our friend was stopped. The very same day his apartment was suddenly of no use. The blackmailer saw from the documents where he lived. Now, this passing Jew had no apartment. He was desperately looking for an apartment until the police caught him.¹⁹

But, even though under special circumstances an Aryan appearance lost its power to protect, most of the time it served as an important crutch for men and women.

Documents that identified a Jew as a Christian offered additional protection. Usually, when several members of a family reached the Aryan side, they preferred to have different names. In case of an arrest, at least some could be spared, claiming not to know each other. Some documents were manufactured illegally and had fictitious names. Others were duplicates of documents which belonged to real people, some of whom were dead, others alive.²⁰

In Poland, those who were of age and not Jewish were required to receive a special document, a Kennkarte, on the basis of a birth certificate. Non-Jewish civilians had to apply for this new identity card in person. Each Kennkarte had the owner's name, date and place of birth, present occupation, and religion. A Kennkarte holder had to register a second time with the vital records office.²¹ The requirement to appear personally in two offices stopped many Jews from getting these valid documents. Of the passing Jews only a minority possessed officially issued papers. Others had a variety of false documents. Still others had no documents at all.

Whether backed by documents or not, a new identity required familiarity with facts that were a part of the new identity. It also called for knowledge about the Christian religion. Poland was a country where people took their Catholic religion seriously. Ignorance about prayers and customs might have acted as a confirmation of a Jewish identity. But familiarity with some facts and an Aryan appearance were only two of the factors that could tip the scale in favor of a passing Jew. Very important was fluency in the native language and an overall ability to blend into the native culture.

In Eastern Europe, Jewish women seem to have had certain advantages. In the Jewish religion women had traditionally occupied a peripheral place. They were barred from religious, political, and cultural leadership. Confined to the domestic sphere, only occasionally would a woman earn a living; usually when her husband instead of working devoted himself to religious study. Because women were excluded from traditional religious educational pursuits, they had more freedom to engage in secular education.²² This was often reflected in women's greater familiarity with the Polish language.²³

Particularly in prewar Polish towns, women had more contacts than men with local people such as storekeepers and all kinds of merchants. This in turn

promoted women's acculturation.²⁴ Exposure to secular culture, through education and more contacts with gentiles, might have improved women's chances for staying alive on the Aryan side.²⁵ In my sample of 308 survivors, the percentage of those who spoke Polish moderately well was higher for women than for men (90 percent versus 71 percent).²⁶ Women's special exposure to Polish culture might have helped them blend into the Christian world.

In addition to the ability to submerge into the culture, peoples' subjective reactions to their environment were also a factor. Alexandra Gutter is convinced that all illegal Jews were fearful, yet she feels that there were some gender differences. Thus, she recalled,

[M]en were more fearful and more likely to hide and it was harder to find places for them. If somebody took money for protecting Jews, they took more money for men. . . . People were less suspicious of women. A woman could much more easily find an apartment. She could walk around town and pass more easily. A woman could dye her hair. Dressed up, she looked more like a Polish woman. Men even if slightly Jewish looking were exposed.

Women were more resourceful. But they were also fearful. I was afraid, very much so. But fear is an interesting thing. When I heard steps on the stairs, I would shake. Later on, during the uprising in Warsaw, when the roof was burning and we were trying to put out the fire with pails of water and the bombs were dropping and there was crossfire, I was not afraid at all. Because what happened on the roof was for everybody. Those steps on the stairs were for me, concentrated on me.²⁷

Tied to fear was depression. And here, too, Alexandra Gutter believes that men were more depressed than women. Men's tendency to be more depressed began at the outset of the occupation, when they were more likely to be murdered or forced into degrading, hard labor. The men's more perilous situation continued on the Aryan side. Realistically, for various, already mentioned reasons they had more to fear than women. On the other hand, however, perceptions of danger did not necessarily correspond to how objectively endangered people were.

For example, compared to other passing Jews, Sandra Brand had little reason to be anxious. She had a typically Aryan appearance, and she spoke Polish fluently. Right after Brand came to Warsaw she was offered a secure job in a German firm, as a Polish-German interpreter. She also had solid documents. In short, she was an ideal candidate for a make-believe Christian. Despite these advantages, Brand admits to having been extremely frightened. At times she was on the verge of giving up, convinced that her behavior revealed her background. Aware that Poles expected Jews to gesticulate with their hands, she was always on guard when talking. During the winter, she carried a muff and kept both hands inside. This, she believed, prevented her from conversing like a Jew, at least during the cool months. Her fears were expressed in other ways as well. On the

street, she tried to make herself inconspicuous by almost hugging the walls of buildings. Brand did this even though she felt that it was safer to walk close to the outer edge of the sidewalk. Being at the edge, she argued, gave a Jew a better chance to run. Sandra Brand was never denounced. But neither did she banish her fears.²⁸

Anxieties, fears, and depressions were sometimes expressed in the sadness of Jewish eyes. Jews were known and identified by the sadness of their eyes. Close calls due to their eyes were among common Jewish experiences. A Jewish courier told about such an incident:

I always played a role. I tried to fit but was always told about my sad eyes. "These are Jewish eyes," they said. I was once stopped on a tram, traveling with a Polish friend from the underground. It was eight in the morning. We were standing on the platform. I noticed a policeman pass. It seems that my eyes rested on him. I was not even aware of it. In a moment, the tram stopped, and this man jumped onto the platform. Coming straight to me he asked for my documents. I had on me two different documents with two different names. He ordered me to come off the tram. He was taking me to the police station to have my papers properly checked. I knew that once I reached the station I would be lost.

I asked him why he was taking me, adding that I had to go to work. I tried to smile at him. He wanted to know if I was afraid.

I said, "Why should I be? I cannot understand why you took me off the tram."

To this he said, "Maybe I'm making a mistake."

So I asked him what it was all about; I wanted him to explain. His answer was: "You know, you look Polish."

"But I am Polish," I interrupted.

"But you have Jewish eyes," he said.

I started to laugh. "How is this possible?"

He laughed too. I was young; it was a nice morning; so I asked him, "Can you give me my things back; after all, I'm in a rush to get to my job."

He said, "OK, take it."

Then I asked if I could jump on the tram. "I will stop it," he said. And he did.²⁹

For passing Jews there was a delicate balance between physical appearance, behavior, and attitudes. Next to appearance, fear and feelings of insecurity could become an easy giveaway. Self-assurance and a relaxed posture could tip the scale in favor of a passing Jew. Unlike men, women under suspicion had a better chance to tip the scale in their favor. On rare occasions, however, a man's self-assurance could also counteract suspicions.

One such exception was Oswald Rufeisen, who spent part of the war passing for half-German and half-Polish, and who worked as an interpreter at the police

station in Mir, in western Belorussia. Before Rufeisen took on this police job, he was continuously identified as a Jew. Each time this happened, suspicions evaporated when Rufeisen confronted his accusers with self-assured denials. Rufeisen's speech and his talent for playing the role helped him turn the tide in his favor. When Rufeisen assumed the official position at the police station, people stopped questioning his background. Nor was he ever checked for circumcision.³⁰

Those who already had special ties to Jewish men might have been reluctant to subject them to a physical examination. It is also likely that Jewish men who were able to blend quickly into the Christian world were more likely to avoid being checked for circumcision precisely because of the ease with which they fit into the Christian world. An ability to blend into a culture created warm feelings toward these Jews. Such feelings, in turn, might have helped ban lingering suspicions.

Experiences of illegal Jews varied greatly. But, within the context of vast differences there were certain shared patterns. Among these was the need to change living quarters. Often these changes forced Jews to switch from hiding to passing and back again. Some such changes were prompted by real dangers, some by imaginary dangers.³¹

Alexandra Gutter described how she, in a group of Jews, had to stay in an archival office: "We had to be very quiet. We ate very, very early breakfast and we stayed in bed all day long. We read books, or soundlessly played cards, bridge. There were five of us. I was with my husband then, another couple, and my girlfriend's husband."³²

For Jewish men more so than for women, a mere suspicion could have had devastating consequences. Men's special vulnerability seems to be reflected in my findings that, of the Jews I studied, 60 percent of the men lived mainly in hiding, compared to 48 percent of women. More importantly, 26 percent of these men were employed and 48 percent of the women were employed.³³ Employment inevitably increased an individual's visibility and, through it, exposure to dangers.

Political and economic wartime conditions in themselves made a difference in the distinct, gendered chances for employment. The job market itself was partly responsible for employment differences of Jewish men and women. Maids, cooks, and governesses topped the list of job openings. This was followed by a need for agricultural laborers. The continual pouring of forced laborers to Germany from Nazi-occupied countries created agricultural employment opportunities. In addition, food shortages, an uneven distribution of goods, and the Nazis' rigid prohibitions led to black-market operations. Most of these had to do with illegal distribution of foods and other scarce products.

Tradition barred men from domestic jobs. In contrast, Jewish women found such work suitable because it offered food, shelter, and a promise of safety. Not yet twenty, Eva Safszycka benefited from these circumstances. She came from a prosperous family in Baranowicze, a part of western Belorussia. When in 1941 the Germans occupied this section of Poland, Eva Safszycka's parents sent her

to their wealthy friends in Warsaw. For a while, shielded by these friends, Safszycka lived in the Warsaw ghetto. When in 1942 the situation became more threatening, Safszycka's aunt arranged a transfer to her ghetto in Siedlce. But there, too, Safszycka barely escaped a ghetto deportation by hiding in a bunker. The noises from the outside—cries, pleas, and shootings—reached Safszycka's hideout. Right there, she decided never again to expose herself to these kinds of experiences. When no one wanted to join her, she all alone ran away from the ghetto.

Safszycka told what happened:

After I left the bunker I met a Jewish policeman; he brought me out of the ghetto. I had three small gold pieces. People thought that I looked like a Pole; my speech was faultless. I didn't know where I was going, I just walked. On the outskirts of Siedlce I came upon an empty brick factory and sneaked in.

Then a watchman, or someone who herds cows, came in. To me he looked old. He probably understood who I was. Here I was seventeen, and alone in the middle of the night. Right away he tried to rape me, threatening that if I would not go along with it he would denounce me. My reaction was: "Take me to the Germans, then." He gave up and left. I stayed on.

Next day, a young Polish man passed by. He too must have guessed that I was Jewish. I asked him for help. I told him that I had a little money, the three gold pieces and offered these to him in exchange for Polish papers. He agreed and left with my gold. I waited. This young man returned with documents of a young Polish woman who had died; she was younger than I. He also bought me a ticket and put me on the train.³⁴

Safszycka went to one of her father's business associates. He in turn contacted his friend, Zygmunt Chlasko, an owner of an estate. She picked up her story:

I met with so much kindness from the Poles, so many were decent and helpful that it is unbelievable. The estate I came to belonged to very wealthy people. In a way, I passed through the war in an uninteresting way because I had it so good with these people. I had never met them before. At this estate I worked as a chambermaid and a governess. I did work, but they took me in. Nobody except the owner of the estate and his wife, Helena, knew that I was Jewish. I stayed there 'til the end. I didn't have a penny and had nothing to wear, but I got everything from them and they were also paying me. The attitude towards me was extraordinary. . . . They hid other Jews, one of them was a girl of eleven. Chlasko was also the head of an oil concern.³⁵

Not all experiences of those who had domestic jobs were as positive as Eva Safszycka's. Examples of exposures to antisemitic talk and mistreatment

abound.³⁶ One Jewish underground courier, Leah Silverstein, worked in a German household where her employer made unreasonable demands and threatened to have her transferred to a concentration camp. Silverstein felt that, as a high Nazi official, the husband of this German woman might follow up on these threats, so she escaped to another city.³⁷

Even though in Eastern Europe there was a shortage of agricultural laborers, the possibilities for getting such jobs were limited. Peasants who were in dire need of farmhands could not afford them. Many of them could not even feed their own families. Moreover, usually, Jewish men who reached the countryside came from urban centers. Some of these men went into hiding and paid for their protection. Of the Jewish men who found farm employment, only a few had farming experience.³⁸ Most were female and male teenagers, flexible and willing to do any kind of work.³⁹

In villages, as in the rest of the country, people were afraid to employ Jewish men. Jewish men were more conspicuous, more easily identified, and therefore more dangerous. Men were also thought of as less accommodating and as requiring more food. As a rule, young farmhands, men and women, received no payment other than food and shelter. One of these hard-working teenage girls was Chava Grinberg-Brown. Even before the war her mother had hired her out to local peasants to tend cows, to take care of pigs, and to perform other farm jobs. For this, the mother was probably paid with farm products.

Chava Grinberg-Brown was born in the small town of Wiskitki, and as far back as she remembered her family lived in abject poverty. At age eleven, alone, she escaped from the Warsaw ghetto to return to the villages around her former home. The trip took several weeks. She recalled: "I wanted to go to the places I knew. This was an animal-like need that I don't quite understand. On the way, at the end of each day, I begged people to let me come in and sleep. I remember that once someone gave me a place to stay and offered me chicken soup that was very good and fat. But from this I got diarrhea. In another home, one of the women gave me medication for my skin condition. They knew that I was Jewish; they had to know; I was so run down, starved, it was obvious. As I wandered from one little place to another, people fed me and let me sleep in their homes or close to them; in barns, pigsties, etc."⁴⁰

Grinberg-Brown spoke Polish fluently. A few caring individuals advised her not to admit to her Jewishness. Others warned her against entering her native town. She soon learned how right they were:

As I was passing my town, I met a Polish fellow who recognized me. He wanted to take me to the Germans, to get money for it. He caught me, but I ran away. Some peasants, who realized what he was after, threatened to give him a beating he would never forget. That stopped him from bothering me.

I have no bad feelings towards the Christians. I survived the war thanks to them. They helped me. But, no one did me any favors. I worked

very hard for the food. Whenever they did not need me or want me, they sent me away. I supported myself. I had no one that could pay for me. I worked for it. . . . No one worried about me. No one comforted me. I went from village to village and stayed a short time. They would feed me during the winter; they had to eat, so I ate too. . . . And I didn't actually suffer hunger. But in the winter I also worked. Maybe I don't remember so well, but I think that they fed me. In the winter you feed animals, the cows and the pigs, so they gave me food also. I cleaned their houses. These are things I probably did in the winter.⁴¹

Like farm work, the black market offered some earning opportunities. Despite rigid prohibitions, the black market in Eastern Europe flourished. Most of these illegal activities involved transfers of food from the countryside to urban centers, small towns and cities. Illegal traffic also moved from towns to villages. The latter usually included items such as thread, needles, buttons, and used clothes often left behind by Jews. Such transactions were illegal. Most involved a railroad trip. Often these transfers ended in the confiscation of goods and/or arrests of the smugglers. Most smugglers were women and children.

Because men rarely transported illegal goods, those who did were conspicuous. High visibility and the special danger involved in train travel must have discouraged Jewish men from participating in the black market. However, some Jewish men were active in local black-market businesses that required no travel. Women usually dealt with the more visible transactions that called for travel.⁴²

Aware of black market operations, the authorities raided trains, confiscating illegal goods. Sometimes these raids led to arrests. While the Germans were ruthless toward women smugglers, the natives treated them with kindness. Rina Eitani, one of these young Jewish smugglers, thinks that women were more supportive than men. In this connection, she spoke of a special incident: "One day I was buying something in a store. A little girl came in warning me, 'The Gestapo is in the house where you live.' Right away, the owner of the store, a woman, put me in the cellar. She wouldn't let me go until the Gestapo left. It would have been safer to leave the apartment, but we had no place to go. So we tried to be at home as little as possible. We stayed a lot in the villages where we bought the produce. The peasants were nice to us. They would feed us and sometimes, in exchange, we worked for them. . . . The Germans never came back."⁴³

For women, wartime earning opportunities were not exhausted by black-market jobs. A transfer to Germany as a Polish laborer was another option. This too was more accessible to Jewish women than men. Throughout the war, the Third Reich tried to boost its economy by bringing in laborers from some of the occupied countries. At first, the Germans had encouraged volunteers. With time, slave-like treatment of foreign laborers reduced their numbers. When the demand for more workers grew, the Germans resorted to forced capture of able-bodied men and women. Those caught ended up as laborers in industrial or agricultural sectors of the German economy.

In Poland, a transfer for work to Germany looked like an attractive alternative to the constant anti-Jewish terror. A move to Germany promised extra safety because Germans were unable to distinguish between non-Jewish and Jewish Poles.

This reasoning was only partially correct. Most Jews could not have passed the scrutiny of the pre-transfer stage. Before being shipped off to Germany, each candidate had to submit to a thorough physical examination. For a Jewish man this meant special dangers. In addition, the documents of those who volunteered were closely scrutinized. Personal questioning of a prospective worker could lead to slips and discovery. In fact, as the number of volunteers dropped, those who did register on their own were more suspect.

In itself, knowledge that the transfer to Germany involved a physical checkup must have discouraged Jewish men from trying. Nevertheless, a few of them slipped through the tests and ended up in Germany. In fact, Zwia Rechtman-Schwarz, who herself became one of these laborers in Germany, thinks that for Jewish men it was much harder to pass the test. But she spoke of one such exceptional case: "A neighbor of mine, a Jew, survived in Germany as a worker, and he told me that when he went to bathe with other men around him all the soap was concentrated on his genitals. For a man, it was not enough that he should look well, have the right speech, but even then he was really in greater danger."⁴⁴

With time, however, even for Jewish women it was harder to pass the initial tests. Still, with most safety doors shut, some women were ready to take the risk. A few of these young women received help from their families and friends who felt that such moves could save their lives. Others, on their own, found their way to Germany in seemingly miraculous circumstances.

Eva Galer belongs to this last group. As 1942 was coming to an end, most inmates in the Lubacz ghetto, including Galer, knew that death was imminent. Earlier, a Jewish runaway from the death camp Bełżec had come. He told them what deportations meant. In response, people redoubled their efforts in building hideouts. Galer's family installed an extra wall in the attic. In anticipation of ghetto raids, Galer and her family had in the past successfully disappeared into this camouflaged shelter. Now, with the end nearing, they knew that no matter how ingenious their hideout was, it could not shield them from a dismemberment of the ghetto.

It happened on a cold day, on 4 January 1943. This time the trucks were too numerous for a mere shrinkage of the ghetto population. Perhaps out of habit, the Galer family ran to their place in the attic. With greater zeal than usual, the Germans were successful in ferreting out the victims. Galer's hiding place was discovered. She described what came next: "It was terrible. Chaotic screams. People were caught, found in different places. They brought us to the station where cattle cars were standing. They hit us, shouted. . . . If anyone fell, they would kick and rush them. They treated us worse than animals. Each family tried

to stay together. We were packed tightly into the wagons and the doors were shut. The cars had small, barred windows.”⁴⁵

Despite the mixture of bewilderment and horror, a few young men started cutting the window bars. They came off. The train moved on. They pushed each other out the opening, one at a time. Eva Galer continued: “Everyone wanted to jump. We knew that we were going to die. The older people felt that they could not leave, nor could the children. We stood nearby, and my father said, ‘Save yourselves, save yourselves.’ First, went my brother, 16, sister, 17, and I, 18. The younger ones must have stayed, but I don’t know what happened after me. My little brother cried, ‘I also want to live.’ He was the youngest, three years old, he cried and cried. When on the outside I fell, I heard shots. Guards were sitting on the roofs of the wagons.”⁴⁶

What was she thinking about? Galer went on, “I was not thinking at all. There was no thought. Emptiness. . . . I fell into a hole filled with snow. I did not hurt. Once the train passed, I got up and went back to look for my sister and my brother. I only found dead bodies.” Did she recognize them? She said, “Yes, definitely. Brother, for sure. It was snowing. So there were no people around. The first thing I did was to tear off the armband. I went back. I walked in the snow. I went to the Christian woman where we had left our belongings.”⁴⁷

The woman felt sorry for the fugitive, but was afraid. She let Galer stay one night, fed her, gave her twenty zlotys and a warm shawl, but told her she would have to leave early in the morning. Galer’s next stop was at the home of a peasant from whom she used to buy milk. This woman refused to let her in. Galer sneaked into the barn. When the woman came in the evening to feed the animals, she found the shivering girl. She took the unwanted guest into the house but told her to leave early in the morning. Afraid to be recognized in these familiar surroundings, Galer walked to a nearby train station. From there, she left for Cracow, to her a strange city. The station in Cracow provided her with a bench and a bathroom. She ate some of the bread she had. With part of the money she treated herself to a glass of hot, brown liquid called tea. Galer knew that by staying too long in one place she would arouse suspicion. Although afraid to venture out from this partially familiar place, she went a small distance away from the station. Close by she discovered an open vegetable market. Inconspicuously, she picked up discarded leaves and bits of rotten vegetables. Then she returned to a bench at the station.

For a while, two days or so, this routine continued. Galer scrutinized faces. She was looking for a Jew to direct her to a nearby ghetto. Was there a ghetto? She was not sure. But this is not what happened. Instead, she said, “One day I went again to the marketplace. I was just looking; I had no money to buy anything. Germans came. They blocked off the street. It was a raid. But I didn’t know what it was. They grabbed young men and women and pushed them into a truck. They took me also. They were catching people for forced labor in Germany. These young Poles were only shopping; they did not have papers, just

like me. We came there. . . . They asked names and where we were born. There were doctors, and there was a place for disinfection. I was hoping that I would pass the doctor's inspection; they noticed my lice."⁴⁸

The lice were no impediment.⁴⁹ Galer continued:

They sent us to Neustadt, on the Austrian-Czech border. Farmers came there to pick up the arrivals. One of the farmers selected me. Only me. At the farm I was so scared. I was afraid to sleep. Afraid to speak Yiddish in my sleep. . . . I had a room that was like a closet. . . . They had to teach me how to milk a cow; I knew nothing. They were not bad; of course if they had known that I was Jewish that would have been a different matter. I was afraid that somehow I would give myself away. I had terrible dreams, did not know how to behave. . . . I told them that I was from a town and that I was in school. . . . I tried to learn German from my employers. . . . From the surrounding farms, the Poles and the Ukrainians wrote home; they were receiving packages, but I did not. I looked for excuses about the fact that my family did not write.⁵⁰

Eva Galer was lucky to have been the sole Polish worker at her place. She had few direct contacts with other Poles. But life had other complications. Before Easter, her German employer asked if she was going to confession and communion. Galer knew that Polish workers in the area went to a Czech church. She also knew that she would feel out of place in any church and was concerned about committing errors. She came up with a partial solution by using the services of the fourteen-year-old daughter of her employer. Galer explained:

I told the young girl that I don't want to go with the Poles, "I would rather go with your family, but tell me how are the services conducted here, because it must be different from the way Poles do it." So the German girl took the prayer book and showed me what kind of prayers they had in the German church. This way I thought that I would avoid some mistakes. Also, I thought that the German Catholic priest, if I would behave incorrectly, would think that I am Polish and that's why I erred.

I went to the communion. I see everybody sticks out their tongue, and I do the same thing, and the priest comes close to me and I, probably out of fear, see only black in front of my eyes. My employer stood next to me. She asked, "Why are you so pale? What happened to you?" I told her that I just didn't feel well.⁵¹

Not to arouse suspicion in her time off, Galer met with Poles who worked on surrounding farms. Unlike most other young women, she was not interested in boyfriends. Actually, she had very little time for one. Poles worked six and a half days a week. Galer was glad that she had no leisure to spare. She was also glad that she rarely heard any antisemitic talk. She suspected that one of the Polish girls she met was Jewish but preferred not to probe. Always on guard,

she made no close friends even though she was very friendly. At the end of the war she learned that none of her family had survived.

While Eva Galer's transfer to Germany was a fortunate accident, moves of most other Jewish women involved cooperative efforts by family members and friends. Yet, no matter how such a transfer came about, the prospective laborers learned fast that a trip to Germany contained special perils. Poles who were a part of a transport represented serious threats. After all, they were carrying their anti-Jewish prejudices with them, and some were willing to act upon them. Another indirect but potential danger was the presence of other Jewish women who were lonely and eager to attach themselves to Jews. To locate and identify passing Jews could serve as a double-edged sword. It might give comfort but at the same time lead to discovery.

How these make-believe Poles coped with their needs for friends and safety is illustrated by experiences of the few women who made it. By 1942, in Lwów, twenty-one-year-old Miriam Gold-Kowadło lost her husband during a ghetto deportation. Soon she reached the Aryan side. She had a false Polish birth certificate. That day she was caught in a raid. Ukrainian policemen found several hidden Jews. One of these Ukrainians stopped Gold-Kowadło and ordered her to join the group of the arrested Jews. She objected loudly, but the man refused to budge. Then she noticed a German gendarme come out of the building.

He turned to Gold-Kowadło and said, "Why are you shouting?" (He spoke Polish.) Still angry, she replied, "This man forces me to stay with the Jews. I'm Polish. I just came from the provinces looking for work. Please tell him to let me go." The German looked at her closely and then said, "If you are Polish, then let me hear you pray."⁵²

Under these circumstances Gold-Kowadło found his request comical. She burst out laughing, unable to control herself. She thinks that her extreme tension contributed to her weird reaction. She is convinced that her strange behavior saved her. No one could have imagined that a Jew who was facing death could be filled with so much merriment. Indeed, the gendarme ordered her release.

After several futile attempts to settle in Lwów, Miriam Gold-Kowadło decided to register for work in Germany. Her fluent Polish and high degree of assimilation helped her pass the inspection. She came to Germany with a large transport of women. Upon arrival, their prospective employers scrutinized them. The manager of an ammunition factory selected her and another fifteen women. Eventually, Gold-Kowadło learned that out of the sixteen women, eleven were Jewish. Their superior, Willi Grosse, was the son of the factory owner. This factory employed over three hundred workers, Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Czech, and French. For the first two years they worked ten hours per day, and then twelve. They lived in a camp close to the factory. Initially, the food was poor, but Gold-Kowadło thinks that it was improved at the owner's request. Similarly, working conditions and the overall treatment of the foreign laborers was fair.

Their tranquillity was interrupted by a sad event. One of the young Jewish

women, Marysia, longed to go back to Poland. In vain her coworkers advised her against it, but she persisted and seized the first opportunity that came her way. One of the Ukrainian women had mental problems, and the manager decided to send her back to Poland. She was incapable of traveling alone. Marysia volunteered to accompany her. Somehow, when they reached Poland, the mentally deranged Ukrainian woman recovered sufficiently to denounce her companion as a Jew. Marysia was shot on the spot.

Tragic in itself, this incident created a panic among the rest of the Jewish women. Without telling that they suspected the origin of the Polish women, the management tried to calm them. Gradually, and at times by accident, the Jewish women learned about each other's origin. In Gold-Kowadło's case, the truth came out inadvertently. It happened when one evening she sat on her bed, looking at her husband's photograph. Hela, a young woman who was next to her, fainted. In this photo Hela recognized her former teacher, a Jew, Eliasz Gold. This is how she learned about Miriam Gold-Kowadło's secret and that Stefania Wodzinska was not her real name. Hela and Miriam, now Stefa, became close friends.

One day Hela came to her friend, pale and agitated. She whispered, "They know about us, this is the end!" "In what way? How?" Gold-Kowadło murmured. "Hans spoke to a policeman, and I heard him say, 'Doppelte Papiere' [double papers]," Hela replied. Gold-Kowadło could not rest. She went to Hans, the head of the camp, and asked, casually, "What did the visiting policeman want?" Hans answered, "He wanted us to get double paper to reduce the escaping light from the windows."⁵³ (This was a preventive measure against air raids.)

On balance, it seems that on the Aryan side women had more options than men—and tried to take advantage of them. These options could affect the quality of life of Jewish men and women and occasionally lead to survival. At the same time, however, towering over the survivors' wartime struggles was the effectiveness of the Germans' power, a power immune to all efforts to halt the murder of Jews.

Notes

A shorter version of this chapter was presented at the conference, "Polish-Jewish Relations during the Holocaust and After: New Perspectives," at Yeshiva University, New York, April 2000.

1. This essay is adapted from chapter 6 of *Resilience and Courage*, by Nechama Tec (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, in press); reprinted by permission of Yale University Press.
2. Lucy Davidowicz, ed., *A Holocaust Reader* (New York: Behrman House, 1976), 67.
3. Władysław Bartoszewski, "Egzekucje publiczne w Warszawie w latach, 1943–1945" (Public executions in Warsaw), *Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Niemieckiej w Polsce* 6 (1946): 221–224; Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 236; Tatiana Berenstein et al., eds., *Eksterminacja Żydów na ziemiach polskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej*

- (Jewish extermination in Poland during Hitler's occupation) (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1957), 121–122.
4. Bartoszewski, "Egzekucje publiczne w Warszawie," 211–224; Philip Friedman, *Their Brothers' Keepers* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1978); Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, *He Who Saves One Life* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971); Szymon Datner, *Las sprawiedliwych* (The forest of the righteous), (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1968).
 5. Zygmunt Klukowski, *Dziennik z lat okupacji, Zamojszczyzna* (Wartime diary from Zamość) (Lublin: Lubelska Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1958); Stanisław Ziemiński, "Kartki z dziennika nauczyciela w Łukowie z okresu okupacji hitlerowskiej" (Notes from a teacher's diary from Łuków during Hitler's occupation), *BŻIH* 27 (1958): 105–112.
 6. Ludwik Hirszfeld, *Historia jednego życia* (The story of one life) (Warsaw: Pax, 1957), 407.
 7. Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 45.
 8. The following are a few of the many sources that describe what life was like for the Poles under the Nazi occupation: Władysław Bartoszewski, *1859 dni Warszawy* (1859 Warsaw days) (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1974); Władysław Bartoszewski, *Straceni na ulicach miasta* (Perished in the streets of the city) (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1970); Ludwik Landau, *Kronika lat wojny i okupacji* (War chronicle), 3 vols. (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1962) (Landau perished while trying to survive by passing); Stefan Korboński, *The Polish Underground State: A Guide to the Underground* (Boulder, Colo.: East European Quarterly, 1978); Stanisław Wroński and Maria Zwolakowa, *Polacy i Żydzi, 1939–1945* (Poles and Jews) (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1971).
 9. In Germany fewer women were arrested and persecuted than men. See Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 80; Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 335. Koonz shows that in Germany before 1938 no Jewish woman was arrested. Court records show that, in general, of those accused and found guilty during the Third Reich, 20% were women and the rest were men (*ibid.*, 334); Koonz also emphasizes that women had much more freedom to move around than men (*ibid.*, 327).
 10. Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, 23.
 11. *Ibid.*, 218 (ff. #3), 184.
 12. Tola Szwarc, personal interview with author, Tel Aviv, 1995.
 13. Alexandra Sołowejczyk-Guter, personal interview with author, Bat-Yam, Israel, 1995.
 14. Ania Rud, personal interview with author, Tel Aviv, 1995.
 15. *Ibid.*
 16. Alexandra Guter, personal interview with author, Bat Yam, Israel, 1995.
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. Moses Lederman, personal interview with author, New York, 1979. Lederman told me that when he boarded a train for Warsaw he stumbled over the body of a young Jew. No one could have taken this young man for a Jew. Lederman later learned that this man had tried to leave for Warsaw but had the misfortune of being recognized by a Polish high school friend, who immediately denounced him. Without any questions a German shot him on the spot. For additional similar cases, see Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, 42–69. Also, Dr. Zyskind, a young surgeon, had a perfect

- Aryan appearance. Less than a mile from his destination to a forest bunker, he was recognized by a Belorussian policeman who was his classmate in public school. The policeman denounced him and Dr. Zyskind was executed after considerable torture, during which he revealed no secrets. This case is described in Nechama Tec's *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 58.
19. Guter, personal interview.
 20. Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, 33–34.
 21. Sofia S. Kubar, *Double Identity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 46–48.
 22. Rachel Adler, "The Jew Who Wasn't There," in *On Being a Jewish Woman: A Reader*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 14; Celia S. Heller, *On the Edge of Destruction* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 158.
 23. Heller, *On the Edge of Destruction*, 227.
 24. Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life Is with People* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952), 132.
 25. Gershon Bacon, "The Missing 52 Percent: Research on Jewish Women in Interwar Poland and Its Implications for Holocaust Studies," 56; and Paula E. Hyman, "Gender and the Jewish Family in Modern Europe," 33, both in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
 26. Nechama Tec, "Sex Distinctions and Passing as Christians during the Holocaust," *East European Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (March 1984): 113–123.
 27. Guter, personal interview. Similarly, when Grynberg's mother stayed with her Polish friend in Warsaw, this friend refused to take him in because she was afraid that as a boy he was much more likely to bring on disaster (Henryk Grynberg, *Childhood of Shadows* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1969), 79.
 28. Sandra Brand, personal interview with author, New York City, 1994; Sandra Brand, *I Dared to Live* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1978), 61–66.
 29. Vladka Meed, personal interview with author, New York City, 1994; Jeanette Nestel was painfully aware of the problems created by Jewish "sad eyes" (Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 03/6550). My parents also kept telling me not to have "sad eyes": "Pretend you are happy. Think about happy things. You must try to have happy eyes! No sad eyes" (Nechama Tec, *Dry Tears: The Story of a Lost Childhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 68.
 30. Nechama Tec, *In the Lion's Den: The Life of Oswald Rufeisen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Oswald Rufeisen survived the war by hiding, by passing, and by becoming a forest partisan.
 31. Among the many discussions on this issue are Bernard Goldstein, *The Stars Bear Witness* (New York, Viking Press, 1949), 201, 211, 216, 222; Nathan Gross, "Aryan Papers in Poland," in *Extermination and Resistance: Historical Records and Source Materials*, ed. Zvi Szner (Haifa: Ghetto Fighter's House, 1958), 1: 79–86; Nathan Gross, "Unlucky Clara," *Yad Vashem Bulletin* 15 (1964): 55–60.
 32. Guter, personal interview.
 33. Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, 213 (ff. #15).
 34. Eva Safczycka, personal interview with author, Tel Aviv, 1995. Safczycka's married name is Strich, but she wanted to be remembered by her maiden name.
 35. *Ibid.*
 36. See Kubar, *Double Identity*, 9–14; Lena Kuchler-Silberman, *One Hundred Children* (New York: Doubleday, 1961); and Arnold Szyfman, *Moja tułaczka wojenna* (My wartime wanderings) (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Obrony Narodowej, 1946).
 37. Leah Silverstein, personal interview with author, Washington, D.C., 1997; Leah

Silverstein, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive, Washington, D.C., transcript of interview RG-50.030*363.

38. Tec, *Defiance*, 24–40.
39. Eva Galer, personal interview with author, New Orleans, 1992. Galer mentions teenagers who helped feed their families by working on surrounding farms; for other examples of teenage boys who worked on farms, see Jack Kuper, *Child of the Holocaust* (New York, Doubleday & Co., 1968), 68–97; Henryk Grynberg, *Childhood of Shadows* (London, Valentine Mitchell, 1969), 45–48; Samuel P. Oliner, *Restless Memories: Recollections of the Holocaust Years* (Berkeley, Calif.: Judah L. Magnes Museum, 1986).
40. Chava Grinberg-Brown, personal interview with author, Bnei Atarot (Moshav, farm, near Tel Aviv), 1992.
41. *Ibid.*
42. For a description of my personal black-market involvement as a buyer and seller, see Tec, *Dry Tears*, 148–153, 165–184; about local black-market activities of young Jewish boys and one girl, see Joseph Ziemian, *The Cigarette Sellers* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Lerner Publications Company, 1975).
43. Rina Eitani, personal interview with author, Herzlia Pituach, Israel, 1995. There are inconsistent conclusions on whether women or men were more likely to extend help to Jews. See Frances Henry, *Victims and Neighbors: A Small Town in Nazi Germany Remembered* (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1984), 104; Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 335; Tec, “Sex Distinctions.” Perhaps gender and the offer of help varied with many other factors.
44. Zvia Rechtman-Schwarz, personal interview with author, Tel Aviv, 1995; Ida Fink, personal communication, 1998 (Fink spent part of the war as a Polish laborer in Germany, and knew about two Jewish men who reached Germany disguised as Poles).
45. Galer, personal interview.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.* Also a fascinating account about survival as Polish laborers in Germany is Ida Fink’s memoir, *The Journey* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1992). Published as a novel, it represents Fink’s personal wartime survival as a passing Jew.
50. Galer, personal interview.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Miriam Gold-Kowadło, personal interview with author, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 03/1181.
53. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 16

Some Issues in Jewish-Polish Relations during the Second World War



ISRAEL GUTMAN

Beginning in the 1980s, a series of discussions and international meetings were held in Great Britain, Israel, Poland, and the United States. These conferences revolved around the complex of questions and controversies relating to Polish-Jewish relations and the Polish-Jewish historical perspective. While many considered these past conferences to be exchanges of opinions among scholars—a Polish-Jewish dialogue—they have been, until recently, encounters between two contending camps.

Jan Błóński, a distinguished Polish scholar in the field of literature, described this situation of conflicting camps implicitly in his 1987 essay, “The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto.”¹ In his essay, he characterized the Polish-Jewish dialogue as a group of deaf people who did not listen to one another, but spent their time mobilizing contradictory arguments against the other. In light of this illustration, I believe there has been recognizable progress in the last few years. First, we have the appearance of works by young, qualified scholars. Second, and not less important, there is now little difference between Polish and Jewish scholars with regard to their approach, the merit of their research, and their attempt at objectivity on a wide array of topics.

On the one hand, I have the feeling that we have considerably improved the level of specific topics, arrived at a more common understanding, and are less affected by sentiments and prejudices. On the other hand, we are still not ripe enough to analyze and evaluate long periods of time and to comprehend the whole, often different and painful, phenomenon of Polish-Jewish relations.

In speaking broadly about the problem of wartime Polish-Jewish relations, Antony Polonsky refers to Mordekhai Tenenbaum, the leader of the Jewish fighting organization in the Białyostok ghetto, and Emmanuel Ringelblum, the great

historian and chronicler of the Holocaust era.² In this context, I would like to add Itzhak Katsnelson, the poet and mourner of the Warsaw ghetto. All of these men, while in the midst of the catastrophe, placed blame on the Poles and, to some extent, Polish society for the Jews' tragic fate. I suppose that the sharp accusations of the victims reflected their deep despair during the last stage of total destruction. Yet, in their lifetime, these contemporary chroniclers of the Holocaust were not fully aware of the meaning of National Socialist ideology and of the fact that the total annihilation of European Jews had become a Nazi state policy.

Nazi rule was not the same in every occupied area of Europe. Some countries acquired a degree of limited autonomy. For instance, Denmark enjoyed a much more moderate system of occupation than occupied France and Belgium did, while the occupation government in Holland was far more oppressive than that in France or Belgium. On Polish soil, including the central region named the General Government, all forms of internal autonomy were denied. In Poland the Nazis established a regime of absolute occupation in which all offices, except for those at the lowest level, were in German hands. Without any autonomy, the Poles did not possess the means to act on the minor possibilities of influencing the conditions under which Jews lived. Only in Poland and in the east were the Jews concentrated in ghettos from the first stages of the war.

This structure, which the Germans established, included the most severe treatment for saving Jews. Many Poles and Polish families paid with their lives for rescuing Jews. Despite these conditions, more Poles have received Righteous Among the Nations medals than any other nation. Nevertheless, a permanent tension has existed between Poles and Jews since the Second World War. Some Jews, among them many of Polish origin, believe that the Poles have always been endemic antisemites and that this extreme negative attitude was a critical element in the ultimate fate of the Jews during the interwar period, the war years, and the war's aftermath.

I do not take seriously the assumption that all Poles have always been and continue to be active or endemic antisemites. Moreover, this supposition is simply incorrect. Paradoxically, this over-generalization is, I would argue, similar, in its totality, to antisemitism. As a matter of fact, historians of Polish Jewry never adopted this extreme judgment. Bernard Weinryb, in his book on the social and political history of Jews in pre-partition Poland, stated that "to look upon many of the anti-Jewish trends of those times [Middle Ages] as pure and simple antisemitism, would mean judging the past according to present-day values and concepts, rather than according to the very different ideas prevailing at that time. In reality, this would be a misunderstanding or even falsifying the past."³ And Raphael Mahler, the outstanding historian of Polish Jewry, wrote that anti-Jewish excesses in Poland during the Middle Ages "were comparatively weaker than in central Europe."⁴

The Jews in medieval Poland functioned as an estate within the complex structure of the country's population. Their status was determined by the rights

and rules granted by the kings and the upper class of the nobility. Their status was also affected by the intolerance and discrimination of the church, restrictions in trade, exclusion from the craft guilds and restrictions from residing in certain towns. But again, according to Salo Baron, Jews who had come to Poland from the west and the east reached primacy among Ashkenazi Jews by the end of the sixteenth century.⁵ They enjoyed a wide scope of internal autonomous life in social, religious, and spiritual aspects. Despite all their hardship in the economic sphere, Jews were never expelled from Poland.

We could say that the sharp decline of Polish Jewry coincided with the downfall of the Polish state and monarchy. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, we can observe that, alongside the Polish struggle for freedom, there appeared a long-term effort to consolidate different groups or social classes within Polish society into a united nation. This process, which entered its last stage at the end of the nineteenth century, is divided into a few essential chapters.

In general, the great mass of Polish Jewry fell outside the process of assimilation on Polish lands. Only a relatively small group assimilated into Polish culture. These included wealthy merchants, bank possessors, and industrialists, including famous names and families like Kronenberg, Bloch, Epstein, Bergson, and Wawelberg. Other assimilationists were members of the Polish intelligentsia and pioneers in the field of Polish culture, who, as a rule, had severed themselves from Jewish society, Judaism, and from the Yiddish language. They integrated quickly into Polish society, and some even entered the ranks of the Polish nobility. After one or two generations, the offsprings of assimilationist families lost their connection with Jewish life, although in some cases, philanthropists paid attention to the needs of poor Jews.

Advocates of Polish positivism, who represented a spiritual and socio-political trend in Poland after the painful defeat of the 1863 uprising, attempted to provide a solution to the Jewish question. They recognized the Jewish masses as a potentially legitimate and needy strata of Polish urban society. But there were preconditions. The Jews had to do away, the Polish positivists argued, with many of their traditional principles, habits, and components with regard to their lifestyles. The Jews were not prepared for such a step, or in any case, not on a large scale. The transformation of such an old and deep-rooted culture could not be achieved in a short period of time. The Polish positivist program for Jewish reform was perhaps the only serious project by an organized group to integrate the Jews into Polish society. Not only were the results meager and disappointing, due to the slow pace of Jewish acculturation and integration, but a few of the leading Polish positivists crossed lines into the antisemitic camp. Thus the persistence of Jewish separateness emerged in the late nineteenth century as a crisis and as the main source of Polish radical antisemitism. The leaders of the Polish nationalist camp, who established the National Democratic Party in 1897, considered the Jewish problem as one of the main questions facing Polish society.

The core of modern Polish and popular antisemitism was partly based on the traditional negative image of the Jew, but was mainly a component of the

new Polish national consciousness. According to the new vision, which Roman Dmowski and his National Democratic movement advocated, there was no place in Polish society for the mass assimilation of Jews. Only a few Jews who departed from the Jewish environment and identified themselves with anti-Jewish tendencies could be recognized as Polish nationals. The first anti-Jewish national boycott was proclaimed in 1912 and constituted Roman Dmowski's revenge against the Jews of Warsaw for refusing to vote for him or other anti-Jewish candidates in the elections to the Fourth Duma (Parliament) in czarist Russia.

We nevertheless cannot deny the existence of a real Jewish problem in Poland. By the 1930s, 3.3 million Jews, most of whom lived in urban areas, were concentrated in a few segments of the economy. These narrow economic branches required renovation and development. The reform of Jewish occupancy, role, and capacity in Polish economic life was an urgent challenge that had been neglected for generations and was completely misunderstood. The Jewish economic role was used as an antisemitic tool in interwar Poland.

In Poland, many accused the Jews of composing a national body with separate political interests. What was in fact the "nationalism" of Polish Jewry? Actually, from the last decade of the nineteenth century, Polish Jews passed over a gradual metamorphosis from a religious ethnic group into a society open to new social, political, and ideological ideas in Europe. What is commonly referred to as Jewish nationalism is Zionism. But in contrast to other minorities, Zionism made no territorial claims on Polish soil. The Zionists sought to build their homeland in Palestine and to emigrate from Poland. This was, of course, in some way promoted and greatly supported by the extreme and less extreme antisemites in Poland.

Let me also briefly deal with other organizations and political parties in Poland. The Bund was not a national party. It fought for Jewish cultural autonomy in a future socialist Poland. And the orthodox Jews were generally loyal to the governing power from whom they tried to obtain the maximum amount of freedom in religious affairs, education, and social welfare. And, after all, it would be untrue and unjust to declare that all Poles or all Polish political bodies were supporters of antisemitism. Many individuals from the Polish intelligentsia, liberal circles, and the Polish political left opposed the anti-Jewish stand and attitudes. Józef Piłsudski, the Polish national hero and the strong man of Poland in the years 1926–1935, was no antisemite and did not use antisemitic arguments for political purposes. But, in general, the agricultural crisis in Poland, the totalitarian regimes, the growing antidemocratic inclination, and, especially, improved relations with Nazi Germany from the beginning of 1934 created an atmosphere ripe for antisemitic currents.

While there was no official anti-Jewish legislation in the Second Polish Republic, many institutions and administrations conducted and manipulated a policy of systematic steps directed against the Jews. By the late 1930s, the heads of the government gave their blessings to the economic boycott campaigns. In addition, with the exception of a small group of emigrants to Palestine, no

country was open to Jews. I will not enter into a discussion of the character of Polish antisemitism, which is a very important question, but only state that it had almost no racial elements. But at the beginning of the war, before the Nazi Final Solution, the Polish political parties retained their political programs. And when we are speaking about attitudes toward the Jews, they remain relatively unchanged during the war. With the exception of small groups of socialists and democrats, the majority was more or less anti-Jewish. But being well aware of the realities in and outside Poland, we have the right to ask an elementary question: How long should a people live on a soil, in a country, in our world, and be regarded as unwanted foreigners?

One also has to take into account the attitude and policies of the Polish government-in-exile, which had settled at first in France and later in London. According to our knowledge, the Poles in the government-in-exile were very careful to be perceived as liberals. In the National Council, which acted as a kind of semi-parliament to the government, one and subsequently two Jews were represented. But the Delegatura, inside Nazi-occupied Poland, which served as the underground wing of the Polish government-in-exile, did not have Jewish representation. Moreover, the Delegatura did not include Jews in the ghettos—Polish citizens—in their frame of support and material and moral aid. Prior to the Final Solution (September 1939 to the summer of 1941), about 120,000 human beings were dying from starvation and epidemics. Was there no possibility to send food, especially when mail service was still permitted to the ghettos? No aid from the Polish underground was extended.

The Holocaust has become a universal issue. We try to discover facts and to understand individuals and groups of people in the midst of a great trial. Father John T. Pawlikowski, a person whom I hold in high esteem, has remarked on several occasions (as well as in his contribution to this volume) that because the Poles hated the Germans occupants it was quite natural that they became less antisemitic during the Nazi occupation. This is exactly the same thesis my friend Professor Władysław Bartoszewski has put forth, a man with an impressive record in the aiding of Jews during the war. As a matter of fact, the Poles, indeed, demonstrated a collective solidarity against the German occupiers. This solidarity did not include, however, a unity of national interests between Poles and Jews.

I have had the opportunity to read the whole Żegota archive, which is housed at Yad Vashem in Israel. The documents reveal that Żegota leaders constantly demanded actions against Polish blackmailers. The answer from the underground was always the same: nothing could be done because it was a juridical process—a trial was required—and, given the circumstances of the occupation, it was not possible to carry out investigations. Żegota responded that it would take independent action by writing proclamations that warned of dire consequences for blackmailing Jews.

Poles who aided and saved Jews during the Shoah deserve recognition and high gratitude. It is a great page in the history of Poland under German occupa-

tion and one they should be proud of. But speaking honestly and frankly, it has to be acknowledged that aiding Jews in occupied Poland was never a high-priority activity of the Polish underground.

Years ago, I constructed a table of European underground movements to determine which did more or less for Jews. The Poles do not have a high place in this table. But there is another thing. When it comes to blackmailing and handing over Jews to Germans, there was no contest. Only in Poland did this become a profession. It was a marginal group. But it existed and the question is why the Polish underground failed, with all its means, to confront the *szmalcownicy*?

Not less important is the fact that there were anti-Jewish excesses after the Holocaust: These anti-Jewish acts in postwar Poland were directed against the surviving remnant of Polish Jewry. These included the Kielce pogrom of 1946 and the Communist government's 1968–1969 anti-Jewish campaign that ended with expulsion of the majority of Poland's Jews.

In all that I have said here—and perhaps I am not objective, for I belong to a generation in which it is difficult to be objective—I believe that the Holocaust is a historical lesson. It is already a subject for the university, for the youth, for schools. But it is not such a subject in Poland. So I have a feeling that the Poles have not absorbed the universal, ethical meaning of the Holocaust. This is our mutual task, which should be transformed into a dialogue and mutual understanding.

Notes

This chapter was adapted by the editor from a lecture delivered at a Yeshiva University conference, "Polish-Jewish Relations during the Holocaust and After: New Perspectives," New York, April 2000.

1. Jan Błoński, *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* (Cracow: Wydawn. Literackie, 1994), 12–15.
2. Antony Polonsky, introduction to *Polin* 13 (2000): 5–6.
3. Bernard D. Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jews in Poland from 1100–1800* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982), 133–134.
4. Raphael Mahler, "Antisemitism in Poland," in *Essays on Antisemitism*, ed. Koppel S. Pinson (New York: Conference on Jewish Relations, 1946), 145.
5. See Salo W. Baron's *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), vol. 16, chap. 1.

PART VI



Aftermath

CHAPTER 17

The Cracow Pogrom of August 1945

A NARRATIVE RECONSTRUCTION



ANNA CICHÓPEK

The problem of antisemitic violence in postwar Poland has received considerable scholarly attention in the last two decades. Following Krystyna Kersten's 1981 analysis of the Kielce pogrom, several historical investigations into the subject were published abroad during the 1980s.¹ At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, Polish historians began researching the history of the Jews in the Polish People's Republic, leading to the publication of several studies on Polish-Jewish relations in the immediate postwar period.² In the post-Communist Polish historiography of the 1990s, attention focused on the Kielce pogrom of July 1946, beginning with Bożena Szaynok's 1992 monograph.³ In contrast, the first scholarly monograph on the Cracow pogrom of August 1945 appeared only recently.⁴ In the following essay, I shall reconstruct the events that transpired in Cracow on 11 August 1945, examining their causes and effects and the role they played in the discussion about antisemitism in postwar Poland.

Polish Jewry in the Immediate Aftermath of World War II

Sources indicate that the wave of antisemitism in postwar Poland reached its peak in the years 1944–1946. These acts included, among others, robbery, extortion, and murder. It is, however, difficult to assess the number of victims. According to Israel Gutman, relying on official Polish sources for the beginning of 1946, 351 Jews were killed between November 1944 and December 1945 (including 15 in the Cracow *voivodship*).⁵ And in the period 1944–1947, scholars have found that more than 1,000 Jews were murdered in Poland.⁶ According to contemporary press accounts, the perpetrators of this anti-Jewish violence were mostly simple people, uneducated. The “mob” and “hoodlums” involved appear to have been so-called average citizens: artisans, petty traders, low-rank

clerks, etc.⁷ But archival materials reveal that uniformed officers of the People's Militia (MO) and the Security (UB), or persons wearing Polish and Soviet uniforms, were also perpetrators of anti-Jewish acts.⁸ Killings were also perpetrated by organized groups such as partisan detachments, including the rank-and-file (*doly*) of the radical-nationalistic underground, as well as possibly provocateur detachments of the UB and the Corps of Internal Security (KBW).⁹ Groups of common bandits committing robbery also had a significant share in these murders.

Scholars have noted waves of growing and receding tension between Poles and Jews in the immediate postwar period.¹⁰ The first wave of antisemitic violence occurred in March and April of 1945. Separate murders were committed in the districts of Ostrolecka, Siedlce, and Śniadów, among others, while rumors of Jewish ritual murder appeared in Chełm Lubelski.¹¹ In March 1945 alone, 108 Jews were killed and 9 wounded, according to the official information of the Ministry of Public Security (MBP).¹² The situation worsened in June and August 1945, when serious riots took place in Działoszyce, Przemyśl, and Rzeszów. During the Rzeszów events, the same pattern appeared that would be repeated later in Cracow and Kielce: the rumor of ritual murder provoked people to anti-Jewish actions.

On the morning of 12 June 1945, a militia detachment began searching Jewish apartments on Tennenbaum Street in the city of Rzeszów. Using the discovery of an alleged ritual murder as their pretext, the militia took some Jews to the police station for questioning. Passers-by threw stones, beat the escorted Jews, and proceeded to plunder Jewish apartments. But the case was dropped when the Voivodship Command of the militia argued that the investigation was unwarranted. It declared that the accusation of ritual murder was a politically motivated provocation and ordered the Jews' immediate release without further interrogation.¹³ A few days later another rumor of the Jewish ritual murder of a Christian child appeared in Przemyśl.¹⁴

Tensions increased during the summer of 1945. Already at the beginning of August, leaflets appeared in Radom demanding that Jews leave the town before the middle of the month. The Jewish inhabitants of Przemyśl received similar letters during the same period.¹⁵ Assaults took place in Opatów, Sanok, Lublin, Grojec, Gniewoszków, Raciąż near Płońsk, and other towns. In Rabka, on the night 12–13 August, someone hurled a hand grenade into the hospital for Jewish orphans and "shots were fired at one of the buildings. After some time the same hospital was under fire at night for almost two hours. Owing to the increased security no person was wounded. In a few days, after the third nightly assault, the hospital in Rabka was closed down."¹⁶ On 13 August, anti-Jewish actions in the city of Chełm were described as a pogrom: "A group of disabled [war veterans] numbering four people was stopping Jewish passers-by on the street demanding money and beating them if refused. They also came to the Jewish Committee, beat the Jews there, and threatened the Jewish population. On August 14th, at noon, the same group, . . . accompanied by a Soviet sergeant, started

a pogrom by beating Jews and plundering their property. The pogrom lasted about eight hours. Five people have been severely beaten, and many less severely beaten.”¹⁷ In its August 1945 report, the Section for Aid to the Jewish Population (Referat d/s Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej) stated the following: “In the described month the concern for the safety of life comes to the forefront of current Jewish problems in Poland. For this period is marked by increasingly frequent organized assaults against the defenseless Jewish population, and the number of Jewish victims grows daily.”¹⁸

The Jews in Cracow, April–August 1945

In January 1945, immediately after liberation, the Jewish population in Cracow numbered approximately 500.¹⁹ By May 1945, the number of Jews in the entire province of Cracow reached about 6,415.²⁰ Their number grew rapidly through a constant influx of Jews returning from the east, from camps, and from those Jews who emerged from hiding. Many Jews came to Cracow from neighboring villages and small towns. By the end of 1946, the number of Jews in the city of Cracow grew to 6,637 (including nearly 2,000 prewar inhabitants of Cracow).²¹

In the first days after liberation, the Voivodship Jewish Committee (Wojewodzki Komitet Żydowski) was established in Cracow on 38 Długa Street.²² In addition to providing assistance to the most needy, it created institutions such as shelters, orphanages, kitchens, infirmaries, and schools.²³ The Jewish Religious Union (Żydowskie Zrzeszenie Religijne) was also established in Cracow, in April 1945, which organized religious life for Cracow Jewry. Until 1947, services were conducted at two synagogues in Kazimierz, the old Jewish district of Cracow: the seventeenth-century Kupa Synagogue, on 27 Miodowa Street (with another entrance at 8 Warszauera Street), and the modern nineteenth-century Temple Synagogue, located at the corner of Miodowa and Podbrzezie Streets.

As in other parts of the country, safety was one of the most serious problems for the Jewish community in Cracow. This is how a report by the Cracow *voivode* describes the situation in Cracow in June 1945:

In regards to the attitudes of the Polish population towards the Jews, the remains of the Nazi influences grafted during the occupation still linger. . . . Robberies combined with murdering Jews occur; their motives and perpetrators are usually not found. Nevertheless, their antisemitic background is apparent. . . . In the previous month there were no serious anti-Jewish events in the voivodship, yet there is no evidence that the society’s attitude towards the Jews has changed. . . . An utterly insignificant event, or the most improbable rumor can trigger serious riots. The society’s attitude towards the Jews is a serious problem requiring a constant vigilance on the side of the authorities, and a proper work with the lower level offices.²⁴

According to the above-cited report and others, the situation did not improve in June 1945. We may note that no serious antisemitic events were recorded in the rural and small-town regions in the Cracow province, probably owing to the mass migration of small-town Jews to the city of Cracow. A large city, it was believed, could provide a much greater sense of anonymity and safety than little towns or villages could. But the migration of Jews to Cracow did not bring the expected security; rather, the consequence was a marked increase in tension. In his report for 1–10 August, the Cracow city administrator (*starosta grodzki*) noted the worsening situation. He pointed to the “insufficient supply of food” and the activity of reactionaries.²⁵ These reactionaries supposedly spread rumors that the difficulties were “the work of the Jews that causes discontent, and in some cases riots erupt.”²⁶

The Immediate Cause of the Pogrom

The events of 27 June 1945 constituted the first sign of real danger for Cracow Jewry. What we know comes from a brief note in the statistics of the Fourth Militia Station in the Pędzichów District of Cracow: “At 12:30, a woman suspected of intending to abduct a child was brought to the Militia station. The investigation revealed that the mother had left the child in the suspect’s care. Rumors were started that a Jewish woman abducted the child in order to kill it. The crowd gathered and started shouting against the Jews. The event reached its peak at Kleparski Square where the mob almost demolished Halbreich’s shop. But a militia detachment, which was dispatched immediately, got the situation under control and brought the most active participants to the 4th Station.”²⁷

Market places like Kleparski Square, or the *tandeta* (flea market, today Szeroka Street) near Kupa Synagogue, were particularly dangerous. Many days before the pogrom, sensational rumors were repeated at Kleparski Square about thirteen corpses of Christian children that had been allegedly discovered. By 11 August, the number of victims was rumored to have grown to eighty.²⁸ One of the rumormongers was Honorata Pieprzyk, thirty-eight, a tradeswoman. Attorney Eljasz Grünfeld, a witness in her case, gave the following testimony: “A few days before the riot, . . . together with her neighbor, . . . she screamed, in full voice, threats and insults directed at Polish Jews: ‘They should be all killed; if [the Jews] had such power as the Germans they would have murdered us all’ etc. Sometimes the “*tandeta*” is quiet and their provoking voices were heard very far. . . . This went on uninterrupted for several days, . . . neither the accused nor her companion were assaulted or bothered, and it was clear that their only purpose was to excite the crowd.”²⁹

Groups of hoodlums who gathered at the Kleparski Square flea market on Fridays and Saturdays threw stones at Kupa Synagogue, with the Jews praying there. Such disturbances had been repeated weekly, becoming so dangerous that on 24 June 1945 the Jewish Religious Association issued a letter to the Cracow voivode requesting immediate protection. The letter suggested reinforc-

ing the security posts in front of the synagogue on Fridays from 8:00 P.M. and Saturdays from 7:00 A.M. On 6 August, five days before the pogrom, the Section of External Service (Wydział Służby Zewnętrznej) of the Cracow Militia assigned a two-person patrol to protect the Kupa Synagogue on Miodowa Street.³⁰

On Saturday, 11 August, between 9:00 and 11:00 A.M., Rabbi Mojżesz Steinberg, the rabbi of the Jewish Religious Association, conducted a Shabbat service at Kupa Synagogue. Like previous Saturdays, a group of some sixty hoodlums gathered before the synagogue and started throwing stones in front of the main entrance on Miodowa Street. Because similar incidents were almost commonplace, the praying Jews just chased the attackers away. When stone throwing began again some time later, Jewish soldiers praying in the synagogue ran outside, and “one of them caught a boy throwing stones in the synagogue’s window, and beat him. The boy freed himself and ran away screaming. . . . According to the testimony of Antoni Nijaki, that boy who had been caught and ran away was a scout. The beating of the boy prompted the excited crowd to start anti-Jewish actions. Between 10:30 A.M. and 11:00 A.M., the boy Antoni Nijaki, driven by curiosity, entered the synagogue. Incited by an unknown militiaman, he ran out screaming ‘People, help! They want to murder me!’ which further stimulated the already excited crowd.”³¹

The rumor of ritual murder, a rumor repeated for several days, found its “confirmation” in the scared boy escaping from the synagogue. The traders in Kleparski Square repeated the horror stories about supposedly murdered children. Only now, “eyewitnesses” had appeared.

From the statement cited above, taken from the prosecutor’s statement, we can convincingly conclude that the actions of two young boys constituted the trigger that led to the subsequent pogrom. The first was the boy scout who was admonished for his improper behavior and whose screams drew the crowd from the nearby Kleparski Square flea market. However, the behavior of the other boy, Antoni Nijaki, age thirteen, was crucial for the development of events. He was arrested the same day in the late afternoon and testified twice, on 11 and 14 August. Here is Nijaki’s testimony from 11 August:

On August 11th, around 2:00 P.M. [in fact, it was more likely about 11:00 A.M.] I went to the square to buy cigarettes for resale. At the corner of Starowiślna and Miodowa streets, I was stopped by a man. I recognized him as a Jew because of his accent; he offered me 20 zlotys for carrying a package to his house. I agreed. I put the package on my shoulders and followed the man. The Jew entered the synagogue at Miodowa Street and I followed him inside. In the synagogue I noticed at once a person, also looking like a Jew, who dragged a boy on the floor, approximately my age, holding him under his arms. I don’t know if the boy was alive or not, but I saw his legs weren’t moving, his mouth was tied with a rag, and there was blood on his face on his forehead and cheeks. When I saw it I just threw the package off my shoulders and

started running out. A woman crossed my way, she was also probably a Jew, but I managed to slip from her hands and ran out to the street. The Jew who hired me to carry his package ran after me. I was screaming for help, and at once a crowd of people gathered; one militiaman from the 2nd Station was there too. He went without me into the synagogue, but I don't know what he found there. Later I learned that the militiaman found nothing.³²

While reading this text, it is hard to resist the impression that it is the product of the boy's excited or purposefully directed imagination. His second testimony, given three days later, appears closer to reality:

I was selling newspapers . . . and one fellow approached asking me to carry his package for him; he promised me 20 zlotys. This fellow walked with me for a while and showed me another one, and told me to go with him. That one was a Jew. I followed him. When I was approaching the synagogue I noticed a crowd of people. When I came closer to the synagogue, a Militia man came to me and told me to scream that I was about to be murdered. I started running, screaming "People help, they're murdering me!" People saw me running from the synagogue. . . . In the synagogue I saw some Jews holding a boy with blood on his face, he could be a Jew too. I was scared and started escaping, and I screamed because they told me to; nobody wanted to murder me.³³

Antoni Nijaki underwent psychiatric examination following his interrogation. The results show that he was a healthy adolescent, fully accountable for his words and actions, with good memory and the ability to communicate clearly and comprehensibly. Taking this into account, Nijaki's statements are surprising. Even disregarding discrepancies in details (incorrect time of event, selling cigarettes or newspapers), we have two basically different versions of the event. The first suggests that a murder was actually committed in the synagogue, and the boy's screams were a natural consequence of this discovery. The second version is more reliable, supporting the hypothesis that Nijaki was used to deliberately excite the crowd. Here, the boy states three times that he did not scream on his own initiative but was told to do so. Moreover, he points to a concrete person, a militiaman, who gave him the order. It is also possible that the boy invented the whole story to justify his behavior or that he was forced to testify this way and not another. Similarly unclear is the case of the other boy supposedly covered with blood in the synagogue. Perhaps it was a child participating in prayers, hit by a splinter of glass or a stone thrown in the window?

What we do know for sure is that the screams of the accused were the ultimate trigger of the anti-Jewish riots in Cracow. According to the report prepared for Stalin by the Soviet special services, one more event influenced the course of the events:

[W]hen the crowd gathered before the synagogue, three Poles in military uniforms broke in, caught four Jews, and escorted them to Szewczyk, the officer on duty at the 1st Militia Station. The Poles introduced themselves as the soldiers of the Cracow Military Region (*Krakowski Okręg Wojskowy*) and gave their names: Jan Wasilewski, Tadeusz Perek, and Roman Gacek. They stated they saw the four Jews whom they apprehended murder Polish children in the synagogue. Szewczyk made a report based on Wasilewski's, Perek's and Gacek's statements, released them without further investigation, and arrested the Jews. Then many militiamen began arresting and beating Jews. Thus the Militia by its actions affirmed the provocative rumors.³⁴

Most of the events and names in this report find confirmation in other sources. Therefore, these facts cannot be disregarded, especially because the report's objective was information, and not propaganda. It seems likely that the militiamen paved the way for the angry mob. Such a scenario finds its confirmation in the testimonies of the accused and witnesses. When asked why he acted with such cruelty, one of the accused pogrom participants responded, "Everybody around said the Jews were murdering children. I saw the soldiers were catching mostly Jews, and the old hatred of Jews started boiling in me so I simply let it out."³⁵

As the representatives of the authority and law, these militiamen and soldiers in fact sanctioned violence toward Jews. People felt free to act and relieved of responsibility; if the "authorities" beat and plundered, all could do the same without fear of reprisals. As the prosecution argued in the trial, "The events assumed such extreme scale because particular militiamen and soldiers participated alongside the enraged mob."³⁶

The Pogrom of 11 August 1945

Shortly after 11:00 A.M., the mob attacked the synagogue. The gate was forced open in search of the supposedly murdered Catholic children. The mob demolished the synagogue's interior and trampled on the holy scrolls and religious books. The Jews found inside were dragged to the street amidst yells and curses. The size of the crowd is difficult to estimate. Contemporary reports put the number at approximately one thousand people. This is certainly an overestimation, although during the whole day up to several hundred people could have taken an active or passive role in the events. One of the assailants was Franciszek Bandys, the janitor of the Jewish shelter at 26 Miodowa Street, next to the synagogue. Bandys forced the synagogue's door open and led in the militiamen. He was also responsible for breaking into the adjacent annex where the synagogue's janitor and his sister lived. This is how Bandys describes his participation in the pogrom:

Today at around 11:00 A.M. I went outside the gate of the house at 26 Miodowa Street. I noticed a crowd of people on the street crying "Beat the Jews!" After a while, a few soldiers wearing yellow-and-red facings ran up to me, as well as one Railroad Security officer who mistook me for a Jew and punched me twice in the face. When I explained to him I was a Pole they took me to seek out the Jews. . . . Together with them I went to the annex by the synagogue and we found a Jewess. The soldiers pushed her off the stairs. I helped and screamed, "F— bitch, look where she hid!" Later, together with the militiamen, we beat her up, and then the people on the street took care of her and also beat her.³⁷

All the time Bandys incited the mob and provoked aggression, screaming in the direction of the Jews, "You whores, if Hitler didn't make it through with you we will," "You are on Polish soil and dare to murder Polish children!" etc.³⁸ He was not the only one who behaved like this. Such testimony well illustrates the mood on the Cracow streets on 11 August 1945.

The mob began plundering and demolishing Jewish apartments near the synagogue. The Jewish shelter at 26 Miodowa Street was among the first to fall prey to the rioting, at around 11:45 A.M. The instigator of the events, Bandys, described these events:

I lingered in the backyard. In the meantime the soldiers [the same with whom he broke into the annex by the synagogue] entered the house at 26 Miodowa Street. It houses a shelter for Jews, a school, and two families live there. I immediately followed the soldiers and told them I was the janitor in the building. They summoned me to help them search for Jews. First we went to the basement. I entered first through the small window, and others followed. . . . We found nobody there. . . . With two soldiers and an armed civilian I went to Ptasznik, a Jew who lived on the first floor. I told him to give me his high boots but he refused and only with the help of one soldier I forced him to take off these boots. I took them for myself, they are the ones I wear now. . . . We went to the first floor apartment where the office was, by then I had an ax and a revolver in my hands. There were women from the whole house [gathered by the militiamen and the soldiers] in this apartment.³⁹

A Jewish woman resident describes the event from a different perspective:

Suddenly I heard screams and steps on the stairs. The door to the room where I lived with the others, a total of sixteen people, was forced open, and several people entered our room including four militiamen in the army uniforms, and one very young man in a navy blue uniform. They all had revolvers or rifles in hands; including the civilians. . . . They yelled "Hands up!" and "we'll cut your heads off!" When I tried to say something one of the militiamen yelled "Shut up or I cut your head off." Some of these individuals left for the upper floor leaving with us a guard

of a few civilians and militiamen who started grabbing our things. At that moment our janitor Franek [Franciszek Bandys] burst into the room. He held a revolver and a large ax.⁴⁰

Bandys then demanded that the Jews show him identification papers, and he searched the people and the place, looking for supposed murderers of children. What followed is known from the report of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland: "The apartment was completely plundered. One of the tenants was led to the toilet in the first floor where he was locked together with ten Jews brought from the street. They all were beaten and robbed of everything."⁴¹

Robberies and beatings were recorded in at least a dozen Jewish apartments. A group of civilians and armed men attacked the Jewish hostel for repatriated persons at 3 Przemyska Street. All Jewish families there were beaten and robbed. A similar fate met the tenants of the apartment at 10 Estery Street. Another group of militiamen (or people dressed in uniforms) broke into the tailor's shop at 22 Miodowa Street and beat and robbed a Jew, Falser Mores. According to the testimony of one participant, Franciszek Kucharski, the events took place as follows:

[A]bout 3:00 P.M., together with Richter [a coworker of Kucharski's father], Richter's father and Richter's son, we went to the house at Podbrzezie Street. While in that house I heard shooting on the street. I went to the entrance where already I found the militia going to the roof because they determined the shots came from there. They came back down shortly saying they didn't find anybody. I stood in the entrance for a while together with the militia, and one man said Jews were shooting from the store. The militiamen told me to open the store. There was no glass in the door, only paper, so I put my hand inside. The key was in the lock, I turned it and opened. There was one Jew in the store; I don't know what happened to him because another group of people in military uniforms came.⁴²

The militiamen arrested Kucharski and took him to the militia station. During this event two characteristic episodes were supposed to have taken place: the accused Kucharski supposedly yelled to a young woman in the store, "Why do you work for these sonovabitches Jews?"⁴³ and then, already on the street, he hit the agent of the Cracow City Security Office, Edmund Lukawiecki, yelling "F— you if you side with the Jews."⁴⁴ All Poles who showed sympathy for the Jews or stood up in their defense were exposed to such reactions. Any sign of compassion could be treated as "confessing guilt," which, on that day, meant possessing Jewish origin. The fear of being robbed or beaten stopped many Poles from helping the attacked. Based on the available sources, it is impossible to assess whether and to what extent such help was granted. Likely, most of the witnesses remained passive.

In Kucharski's testimony above, the accused said that when he was inside the house at 4 Podbrzezie Street he heard shots "which sounded like they came

from the street.” Other sources indicate there was an outburst of shooting in the afternoon around Dietla and Podbrzezie Streets. “The Army and the Militia were shot at twice during the cleansing action,” reported the Jewish Press Agency, “first in the house at 9 Pobrzejie St. and then in the house at 16a Dietla Street.”⁴⁵ The NKVD report reads, “During the assault the soldiers of the Polish Army fired several provocative rounds causing the rumors that Jews were shooting.”⁴⁶ On the other hand, *Informator WIN* (a bulletin of the Freedom and Independence organization) contradicted the latter two reports, claiming, “Jews were shooting from the neighboring houses using revolvers and even one machine gun.” Unfortunately, this is an event in which it is very difficult to interpret who, when, and why the shooting started during the Cracow pogrom. The inadequate sources and types of documents at our disposal make answering many questions difficult. We must remember that after the war, guns were accessible to almost anyone. The rumors that Jews were shooting spread momentarily, and this prompted the militia to start searching buildings. These searches had many features of common robbery under the pretense of checking the tenants’ IDs and searching their apartments.⁴⁷

The exceptionally active participation of militiamen and soldiers in the Cracow events of 11 August 1945 is characteristic. It is significant that among twenty-five accused, twelve were officers. Instead of performing their duties of dispersing the crowd and defending the attacked, these officers were accused of inciting racial hatred as well as beating and robbing Jews (“They want communism, so I’ll give them communism,” “They defend Jews while only Jews do such things”).⁴⁸ One example is that around 12:30 P.M., the MP corporal, Jan Podstawski, together with two militiamen from the Operation Battalion, Edmund Bartosik and Czesław Hynek, not only failed to help Stanisława Saletnik but severely beat her, causing serious injuries. While beating her, they yelled, “You lousy kike, you murdered two Polish children” and “A kike, beat her if she’s a kike.”⁴⁹ The woman, a Catholic Pole who had been mistaken for a Jew, was heavily beaten, robbed, and then taken to the militia station by the militiamen, who were “performing their duties.” One of them testified that he “acted out of personal motives, namely the hatred towards Jews.”⁵⁰

Another militiaman, Bolesław Skrzypek, together with his friend, the militiaman Józef Bednarczyk, arrested Hilel Kleiner, whom they met on the street:

On August 11th, at about 5:30 P.M., I was near Niekierska Pharmacy on Starowiślna Street and I met a friend, also a militiaman. . . . We walked together and came across a citizen who looked like a Jew. Bednarczyk approached him and we checked his ID. It came out that he was indeed a Jew. We took him with us and led him towards the Zablocie Bridge. Since Kleiner did not want to go, I took him by the hand and dragged him, beating him. Then Bednarczyk beat him and so did other civilians who joined us. . . . [We arrested him] because he was a Jew. We led him

towards the Vistula. When we were not far from the bridge, the Soviets approached us. I was disarmed and arrested while Borowczyk escaped shooting at them. Kleiner was released.⁵¹

The victim, Kleiner, testified, “[After I was arrested, the militiamen] started ridiculing me, ‘A Jew is a Bolshevik,’ ‘C’mon with us.’ ‘It’s enough of our blood,’ ‘He’s the one who murdered in the synagogue.’ . . . From the beginning they beat me with riffle butts and kicked me, both Skrzypek and the other guy. Skrzypek told me that they’d take me to the Vistula, shoot me under the bridge, and dump me in the water. . . . They took me all the way to the bridge, and there they started robbing me. Skrzypek grabbed my briefcase from my hand, and I think, my coat too. I don’t remember it that well because I was so beaten up that I was almost unconscious.”⁵²

Even little children were not spared. Around 2:00 P.M., a five-year-old Jewish girl ran out of an entrance on Miodowa Street. Second Lieutenant Józef Konieczny and one civilian ran after her, yelling, “Kill her, she’s a Jewish child.” A witness of this, Józef Drzewiecki, a deputy to the National Council (Krajowa Rada Narodowa), witnessed this event and tried to stop them. But Konieczny “punched him in the face with his fist. He said, ‘What do you sonovabitch care, it’s a Jewish child.’”⁵³ Fortunately for the girl, Major Konrad Gruda, the voivodship commander of the militia, appeared and ordered Konieczny to immediately report to the Second Militia Station. It came out that he was under the influence of a large quantity of alcohol. In fact, many people, especially militiamen, partook in the events while drunk.⁵⁴

There are many descriptions of similar events in which militiamen and soldiers played a prominent role. Undoubtedly, their active participation increased the crowd’s tension and led to even greater aggression. There were several reasons for such behavior of people in uniforms. First of all, they were people springing from similar impoverished circles and driven by the same motivations as the crowd that gathered at the synagogue. Most of them had completed only a seven-grade elementary school, some just four or even three grades. Their attitude was influenced to some extent by their identification with power and the fact of their having arms. Having the means of enforcement, they became particularly dangerous to the Jewish population.

While militiamen were a particularly visible and active group of assailants, they were not the only ones. The crowd consisted primarily of the simple inhabitants of the Kazimierz quarter of Cracow. They were mostly the so-called *lumpenproletariat*, people with no permanent trade or employment, shabbily living in the formerly Jewish apartments. The crowd’s aggression took the form of robberies, the demolishing of apartments, and the beating of Jews on the street. Such was the experience of Hanna Zajtman, a Jew from Cracow:

The anti-Jewish riots on Saturday found a friend and me on Miodowa Street. I noticed that street hoodlums were aggressive towards us. I did not know about the pogrom, and I said I was going to call the police.

They started yelling “Kikes, kikes!” A crowd of some 50 people gathered and surrounded me (my friend was pushed aside,) and they started beating me. I was knocked over, my shoes were torn from me, as was my bag with the sum of one thousand zlotys; they started beating, kicking, beating. I fainted and only came to my senses in the car. I told the Soviet [officer] in the car, “Why did they beat me, I’m not a German,” and I fainted again. I was taken to the 2nd Militia Station from where they called the ambulance. There were five other people in the station including a badly wounded Polish woman. In the ambulance I overheard the comments by the paramedic and the accompanying soldiers who referred to us as Jewish crap that they had to save even though they shouldn’t; that we murdered children and should be all executed. We were taken to the St. Lazar Hospital at Kopernika Street. First I was taken to the operating room. Right after my surgery a soldier appeared who claimed that after the surgery he would take everyone to prison. He also beat one wounded Jew waiting for his surgery. He kept us under the unlocked gun and didn’t even let us drink water. After a while three railway workers came, and one of them said, “It’s a scandal that a Pole does not have enough courage to hit a defenseless man,” and he hit a wounded Jew. . . . The women who stood behind the door, including nurses, said they were only waiting for the surgery to be over to tear us into pieces. . . . From 1:00 P.M. to 7:00 P.M. we had to wait in the operating room, and only then were we given beds. . . . The nun who tended to me said, “When they brought you here I thought, well, they gave it to her, that crooked Kike.”⁵⁵

This distressing account does not need comments. It testifies to the attitudes of soldiers, railway workers, health-care professionals, and even a Catholic nun.

We do not have sources on the medical aid provided to the riot victims. We only know that the beaten and wounded persons were transported to the St. Lazarus Hospital on Kopernika Street. In the report of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland we find information about five people “seriously wounded [of whom] four are in the hospital at the surgical ward, and one is in the hospital in the building of the Jewish Committee at 38 Długa St.”⁵⁶ I was able to establish the identity of only one victim brought to the surgical ward on 11 August 1945.⁵⁷ Only the rare photographs from the funeral, with five coffins clearly visible, give us an estimate of the number of people killed. However, on 14 August, the Polpress (Polish Press Agency) reported two people killed, identified as Roza Berger and another Jewish woman whose name was not known.⁵⁸ *The American-Jewish Year Book* from 1946 reported that a third person, sixty-two-year-old Anszel Zucker, was murdered during the Cracow riots.⁵⁹ The death of Roza Berger is the only one confirmed in all sources. About other victims we have no information.

The testimonies of witnesses indicate that anti-Jewish sentiments were on

the rise in all of Cracow. Some reported, for instance, that stall keepers at Szczepanski Square wanted to close shop and “go beat the Jews.”⁶⁰ The actual riots occurred mainly on Miodowa, Starowiślna, Przemyska, and Józefa Streets, in the Kazimierz quarter. The skirmishes were most intense between 11:00 A.M. and 1:00 P.M., calming down around 2:00 P.M., only to gain strength again in the late afternoon. At around 4:00 P.M., a fire broke out in the synagogue on 27 Miodowa Street. The reporter for the Central Committee of Jews in Poland testified, “In the afternoon a crowd broke into the Kupa Synagogue at Miodowa Street. The interior was burned. The perpetrators carried the scrolls out to the street and piled them up into a pyre that was burned in the German way.”⁶¹

We know little about the authorities’ role during the Cracow riots. Around noon, an officer of the City Security Office (MUBP, Miejski Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego) escorted Janina Nowicka, who had been beaten by the crowd for supposedly murdering Polish children, to the Second Militia Station. The militia sergeant, Kosowski, and the deputy chief of the station, Susula, went to the place of the alleged crime, but found no evidence of wrongdoing. Having observed the dangerous situation developing around Miodowa Street, they returned to the station and immediately sent a cable to the authorities requesting reinforcement. The Operation Battalion was dispatched, and the voivodship commandant of the militia, Major Konrad Gruda, arrived at the scene.

Pacifying the riots and restoring order took several hours. It was conducted jointly by the Voivodship Command of the Militia and the Voivodship Security Office in Cracow (Second Department) with the three-hundred-strong Sixth Special Regiment of the Internal Security Corps. In the evening, the First Armored Regiment of the Internal Security Corps aided in the dispersion of rioters in Kazimierz.⁶²

Aftermath

The tension in Cracow lasted for a few more days, with rumors about Jewish ritual murder continuing to spread. On Sunday, 12 August, at 8:30 A.M., three soldiers came to the Kupa Synagogue. One of them said, “In the very place where he stood he had found children’s corpses. One child was probably recognized by some woman and taken away. In the basement, to the right side, there was blood that was removed by the authorities. The children’s corpses were probably burned in the hearth that was destroyed.” Riots erupted again: “the mob again burst into the same synagogue and demolished the remnants of the furniture. The desecrated and torn scrolls were on the floor.”⁶³ On the same day, 12 August, in the Cracow-Podleze train station, two young Jews “were stopped by railroad security officers who checked their IDs and searched them looking for guns. The officers asked them why they were going to Cracow and said, ‘If you want to drink Catholic blood you should be removed from this world.’ The witnesses testified that Soviet soldiers tried to calm down the excited crowd, they shouted, dispersed the attackers, and drew their revolvers.”⁶⁴ A leaflet distributed

in Cracow further incited hatred toward the Jews: "Beat the Jews. For the murdered Polish children."⁶⁵

Between 11 and 13 August, twenty-five people were arrested and incarcerated at the St. Michal Prison on Senacka Street. Following the interrogations of the accused and the witnesses, as well as the gathering of evidence, the investigation was completed on 1 September, and documents were passed on to the military prosecutor of the Cracow District. Between October 1945 and February 1946, the Fifth Military District Court in Cracow sentenced ten persons to prison terms of between six months and seven years. The highest sentence of seven years was given to Franciszek Bandys, who escaped from the Wronki Prison, where he had been placed in January 1946.⁶⁶

Conclusion

The events described above were a consequence of many processes occurring in Polish society after the war, and their explanation requires a detailed analysis of a multitude of factors. These include the disintegration of the state structures after the war, civil war, the identification of the Jews with communism (*Żydokomuna*), five years of Nazi propaganda, social demoralization, and the fear of losing material benefits (by returning Jewish property). Yet we should consider the main factor influencing the attitudes and motivations of the perpetrators. An analysis of the sources suggests that the main reason for the events was neither political prejudice nor economic prejudice, but the stereotypical image of the Jew murdering Christian children, an image deeply rooted in social conscience. In the testimonies of the accused, the motive of revenge for the alleged Jewish murder of Polish children in the synagogue recurred. Let us quote again some of the statements:

Q. What was the reason that you acted with such bestiality?

A. Everybody around said that the Jews were murdering children. I saw the soldiers were catching mostly Jews, and the old hatred of Jews started boiling in me so I simply let it out.

Q. What did people say about the reasons of that shooting?

A. They said Jews were beaten because they murdered children in a synagogue, that the militia found corpses of slaughtered children in the synagogue, that a boy had escaped from under the knife, all in blood, and he notified the militia.⁶⁷

The amazing readiness to believe the rumors of Jewish ritual murder was a result of certain social conditions. Cracow's Kazimierz quarter, Jewish until the war, was almost entirely settled by the Cracow poor and newcomers after liberation. It is enough to examine the list of accused. With the exception of one officer and two persons who completed middle school, all of them were uneducated. They included workers, tradesmen who completed only three or four

grades of elementary school, and one illiterate. The women were mostly widows with no livelihood. The frustration caused by poverty, meager living conditions, and the low level of education created among the inhabitants of Kazimierz an environment that was extremely responsive to antisemitic slogans. Also, the many years of fear and the lack of security during the long Nazi occupation had to be compensated for in some way. One spark was enough to release uncontrolled aggression. Even the most irrational superstition, which would have had a minimal response during peace time and in a stable political and economic situation, could serve as a detonator. We shall also note that many participants were under the influence of alcohol.

The question arises of whether or not there was a purposefully prepared provocation in Cracow. It appears that such a provocation was not necessary for the outbreak that occurred on 11 August 1945. Still, for incitement to succeed, the conditions described above had to be in place. The authorities pointed to provocation by "reactionaries." Conversely, the Polish underground accused the NKVD of instigating the riots. However, there is no basis to accept one view or the other, and no documents have survived (and possibly none ever existed) that support either claim.⁶⁸ Even the similar scenario of the riots in Rzeszów, Cracow, and Kielce proves nothing (a child accuses Jews with attempted murder; the rumor of ritual murder excites the mob; militiamen and soldiers provoke and prompt rioting). A closer look at the history of pogroms, which were not all the result of deliberate provocation, nonetheless reveals similar patterns. The active participation of soldiers and militiamen on the side of the attacking mob testifies to their morale rather than to a purposeful, premeditated plot to incite a pogrom.

A year later the Kielce pogrom of 4 June 1946 was much more dramatic and had a much broader resonance. It is true that the Polish and foreign press gave much attention to the Cracow pogrom, that Polish governmental authorities condemned the perpetrators, and that many political and social organizations issued appropriately condemnatory resolutions. But the impact of the Cracow pogrom is hardly comparable with the outcry that occurred after the Kielce events. Political significance was attributed to the Kielce events that became an important symbol in the ideological war between the authorities and the opposition. Also, the post-Cracow wave of emigration was much smaller than that which occurred after Kielce. Jewish emigration from Poland reached a few thousand after August 1945, mostly from the Cracow region, whereas tens of thousands of Jews from all over the country left Poland after the Kielce pogrom. The 1946 emigrants passed their knowledge of the Kielce pogrom along, and it became a commonplace in Jewish memory.

Compared to the Kielce events, the Cracow pogrom was not significant enough to become perceived as a separate event. It appears in the literature only as a part of the broader phenomenon of postwar antisemitism in Poland, in which the Kielce pogrom is the culminating point. All these factors combined meant that the memory of the Kielce pogrom had an enormous impact on shaping the

negative image of Poland, whereas the Cracow events only augmented the notion of postwar antisemitism in Poland.

Notes

1. Krystyna Kersten's article appeared as "Kielce—4 lipiec 1946 r.," *Tygodnik Solidarność* 36 (4 Dec. 1981). Studies appearing abroad in the 1980s include Michał Checiński, *Poland: Communism, Nationalism, Antisemitism* (New York: Karz-Cohl Publishing, 1982); Michał Borwicz, "1944–1947," *Puls* 24 (1984–1985); and Israel Gutman, "Żydzi w Polsce po II Wojnie Światowej—akcja kalumni i zabójstw," *Przegląd prasy zagranicznej* 2, no. 3–4 (1986). For an early study of Jews in postwar Poland, see Paul Lendvai, *Antisemitism without Jews* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971).
2. Krystyna Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm: Anatomia półprawd, 1939–1968* (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992); Bożena Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946* (Warsaw: Bellona, 1992); Józef Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową," in *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce*, ed. Jerzy Tomaszewski (Warsaw: Wydawn. Naukowe PWN, 1993); Jan T. Gross, *Upiorna dekada: Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i komunistów, 1939–1948* (Cracow: Universities, 1998); Natalia Aleksion, "Nielegalna emigracja Żydów z Polski w latach, 1945–47," *BŻIH* 3–4 (1996).
3. The works on Kielce include Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach*; S. Meducki and Z. Wrona, eds., *Antyżydowskie wydarzenia kieleckie 4 lipca 1946 roku: Dokumenty i materiały* (Kielce: Urząd Miasta Kielce, 1992); Tadeusz Wiącek, *Zabić Żyda: Kulisy i tajemnice pogromu kieleckiego 1946* (Cracow: Oficyna Wydawn. "Temax," 1992); "Anatomia pogromu: Rzeszów 1919, Kielce 1946," *BŻIH* 4 (1996). For brief descriptions of the Cracow pogrom, see Marc Hillel, *Le massacre des survivants en Pologne, 1945–1947* (Paris: Plon, 1985); Gross, *Upiorna dekada*; and Julian Kwiek, *Żydzi, Łemkowie, Słowacy w województwie Krakowskim w latach, 1945–1949/1950* (Cracow: Księgarnia Akademicka, 1998).
4. Anna Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie 11 sierpnia 1945 roku: Próba rekonstrukcji* (Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 2000).
5. Gutman, "Żydzi w Polsce po II Wojnie Światowej," 400–405.
6. Israel Gutman, Alina Cała, and Józef Adelson, among others, agree on this figure.
7. Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową," 401.
8. In the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw, Poland (hereafter cited as AŻIH), see *Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej* 66–76 (1945) (hereafter cited as *Biuletyn ŻAP*). On the events in Raciąż, see, in the Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw (hereafter cited as AAN), zespół Urzędu Rady Miasta, URM, Office of the City Council, sygnatura 5/133, Murder in Bydgoszcz.
9. For more on this subject, see M. Korcuć, "Oddziały prowokacyjne UB i KBW w Małopolsce," *Zeszyty Historyczne WIN* 8 (1996).
10. Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm*, 110–112.
11. *Ibid.*, 110.
12. AAN, zespół Ministerstwa Administracji Publicznej (MAP), sygn. 786.
13. The description of these events is based on AAN, zespół Komitet Centralny Polskiej

- Partii Robotniczej (KC PPR)—Sekretariat, sygn. 295/VII-199, kartka (k.) 28–29a; AŻIH, sygn. 301/1320, relacje.
14. A ŻIH, zespół Prezydium Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce (hereafter cited as CKŻP), sygn. 303/24.
 15. A ŻIH, *Biuletyn ŻAP* 60–70 (1945).
 16. A ŻIH, zespół Prezydium CKŻP, sygn. 303/24, k. 179–189.
 17. A ŻIH, zespół Prezydium CKŻP, sygn. 303/24, k. 179–189.
 18. A ŻIH, zespół Prezydium CKŻP, sygn. 303/24, k. 179–180.
 19. Małgorzata Kostecka, “Z dziejów ludności żydowskiej Krakowa w latach 1945–1947” (M.A. thesis, Jagiellonian University of Cracow, 1997), 30.
 20. A ŻIH, zespół Prezydium CKŻP, sygn. 303/24, k. 179–189.
 21. Kostecka, “Z dziejów ludności żydowskiej,” 30.
 22. The Voivodship Jewish Committee was initially called the Provisional Committee to Aid the Jews (Tymczasowy Komitet Pomocy Żydom).
 23. Kostecka, “Z dziejów ludności żydowskiej,” 30.
 24. State Archive in Cracow, Poland (hereafter cited as APKr), zespół Urząd Wojewodzki (UW) II 905—sprawozdanie sytuacyjne wojewody Krakowskiego za miesiąc czerwiec 1945 (rękopis) [Report on the situation in the Cracow province for the month of June 1945 (handwritten)].
 25. Official propaganda used the term “reactionary” in reference to all opposition groups in Poland during that time, including pro-Home Army organizations and the rightest National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne).
 26. APKr, zespół UW II 923.
 27. APKr, zespół UW II 923—wykaz statystyczny Komendy MO w Krakowie.
 28. Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe (Central Military Archive), Warsaw (hereafter cited as CAW), sygn. 1265/336, k. 122–133, Bill of indictment, 5 September 1945.
 29. CAW, sygn. 859/322, k. 6, testimony of Eljasz Grünfeld.
 30. *Ibid.*
 31. CAW, sygn. 1265/336, k. 122–133.
 32. CAW, sygn. 767/322, k. 46, testimony of Antoni Nijaki, 11 August 1945.
 33. *Ibid.*
 34. “Raporty z Polski,” *Karta* 15 (1995): 31–32, Soobszczenije Sieliwanowskogo NKWD SSSR Berija, d.98 (336–337a).
 35. CAW, sygn. 767/322, k. 23–24, protocols from the interrogation of Franciszek Bandys, 11 August 1945.
 36. CAW, sygn. 1265/336, k. 122–133.
 37. CAW, sygn. 767/322, k. 23–24.
 38. CAW, sygn. 1265/336, k. 70–73, postanowienie o pociągnięciu do odpowiedzialności karnej Franciszka Bandysa.
 39. CAW, sygn. 767/322, k. 22.
 40. *Ibid.*
 41. Julian Kwiek, “Wydarzenia antyżydowskie 11 sierpnia 1945 r. w Krakowie. Dokumenty,” *BŻIH* 1 (2000): 25.

42. CAW, sygn. 767/322, protocols from the interrogation of Franciszek Bandys, 13 August 1945.
43. CAW, sygn. 1265/336, k. 74–75.
44. *Ibid.*
45. A`IH, *Biuletyn ŻAP* (1945).
46. “Raporty z Polski,” 31.
47. CAW, sygn. 767/322, k. 36, description of events from the transcript of Kazimierz Rafa’s testimony.
48. CAW, sygn. 1265/336, k. 117–118, postanowienie o pociągnięciu do odpowiedzialności karnej Stanisława Jedyłowicza.
49. CAW, sygn. 1265/336, k. 76–81, postanowienie o pociągnięciu do odpowiedzialności karnej Jana Podstawskiego i Edmunda Bartosika.
50. CAW, sygn. 1265/336, k. 76–81.
51. CAW, sygn. 767/322, k. 43, protocols from the testimony of Bolesław Skrzypek.
52. CAW, sygn. 767/322, k. 43.
53. CAW, sygn. 853/322, k. 6, protocols from the interrogation of the witness Michał Drzewiecki, 21 August 1945.
54. CAW, sygn. 1265/336, k. 115–116, postanowienie o pociągnięciu do odpowiedzialności karnej Kazimierza Malewicza.
55. A`IH, sygn. 301/1582, relacja Hanny Zajtman spisana 20 sierpnia 1945.
56. Kwiek, “Wydarzenia antyżydowskie,” 26.
57. Porucznik Jerzy Kuriański, zastępca komendanta wojewódzkiego MO w Krakowie.
58. *Rzeczpospolita* 218 (1945): 3, which states: “In Wolnica, criminals shot a 55 year-old Jew, Bergerowa [Roza Berger]. . . . Across the street from the Power Plant [?], someone split the skull of an unknown Jewish woman.”
59. *The American Jewish Year Book* (Philadelphia: American Jewish Committee, 1946), no. 5707, vol. 48, 336–337.
60. Kwiek, “Wydarzenia antyżydowskie,” 26.
61. *Ibid.*
62. Archiwum Urzędu Ochrony Państwa, Cracow, sygn. 3k, III: 34–35.
63. Kwiek, “Wydarzenia antyżydowskie,” 26.
64. *Ibid.*
65. CAW, sygn. 767/322, k. 96.
66. AAN, k. 135–136, wykaz spraw rozpoznawanych przez Wojskowe Sady, w których zapadły prawomocne wyroki skazujące za prześladowania Żydów w czasie od 2 lutego 1945 do 23 lutego 1946.
67. CAW, sygn. 767/322, k. 36, zeznania oskarżonego Kazimierza Rafy.
68. There exist only suggestions in, among others, the testimonies of Antoni Nijaki in Cracow and W. Błaszczuk in Kielce. See Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach*, 32, testimony of W. Błaszczuk; and CAW, sygn. 767/322, k. 46, testimony of Antoni Nijaki, 11 August 1945.

*The Impact of the Holocaust
on Jewish Attitudes
in Postwar Poland*



BOŻENA SZAYNOK

Any description of the Jewish community in postwar Poland must begin with two figures. Before World War II, there were about 3.5 million Jews in Poland. In July 1946, at the postwar population peak, the Jewish population of Poland numbered approximately 250,000. These figures most profoundly illustrate the tragedy that befell Polish Jews during the Shoah. The Jews who managed to survive required not only financial aid but, due to their traumatic war experiences, psychological support as well. Researching the Jewish community in the years 1947–1949, Irena Nowakowska recorded the following observations about Polish-Jewish survivors: “They were people who either came out of hiding and, after years of living illegally, could declare their Jewishness, or people with horrible experiences in ghettos or concentration camps, or repatriates from the Soviet Union. It was a crowd moving around, unsettled, and scared. These people were not coming back to their homes or families because these no longer existed. It was a group that had survived a cataclysm.”¹

Many Jewish survivors emerged after the war in bad physical condition. In a 1945 article in the Jewish newspaper *Dos naye leben*, the following description is given of the Jewish community in Poland: “Most of the Jews saved from the Destruction were not able to work. Medical examination showed that a third of the survivors had TB and required long and intensive treatment.”²

It is also important to take into account the Holocaust survivors’ psychological stress. The horrible experience left them with a sense of being wronged and abandoned. Post-traumatic stress syndrome was present with its characteristic features. As the young Polish sociologist Barbara Engelking has written,

“the imprint of death and fear of death, . . . the sense of guilt (the survivor guilt), . . . psychological numbness, . . . [and] suspicion of false comforting . . . need to be understood.”³

The discussion of numbers and psychological trauma form the point of departure for analyzing the Jewish population in postwar Poland. The Shoah determined Jewish attitudes and expectations for the future. For Jews returning from hiding, from the ghettos or other places, a fundamental question was whether to emigrate or remain in Poland, a choice that depended on many factors. When they returned to their prewar places of residence, often in small towns, they brought with them the twin legacies of antisemitism and the Holocaust. Jakub Egit, the president of the Jewish Committee in Upper Silesia after the war, described the mood of the Jewish population in 1946: “How badly disappointed were the lucky ones who returned to their old homes: No relatives, no friends, the house destroyed; there weren’t even tombstones left at the old cemetery.”⁴

Jews returning to their homes often were met with a hostile reception by their Polish neighbors. Many Jews recall the first question their prewar neighbors asked: “Are you still alive?” As Halina Birenbaum recalls, “After returning to their birthplaces [Jews] could not find any of their kin, and their former Polish neighbors, especially in little towns, did not express joy that they were back.”⁵

As is now well known, some returnees fell victim to assaults or murder, particularly by Poles who had acquired Jewish property during the war. According to data for the Kielce Province, about thirteen Jews were killed in June 1945. In ten of the cases, the murders were related to property disputes.⁶

The return to places of birth also constituted the moment Jews realized the scope of the Nazi annihilation. A person whom I interviewed in Israel in 1995 recalled, “During the war I knew what happened to Polish Jews but I did not realize the extent of the Destruction. After the war was over I came to Cracow where a part of my family used to live. I met those who survived the Destruction. Only when I saw those few people gathered in one room did I really understand what happened to Polish Jewry during the war. This handful was all that was left of the families of many generations that had lived in our house before the war.”⁷

The difficult moment of return played a large role in determining Jewish decisions about the future. Those who decided to stay often evoked the argument of historical retribution. As Jakub Egit wrote in his book on the beginning of Jewish settlement in Lower Silesia, “The idea is . . . to create a new life where Hitler wanted to destroy all life.”⁸ For others the decision to stay was linked to the need for continuity in the places where Jews had lived for generations. “We wanted to perpetuate Jewish culture,” one Bundist said in explaining his decision to remain in Poland after the war, “so that it existed and developed, so that young people learned in Yiddish and knew Yiddish. This was our ideology.”⁹ For others, returning to Poland entailed no doubt: “I returned on the first transport. Maybe someone survived, maybe I will find somebody. . . . Such was that

irrational, subconscious hope. I had lived here and I left here, so I also had to come back.”¹⁰

In postwar Polish-Jewish political life, two groups advocated rebuilding a Jewish life in Poland: the Bund and the Fraction of the Polish Workers' Party (*Frakcja Polskiej Partii Robotniczej*), composed of Jewish communists working in the Jewish community. The anti-emigrationist ideology of these Jewish activists was motivated by a conviction that Jewish life could be restored after the Shoah and that the new political system could play an important role in this reconstruction. The age-old tradition and history of Jews in Poland should not be broken, it was argued.

According to Irena Nowakowska, the proportion of Jews ideologically committed to remaining in Poland was small. “The Jewish community in Poland became divided,” Nowakowska wrote in the late 1940s. “On one side there is a trend to emigrate, on the other, to assimilate. The Jewish group representing the option of remaining in Poland is small.”¹¹

There were various reasons for the Jews to emigrate. This is how the Central Committee of the Jews in Poland (*CKŻP*), the main representative body of Jews, presented the issue in its memorandum to the British-American Commission:

The basic reason for the emigration trend is the fact that many Jews . . . cannot live in the places that are the cemeteries of their families, relatives, and friends. . . . For the remnants of savagely murdered families it is hard to decide to go on with living where they had lost their dearest ones. One of the understandable results of this is a drive among the Jews who survived the slaughter to resettle to a new environment and build their future there. They prefer to start anew in a completely different surrounding. . . . The Jews who were alone after the slaughter have some family abroad, mostly in Palestine, where a large wave of emigration arrived from Poland before the war. These lonely Jews want to join them after the horrible shock. They want to become again normal people. . . . Because of their experiences and the tragedy of Jewish people, the inclination to create a national home in Palestine has strengthened among a large part of Polish Jews. A large part of the Jews, especially the young, want to tie their lot to the development and the future of Palestine. Their deep ideological motivations are one of the main reasons for emigration. It is an undeniable fact that murdering democratic activists, security officers and Jews still occurs in Poland. . . . However, we stress that the instances of antisemitism are not the main cause of the trend to emigrate. . . . As we have demonstrated, the main reasons are deeper, objective, ideological and psychological.¹²

The Zionists, themselves internally divided between several parties, as well as activists in the religious parties, characterized Poland as a Jewish cemetery and advocated emigration. There is no doubt that at the conclusion of the war the advocates of emigration exercised an enormous influence on the Jewish

community, for the program of the Zionist parties responded to the needs of many Jews and included such slogans as independence for Palestine and the need for Jews to have their own state. David Meller, one contemporary Zionist who was active in postwar Poland, wrote in 1949, "Everybody wanted to be as far as possible from the places with the ashes of the murdered, the dearest ones; everybody wanted to escape the memories, to be like other people, and have his own nook, his Homeland."¹³

The Holocaust shaped attitudes toward emigration not only immediately after the war, but also in the following years. We must remember that, in addition to the Holocaust, which undoubtedly generated pro-emigration attitudes, the spread of antisemitism and the postwar political situation also served as emigrationist motives. When we analyze the actions of that section of the Jewish population which decided to stay in Poland, we see that many of them subsequently emigrated. Many Jews who committed themselves to remaining in Poland immediately after the war nonetheless joined their co-religionists in two waves of emigration. These two periods followed a trickle of emigration immediately after the war when, between the end of war and June 1945, over 50,000 people left Poland. First, after the Kielce pogrom, over 70,000 Jews left Poland in the period July–December 1946. Second, 28,000 Jews registered for emigration after the proclamation of Israeli statehood and the Polish government's decision to permit Jewish emigration. The data for some towns indicate that about 30 percent of their Jewish citizens wished to leave Poland.¹⁴

The postwar Jewish community articulated three currents: to remain in Poland, to emigrate, or to assimilate. The third attitude concerns both the assimilated Jews and those undergoing assimilation. In Irena Nowakowska's above-mentioned study, the assimilationist option was presented in various ways. The experience of the Holocaust played a significant role in this group. The respondents pointed to the small number of Jews, the lack of means to rebuild Jewish life, and the wartime experience. These Jews retained Polish names, were married to non-Jewish Poles, and were in the process of abandoning ties with Yiddish and Judaism. Paradoxically, the social and political development in postwar Poland strengthened both the pro-emigration and pro-assimilation positions. As Nowakowska concluded in her study, the deep social processes that were influencing the postwar Jewish group were "the function of three main factors: (1) the biological destruction of the large Jewish community during the occupation; (2) the socio-economic structural changes in Poland; and (3) the establishment of a Jewish state." Thus, the three critical changes that occurred during and after the Second World War led to the dissolution of the very elements that had tied together prewar Polish Jewry. It is worth quoting Nowakowska's analysis at length:

The surveyed Jewish group is characterized by its residual state. . . . Socialism removes the special social situation of the Jews. The social changes have removed the structural separateness of the Jewish group. . . . As a result of economic and social changes the institutions of the Jewish group are deteriorating. The function of religion, once very important, now

diminishes. . . . In socialist Poland, the most important process for the Jews is the process of deep assimilation. . . . Endogamy drops, and with it, the distinctiveness of the Jewish group. . . . Alongside the intensive assimilation . . . the equally important and characteristic process occurs of developing Jewish nationalistic ideology. Both the process of assimilation and the process of developing Jewish nationalistic ideology erode the Jewish group in Poland. . . . These processes are very deep and affect Jews in all social strata.¹⁵

Despite the structural changes that were profoundly influencing postwar Polish Jewry, the community was not uniform. Not only was it divided on differing views regarding the future of Jews in Poland, but there were also differences in degrees of affiliation with the Jewish community.

Registering with the Jewish Committee was voluntary and constituted a confirmation of one's nationality. However, alongside those assimilationists who decided not to register with the community, there were many self-identifying Jews who were left out of the statistics of the Jewish committees, probably around 10 to 20 percent. The very act of registering with the Jewish Committee was, on some level, a declaration of belonging to the Jewish nation. For others, it was simply an affirmation of one's desire to remain a Jew in Poland, while for others it was just an acknowledgment of their Jewishness with no implications of belonging. There were also motivations outside of identity issues, such as the intention of finding family or friends or the opportunity to get material help or food. Some subsequently regretted having registered. A student from Lodz, for example, responded to Nowakowska's survey, "I registered in the Jewish committee as soon as I came to Poland. I wouldn't do the same today."¹⁶

Anti-Jewish persecution in postwar Poland brought about two responses. First, some chose to, in a sense, remain in hiding by retaining their wartime "Aryan" identity.¹⁷ For other Jews, postwar antisemitism led to a return to Jewishness and created bonds "of moral nature with the people of Jewish origin. As if the enormity of death tied them with the oppressed group."¹⁸

The Holocaust years led to a changing role for religion in the postwar Jewish community. Many who strayed from observing Jewish law pointed to the war years as the causal factor. The following views recurred repeatedly among Nowakowska's respondents: "I was religious before the war, but the tragedy I went through took my faith away from me" or "I don't believe! If there were any kind of higher power it would never allow to burn and poison so many millions of people for the sins they never committed."¹⁹

The experience of the war similarly brought changes in some Jews' political outlook. Many argued that the postwar remnant was too small to pursue the same political options that were popular before the war. A good example of this is the Bund, one of the most influential political groups in interwar Poland. In the postwar reality, the Bund's political program was anachronistic. Eugenio Reale, the Italian ambassador to Poland, observed in his report for the years 1945–1946, "Despite its close links with the PPS (Polish Socialist Party) and

its unconditional adherence to the government, the Bund is going down.”²⁰ The result was that many Bundists and Jewish Communists joined the ranks of left-wing Zionist parties.

Some changes affecting all citizens of postwar Poland played an important role in the transformation of Jewish life in Poland. These included the loss of Poland’s prewar eastern territories and the consequent relocation of populations to the newly acquired western region. With the establishment of the new Polish-Soviet border, groups of Jews in the east who were prewar Polish citizens decided to leave their original places and move to Palestine or Poland. From the fall of 1944, by the agreements between the PKWN (Polish Committee of the National Liberation) and the governments of the Soviet western republics of Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine, Jewish inhabitants of prewar eastern Poland had the option of relocating to the new Polish state. And in July 1945, the Soviets granted prewar Polish citizens living inside Soviet Russia the right to declare Polish citizenship. This was followed by the evacuation of Poles and Jews from Soviet Russia into Poland. The repatriation agreement began at the beginning of 1946, and within six months, about 130,000 Jews arrived in Poland. Almost all of these Jews were directed to the new western areas of Poland: Lower Silesia and Szczecin. In addition, large-scale relocations of the Jewish population took place within Poland. The principal directions of these movements were also to Lower Silesia as well as from small towns to big towns. This restructuring of the Jewish community had an impact on emigration to Palestine.²¹

The consequences of this demographic shift varied. Among the destructive ones were, as Krystyna Kersten has maintained, “uprooting, destruction, emigration from the local homeland, [and] loss of interpersonal bonds.”²² On the other hand, “they were accompanied by the process of developing a new type of national bond. . . . The bond with the national community was intensified, [and] the issue of national identity gained importance.”²³ Thus, a major consequence of population shifts and antisemitism was the strengthening of Zionist leanings, leading to the conviction, shared by the majority, that only a Jewish state can protect the Jewish people. It came to be that, for many, the possibility of “being a Jew” was identified with developing the state.

The formation of cooperatives became popular among the new Jewish communities in Lower Silesia and Szczecin. These cooperatives became not just workplaces but also places of socialization where Jews could speak Yiddish. Most Jews were reluctant to take up employment in large Polish factories where the sense of alienation was strong. The trend among postwar Polish Jewry was to form communities with the surviving Jewish population, many of whom were similarly left without families, friends, or relatives after the war.

Conclusions

The Second World War strengthened national consciousness among the peoples of prewar Poland. As Kersten has insightfully observed, “While sharp-

ening national divisions and bringing them to the surface, the war also shaped a specific form of Polish national consciousness. Because threatened, the nation became the predominant category of thinking and the main subject of activity [during the war]. Thus . . . national belonging assumed fundamental importance. One's life had depended on whether one was a Pole, a Jew, a Ukrainian, or a Lithuanian; however it was not he who decided [his national identity] but the authorities endowed with the power of deciding life and death. This common fate, imposed from the outside, cemented bonds and bred solidarity within groups."²⁴

The war years thus formed the context in which the problem of postwar Polish-Jewish relations arose. After the war, Poles and Jews constituted two communities with two different experiences. The result was not only an intensified sense of belonging to one's nation. Michał Borwicz noted the process by which the Jews as a community disappeared from the awareness of the Poles. The isolation of wartime Polish Jewry led to a situation in which "the attitude towards [Jews] ceased to be one towards the people and became an attitude towards a nation."²⁵ Another writer described the generation infected with death and the impact it had on the level of morality among Poles after the war, a level that tolerated a high degree of anti-Jewish excesses.²⁶ The issue of Polish owners of prewar Jewish property also motivated Poles to assault and murder Jews after the war. In addition, the political situation of Poland began to influence Polish-Jewish relations; this is, however, a separate aspect of the postwar reality.

The Holocaust constituted a dramatic rupture in the history of Polish Jews. Those surviving Jews who remained in Poland were also marked by the Shoah, which, to a large extent, predetermined their fates. We cannot understand the attitudes, actions, and political activities of postwar Polish Jewry without referring to the war period. While the postwar reality played a role in shaping the fate of Polish Jewry, the Holocaust undoubtedly contributed to uncertainty, fear, and the difficulty of adapting to the new postwar reality. Even if attempts to reconstruct postwar Jewish life found supporters, the majority of Jews were not able to find roots in Poland. Thus, in addition to the experience of the Holocaust, the consolidation of Communist rule and the establishment of Israel further prevented the revival of Jewish life in Poland after the Shoah.

Notes

1. Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska, *Żydzi polscy (1947–1950): Analiza więzi społecznej ludności żydowskiej w Polsce powojennej* (Warsaw: Wydawn. Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 1996), 59.
2. Michał Grynberg, *Żydowska spółdzielczość pracy w Polsce w latach 1945–1949* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawn. Naukowe, 1986), 15. Grynberg provides information gleaned from *Dos naje lebn* 13 (1945).
3. Barbara Engelking, *Zagłada i pamięć* (Warsaw: Wydawn. IFIS PAN, 1994), 226–232.

4. Jakub Egit, "Rok życia żydowskiego na Dolnym Śląsku," *Nowe Życie* jednodniówka, 15 July 1946.
5. Quoted in Ewa Koźmińska-Frejłak, "Nieudana odbudowa: Powroty," *Midrasz* 7–8 (1998): 8.
6. Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw (Archive of New Records, hereafter cited as AAN), Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej, or Ministry of Public Administration, at AAN (hereafter cited as, MAP), sygn. 786, s. 17.
7. Interview with H. Sz. conducted in Israel, September 1995.
8. Jakub Egit, *Tsu a naye lebn* (Wrocław: Nidershlezye, 1947) (Yiddish translation, Frydka Rotem).
9. Interview conducted by author in Israel, September 1995.
10. Koźmińska-Frejłak, "Nieudana odbudowa," 8.
11. Hurwic-Nowakowska, *Żydzi polscy (1947–1950)*, 213.
12. AAN, MAP, sygn. 788, s. 51–53.
13. Quoted in David Meller, "Zminionych dni," *Opinia* 50 (15 Feb. 1949), 4.
14. State Archive in Wrocław, Poland, Voivodiship Committee of the Polish United Worker's Party (Komitet Wojewódzki PZPR), sygn. 74-V–48, s. 22–23.
15. Hurwic-Nowakowska, *Żydzi polscy (1947–1950)*, 211–215.
16. *Ibid.*, 32.
17. Irena Nowakowska, "Jeszcze o kwestii żydowskiej," *Więź* 7–8 (1986).
18. *Ibid.*
19. Hurwic-Nowakowska, *Żydzi polscy (1947–1950)*, 102–103.
20. Eugenio Reale, *Raporty, Polska 1945–1946* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1991), 243.
21. We must also remember that some groups of Jews did not decide to return to Poland after the war and remained in the Displaced Persons' camps in Austria, Italy, and the occupation zones in Germany. In the DP camps they waited for an opportunity to move to Palestine.
22. Krystyna Kersten, "Ludzie na drogach: O przesiedleniach ludności w Polsce 1939–1948," *Res Publica* 4 (October 1987): 61.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Krystyna Kersten, *Między wyzwoleniem a zniewoleniem: Polska 1944–1956* (London: Aneks, 1993), 11.
25. Michał Borwicz, paper presented at the International Conference on Polish Jewry at Oxford, England, 1984.
26. Edmund Osmanczyk, "Dramatyczne lata 1945–1946," in *Kalendarz Żydowski, 1986–1987* (Warsaw: Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego PRL, 1987), 161–173.

Jewish Responses to Antisemitism in Poland, 1944–1947



NATALIA ALEKSJUN

The experience of anti-Jewish violence in Poland profoundly affected the daily lives of Holocaust survivors in the immediate postwar period. Shlomo Hershenhorn, who headed the Office for Aiding the Jewish Population (Referat do Spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej), formed in August 1944, argued that tackling the acute problem of providing protection to Jewish survivors was even more urgent than providing aid to Jewish children or camp survivors.¹ Yitzhak Zuckerman, one of the leading figures of the Zionist movement in Poland, a member of Dror, and a representative of the Central Committee of the Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce, or CKZP), established in the fall of 1944, described violent antisemitism as the most important element of the postwar Polish reality.²

This chapter examines the effects of anti-Jewish violence on Polish Jewry from the time of the liberation of eastern Poland in late 1944 to the consolidation of Communist rule in 1947. The survivors, using the Holocaust as their reference, reacted to various anti-Jewish excesses as one step removed from genocide. With the trauma of the Holocaust deeply seared into their psyches, both individuals and communities developed strategies for coping with a sense of physical danger. Ultimately, the Jewish experience in postwar Poland led in many instances to the decision to emigrate.³

I shall thus analyze both individual and communal responses to antisemitism in postwar Poland and their effects on the Jewish perspective on and participation in the political events in the country. I will also examine the strategies that the survivors, their institutions, and their representatives employed to deal with antisemitism.⁴ On an individual level, anti-Jewish violence significantly influenced survivors' decisions about their future and their identity. On a communal level, violent antisemitism largely shaped the behavior of major

internal Jewish institutions as well as molded the ways in which Jewish politics related to the power structure in Poland in the years immediately following World War II.

Old and new elements, thrust forward by the postwar political and social milieu of the Communist takeover in Poland, shaped postwar antisemitism. True, postwar antisemitism contained many attributes of traditional Jew-hatred. Ever present, religious antisemitism found its most brutal expression in accusations of Jewish ritual murder, most prominently in the case of the pogroms in Cracow (11 August 1945) and Kielce (4 July 1946).⁵ Such accusations also occurred in the cities of Bytom, Białystok, Otwock, Szczecin, Bielawa, and Legnica. Moreover, some pamphlets disseminated immediately after the war repeated the call for an anti-Jewish economic boycott.⁶

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the context of anti-Jewish violence changed significantly. Indeed, Polish eyewitnesses of the Shoah serve as the background to understanding postwar antisemitism.⁷ Demoralized by the war, certain elements in Polish society blamed and targeted the Jews. This tense, confrontational, and hostile mood resulted from the encounters between Jews and gentiles within the context of the political situation of the Communist consolidation of power in Poland in the years 1944–1947. Although the Jews no longer constituted a visible minority, many Poles perceived them as unduly influential in the new Communist-dominated government. The stereotype of the *Żydokomuna* (Judeo-Communist) became a hallmark of antisemitic propaganda in the postwar period. Last but not least, at the roots of anti-Jewish hostility lay the fear that survivors would demand the return of their property.⁸

Eruptions of violent antisemitism fluctuated in intensity during this period of time and reached their peak in a pogrom perpetrated in Kielce on 4 July 1946, which left 42 Jews murdered and many more injured. Brutal violence was also characteristic of the period, with grenades thrown into orphanages and women and children killed.⁹ While an exact estimation is impossible, from several hundred to 1,500 Polish Jews were killed between 1945 and 1947.¹⁰

The Decline of the Jewish Community in Poland

Far from a monolithic community, the Jewish community in postwar Poland consisted of several groups, shaped by their different experiences during the war. It is estimated that between 50,000 to 120,000 Polish Jews survived in Nazi-occupied territory. These included those who endured the war in hiding, those who disguised themselves as non-Jews, those who fought in partisan units, and those who suffered in Nazi concentration camps. However, the majority of Polish-Jewish survivors endured the war years in the Soviet Union. In January 1946, before the mass repatriation of Polish citizens from the Soviet Union, there were 86,000 Jews registered in Jewish committees in Poland. After the repatriation of about 136,000 Polish Jews from the Soviet Union in the spring and summer of 1946, the records of the CKŻP from that summer indicate that there were

240,000 Jews in Poland. By the spring of 1947, the number of Jews in Poland declined dramatically to 90,000 due to mass migration in the aftermath of the Kielce pogrom.

Individual Responses: Dilemma over Residence and Identity

Individual responses to anti-Jewish violence become apparent in the course of liberation from the Nazi occupation in 1944 and 1945. Jews from eastern Poland, liberated in 1944, emerged as the first group to face dilemmas regarding their future. Some of the survivors who returned to their hometowns managed to recover some level of normalization. For example, in late August of 1944, Moshe Maltz, a survivor from Sokal, Galicia, noted in his diary:

We have reports that a few Jews have returned to Lwów. Others have moved there from the surrounding countryside. Perhaps a fairly large Jewish community will rise there upon the ruins of the old. For a while I thought that my family should think of leaving Sokal and settling in Lwów also. But life in Sokal is beginning to look almost normal. A few Ukrainians who fled from the Russians have returned, and some Poles from West Galicia have also settled there. The Russians are organizing state-operated stores to generate jobs. Our women are doing some “unofficial” business on the black market. One way or the other, the people in Sokal are making a living, and that includes us Jews. I have a job as a buyer with a state-operated agricultural cooperative. So I decided that, at least for the present, we should stay in Sokal.¹¹

Rebuilding Jewish life after liberation was psychologically and practically very difficult. Many Jews were sole survivors of entire families or communities. Thus, Jews returning to their hometowns found themselves in deep depression and despair, facing not only the magnitude of personal loss but also the complete devastation of their community. Maltz noted shortly after liberation, in late July of 1944, “I have begun to venture out a little, but never very far from my house because I still don’t feel strong enough to see the homes of my relatives and friends who are gone.”¹² They lacked clothes, shoes, food, and in many cases a place to live, since their houses were either occupied or destroyed during the war.¹³ Indeed, the survivors faced poverty and psychological despair as well as exposure to an atmosphere of hostility and sometimes mortal danger. Maltz noted in November 1944, only two months after writing his optimistic entry:

Whenever I have business with a Ukrainian in town, I tell my family where I am going and when I expect to be back, because it sometimes happens that a Jew leaves his home to keep an appointment with a Ukrainian and is never seen again. Most of the time I avoid going on such errands by myself; I usually take another person with me. I stay home

after dark because a Jew who is out at night can get a bullet in his back and no one will ever find out who did it. The door of my house is locked securely at all times. If someone knocks on the door, we ask who it is before we open. If we know the voice, we open; if not, we don't. I always carry a couple of guns with me so that I can defend myself.¹⁴

Fear paralyzed the attempts of many survivors to assume their prewar professional activities both in commerce and in the free professions.¹⁵ It also prevented them from some deeply personal, at times religious initiatives, such as tending to mass graves and devastated Jewish cemeteries or visiting previous ghetto areas.¹⁶

The survivors' sense of physical danger also influenced their attempts at tracing relatives in Poland and abroad. Yonas Turkow, a distinguished Jewish actor and Holocaust survivor, organized a special radio broadcast in Yiddish in newly liberated Lublin. Known as "Zuchvinkel fun kroyvim" (Search for Relatives), this program publicized the names and addresses of survivors provided by the Jewish committees as well as by individuals. These lists served a vitally important purpose for survivors, informing their relatives abroad that they had remained alive.¹⁷ However, after receiving hand-written threats, Turkow decided to omit from his broadcasts the addresses and the Christian names still used by Jews who had recently emerged from hiding during the war. Turkow realized that exposing these survivors' Jewish identities proved more dangerous than thwarting their relatives' attempts to trace them.¹⁸

Fear of anti-Jewish violence influenced the structure of Jewish settlement in postwar Poland. Gradually, Jews left their hometowns and moved to bigger cities, hoping to find security and refuge there. Among the smaller towns that Jews deserted in response to threats and murders were Jodłowiec and Kolbuszowa (Rzeszów Province), Klimontów (Katowice Province), Parczew and Piaski (Lublin Province), and Żelechów (Lublin Province).¹⁹ Jews also received threats and were called upon to leave Radom, while in Lublin the Jewish Committee received phone calls demanding that the Jews leave the city within a week.²⁰ In some cases, non-Jewish friends advised them to abandon their hometowns. For example, Toivi Blatt, who escaped from Sobibor and returned after liberation to Izbica (Lublin Province), received the following warning from a Pole with whom he worked in a bakery: "They are looking for you, they are looking. Run, run today to Lublin, before it is too late."²¹

Many Jews who repatriated from the Soviet Union expected that the Nazi atrocities would have discredited all forms of antisemitism in Poland. The unexpectedly hostile reception faced by some returnees caused shock and disillusionment. They realized that after the war Jews no longer constituted a normal part of the social landscape. Samuel Honig, who returned to Poland from the Soviet Union, captured this transformation from hope to despair:

Poland meant to me, a country where I wasn't afraid of anything, a country that didn't have *gulags*. . . . I looked for the name of the station. It

said Przemysł. . . . When most of the people jumped out on the platform, I could see some hostility on the faces of the Polish people. Nobody tried or showed any welcome sign. . . . One of them was loudly saying to the other: "Look how many of 'ours' are coming back." Momentarily, I didn't understand what they meant, but sure enough the other Pole said: "Look, only Jews." At this moment I realized we were not welcome. People in the car were upset. Some were called "dirty Jews," directly, while others heard remarks like: "Look how many still survived and who needs them here."²²

For many Polish Jews, especially those repatriated from the Soviet Union, Lower Silesia seemed to offer the possibility of creating a safe Jewish settlement. Their choice of that region was due to the attitude of the Polish government, the CKŻP, and the relative absence of anti-Jewish violence in this region. In Lower Silesia, where Germans were deserting their property, empty apartments, factories, and farms offered prospects of settlement, employment, and work.²³

On an individual level, exposure to this virulent antisemitism caused two kinds of reactions. Some decided to live as non-Jews, while others turned to Jewish institutions not only for help in securing basic needs such as food and clothes, but also for protection and, eventually, easy exit from Poland. For some survivors, especially those who lived as non-Jews under the Nazi occupation, the return to Jewish life proved a slow process of re-adaptation. Helena Szereszewska, for example, remembered experiencing astonishment at her instinctive decision not to reveal her Jewish identity when she was arrested in liberated Poznań on her way back from the camp.²⁴ Some survivors heeded the advice of Jewish Soviet soldiers not to immediately disclose their Jewish identity for reasons of security.²⁵

In many cases, however, feelings of danger contributed to Polish Jews' hesitation to openly "unmask" and embrace their prewar identity. For many survivors their decision to continue to use their adopted non-Jewish name did not indicate a desire to integrate into Polish society. On the contrary, one of the young survivors admitted, "We were too desperate to get out of Poland. . . . However, I wanted to finish school before we left, and needed another three years to do so. Mother agreed to stay in Poland for this period of time. I went to school under my Polish assumed name as I was too frightened to admit that I was Jewish."²⁶

Even some members of the Zionist parties behaved this way. Yitzhak Zuckerman used his Polish name (Stanisław Bagniewski) and documents while traveling in the country with Zionist missions.²⁷ Some, however, seemed to use their Polish names on a daily basis, much to the dislike of fellow Zionist party members. D. Meller and G. Alpert of Ichud pleaded with the local party leaders in Rychbach (Dzierżoniów) to start a campaign to encourage party members to give up their Aryan papers and return to their Jewish names.²⁸ Commenting on the changes of names among Polish Jews, Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska stated, "Very often name change was motivated by a desire to conceal Jewish origins

for opportunistic reasons, in order to create conditions and opportunities equal to those of Poles.”²⁹

Jewish Communal Life: Organizing Evacuation and Self-Defense

Jewish institutions, especially Jewish committees and Jewish religious congregations, not only served as a point of reference and support for Jews returning to their Jewish identity, but also provided a source of minimal security for those who wished to live openly as Jews. For example, Rena Kant from Jedlicze (Rzeszów Province) still feared revealing her identity after liberation, posing instead as a Polish shepherdess who worked in the villages. Only after she had heard about the Jewish Committee and the Jewish orphanage in Cracow did Rena Kant abandon the village for the Jewish Committee in Krosno.³⁰ Another child survivor, Pinchas Gruszniewski, recalled, “It was already November of 1946. In my village people talked about one woman who had saved a Jew and was robbed by the bandits as revenge. . . . And I told her, ‘I am a Jew. I can’t take it here any longer. I know you hid a Jew, help me too, please.’ She took me to Łomża, my hometown. I was terrified that somebody might recognize me and kill me, because there was not a single Jew there. She took me to Białystok, to the Jew she had saved. For the first time in four years, I found myself among other Jews. I was thrilled, could hardly speak, all shaking of joy that there are still Jews.”³¹

In the years 1944–1947, Jewish institutions played a central role in organizing and supporting the survivors. Secular Jewish committees, religious Jewish congregations, parties, and political organizations not only offered material help to their members but also provided a social framework to people who lost their entire families and social circles.

Those who aspired to leadership positions in the Polish-Jewish community engaged in securing basic needs of the survivors through their organizations as well as through institutions in which different political camps were represented. Many of them, especially the young Zionists, expressed a deep sense of mission.³² In January 1945 the survivors of various Zionist youth movements met in liberated Lublin. Yizchak Zuckerman, who opposed the program of Aba Kovner’s group, Hashomer Hatsa’ir, which insisted on immediate departure from Poland, expressed a sense of responsibility for all survivors, not only members of his own movement: “Could we agree to it [leaving Poland] now, in January 1945, before the war ended in Europe and when masses of Jews from the Soviet Union were about to return to Poland? Could we agree to leave Poland at that time? I think it would have been the greatest stupidity to reduce the forces we could have activated to help the Jews returning from the camps and those repatriated from the Soviet Union. . . . I pleaded with them to leave some members of Hashomer Hatsa’ir behind in Poland, too, because more expatriated would come and there wouldn’t be anyone to welcome and organize them.”³³

Zionists, Bundists, and Jewish Communists, serving as communal leaders, assumed responsibility for securing basic needs and for finding housing and employment for returnees.³⁴ Even though the "Survey of Activities of the Central Committee of the Jews in Poland," published in Warsaw in 1947, did not list the fight against antisemitism among its most important tasks, the leaders of the Central Committee still declared: "During the period [from January to June 1946] the Central Committee was always on the alert trying to intervene with the authorities and to take care of the wounded. It took the initiative in helping to transfer Jews from smaller to larger Jewish centers, to foil reactionary bands from carrying out pogroms."³⁵

Often Jewish committees initiated and organized evacuation of the Jews from smaller cities where their lives were in danger. At the Emergency Meeting of the Presidents of Provincial and Local Jewish Committees, held after the Kielce pogrom, two conflicting opinions prevailed. Some advocated evacuating all the smaller Jewish communities immediately upon the instruction of the CKŻP, while others wanted to leave the ultimate decision in the hands of the local committees. This difference of opinion demonstrates that representatives of the committees assumed responsibility for all the Jews in the country.³⁶ Various Jewish institutions, such as Jewish committees and many *kibbutzim*, tried to organize a minimal measure of self-defense immediately after the liberation. However, until the summer of 1946, resources proved very limited. Only individuals had weapons, with the authorities only reluctantly granting them legal permits.³⁷

In July of 1946, in response to events in Kielce, the CKŻP established its Special Commission (Centralna Komisja Specjalna, CKS), a self-defense force. This Special Commission planned defense of Jewish communal buildings, hired Jewish guards, and dispatched some two thousand weapons to local Jewish communities. Jewish self-defense groups guarded 390 Jewish institutions in different locations.³⁸ Jan Gross rightly stressed the practical and psychological importance of the Special Commission: "The [Special Commission] mattered, because it managed to obtain a special budget and official authorization, which enabled it to deliver funds to local Jewish committees for hiring guards and procuring weapons. Moreover, by quickly dispatching delegates to various Jewish communities to mobilize inter-party cooperation in setting up local special commissions, it placed security matters at the center of the local and provincial Jewish committees' attention."³⁹

The issue of antisemitism also played a central role in the internal Jewish debates in the forums of the CKŻP and its local branches concerning the future of Polish Jewry. Antisemitism became one of very few issues around which representatives of various Jewish parties successfully cooperated most of the time, and it gained a new importance after the Kielce pogrom.⁴⁰

Indeed, the impact of the wave of antisemitic attacks caused even the Communist faction (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR) of the CKŻP to change its position on children's emigration. Previously reluctant to relinquish children who

were in the custody of the institution, the PPR representatives now considered sending a group of Jewish orphans to their relatives abroad. At the meeting of the Communist faction, held in April of 1946, the Communists declared: "Under the present circumstances, we cannot guarantee the lives of the children in the orphanages. . . . We do not believe that it is right to move the children to some country. We shall discuss the matter on an individual basis and make the appropriate decision."⁴¹

Representatives of the Bund and the Jewish Communists in the committees had usually opposed Jewish emigration from Poland. And although they continued to oppose illegal exodus from the country, after the Kielce pogrom, at a meeting of representatives of the Jewish provincial committees, they decided to allocate a sum of one million zlotys to help Jews emigrating en masse from Poland.⁴²

In the aftermath of the Kielce pogrom the Communist representatives cooperated more readily with the Zionists on the issue of self-defense. This cooperation was almost symbolically confirmed by the fact that Yitzhak Zuckerman was nominated the head of the centralized Jewish self-defense organization (*Centralna Komisja Specjalna*).⁴³

Finally, the pogrom in Kielce changed the dynamics within the Zionist camp. Yitzhak Zuckerman recalled that only after the pogrom occurred did he openly inform Adolf Berman about the activities of the Bricha, concerning the Zionist illegal emigration from Poland.⁴⁴

Jewish Reactions to the Political Situation in Poland

Antisemitism also shaped the stand that Jewish leaders took in the general political life of Poland. The Jews initially interpreted the Communists' gradual seizure of power as a guarantee of security for the survivors. Immediately following the liberation, Jewish leaders concentrated their efforts on obtaining legal as well as practical protection against anti-Jewish violence. Initially, the prospects seemed quite promising. The Manifesto issued by the Polish Committee of National Liberation (*Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego*, PKWN) in July 1944 expressed a sympathetic attitude toward the Jews as well as sensitivity to the special needs and problems of the remaining Jewish population: "To the Jews, who were brutally exterminated by the occupiers, will be assured the reconstruction of their existence and their legal and factual equality of rights."⁴⁵

At this early stage, in the summer of 1944, Jewish representatives sat in newly formed official bodies: Dr. Emil Sommerstein (General Zionists) served as head of the PKWN's Department of War Compensation, while three Jewish representatives sat in the State Council (*Krajowa Rada Narodowa*, KRN), including Sommerstein, Adolf Berman (*Poalei Zion Left*) and Michał Shuldenfrei (Bund). By the beginning of 1945, two newly centralized institutions represented Jewish interests vis-à-vis the government: the CKŻP and the Organizational Committee of Jewish Religious Committees (*Komitet Organizacyjny Żydowskich Kongregacji Wyznaniowych*).

In the period following the liberation, Holocaust survivors remained almost entirely dependent on the government for protection. In response to the recurrent murder of Jews throughout the country, Jewish political representatives and their institutions implored the government to take decisive steps against anti-Jewish violence. Jewish delegates intervened with the Ministry of Security, the Justice Department, Foreign Affairs, and with the Ministry of Public Administration.⁴⁶ In March 1946, the CKŻP issued a memorandum to the prime minister of Poland, E. Osóbka-Morawski, demanding that the government take radical steps against the murderers, while lobbying for the passage of anti-racist legislation.⁴⁷ At the same time, it continuously appealed for a state-sponsored campaign against antisemitism to change the social climate in the country.

In reality, however, even those Jewish leaders who supported the direction of political change in Poland could not fail to notice the discrepancy between the intentions enshrined in political documents and the social and political reality concerning compensation to the Jews and the restoration of their rights. The new regime did not offer the Jews solutions to the grave problems that they faced following the violent antisemitic outbursts. Nor did the local administration lack antisemitic bias.⁴⁸ Often, Jewish committees alone reacted to cases in which members of the militia and soldiers participated actively in crimes committed against Jews.⁴⁹

Survivors responded differently to the new regime. Jewish politicians and religious leaders tried to gain sympathy and support from the Catholic Church and Polish liberal circles.⁵⁰ Facing violent antisemitism that the government could not stop, many Jewish leaders, especially Zionists, convinced the officials to allow Jewish emigration from Poland. They used this argument most successfully in the aftermath of the Kielce pogrom. As Yitzchak Zuckerman stated in his memoirs: “Polish Communism—they were the only ones who came out strongly, with decrees, instructions, and orders to the militia to avoid harming Jews; they were the only ones who sincerely wanted to defend Jews, but they didn’t have much power. . . . But after the pogrom in Kielce, what I said was the only correct thing to do: let the Jews leave Poland!”⁵¹

Zuckerman voiced his fervent belief that the Jews should flee Poland following the Kielce pogrom. At an emergency meeting of the CKŻP, he declared, “I had thought that the Jews would live in Poland for a long time. . . . Tomorrow we will say *kaddish* for the victims of the Kielce pogrom and we will make practical decisions.”⁵² Yitzchak Zuckerman and Adolf Berman, who represented the Zionists but in fact spoke for the entire remaining Jewish population, received semi-official consent to open the Polish borders to the Jews.⁵³

The pogrom in Kielce also changed the official attitude with regard to the need for Jewish self-defense. To some extent, the authorities transferred the immediate responsibility for the physical security of the Jews to the Jews themselves. As Zuckerman stated,

For a long time after Kielce, I established my headquarters at the Jewish Central Committee. . . . Someone was on duty there twenty-four

hours a day. . . . We would get the information from the local Jewish committee because self-defense was a central operation approved and recognized by the authorities. We would get warning calls and telephone appeals about the fear of outbursts here and there. In such case, we would put all defense groups on alert. The authorities regarded them as a kind of popular militia for the defense of Jews. The Poles didn't interfere, and no one supervised us. The weapons were given to us in full trust. The Jewish Central Committee was responsible and I was responsible to the committee.⁵⁴

Conclusion

In his recent book, David Engel distinguishes between various groups of Polish Jews following World War II and points to the importance of their different war experiences as well as the different contexts of their liberation. These elements influenced the way the Jews perceived their present and their future.⁵⁵ In the aftermath of liberation, reactions to violent antisemitism emerged as a common and unifying Jewish experience in Poland. This continued antisemitism shaped a worldview that characterized the majority of the Jewish survivors and influenced their communal life and attitudes to more general political issues.

In reaction to anti-Jewish violence, Jewish institutions and organizations assumed a central role in the everyday lives of the survivors. Postwar antisemitism limited the chances for Jewish integration into Polish society. In response to violent anti-Jewish outbursts of the years 1944–1947, the issue of security became a primary concern on the agenda of all Jewish institutions. People involved in these institutions—whether through Jewish committees, political parties, or religious congregations—tried to secure some level of protection for Jews through political intervention. However, most of the survivors as well as their leaders soon lost their confidence in both the ability and willingness of the government to protect them. This realization led to an even stronger need to rally within the collective Jewish structure. Jewish political organizations and institutions assumed full responsibility for the security and the well-being of the survivors, making Jewish institutions vital for the survivors.

As the attempts of the Jewish leadership to protect the Jewish population proved futile after the pogrom in Kielce, an agreement was reached with some members of the government; this opened the borders to almost 100,000 Jews. Through Zionist efforts, more than 140,000 Jews left Poland illegally in the years 1945–1947, and 25,000 to 50,000 more left illegally through individual initiatives.⁵⁶ While a minority of Jews chose to remain after liberation, the combination of the Holocaust and postwar antisemitism suggested to the majority of postwar Polish Jewry that its future existed outside Poland.

Notes

1. Archiwum Urz. du Rady Ministrów (Archive of the Office of the Council of Ministers, hereafter cited as AURM), housed in the Archive of New Records, Warsaw (hereafter cited as AAN), Prezydium Rady Ministrów (Presidium of the Council of Ministers, hereafter cited as PRM), 5/137, pp. 11–14, Report of the Office for Aiding the Jewish Population, June 1945. The Office for Aiding the Jewish Population was established on 8 August 1944 and charged with general help in Lublin and liberated areas. See Michał Szulkin, “Sprawozdania z działalności Referatu dla Spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej w Polsce przy Prezydium PKWN,” *BŻIH* 1 (1971): 75–90.
2. Yitzhak Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, trans. and ed. Barbara Harshav (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 581. The CKŻP oversaw the activities of local Jewish committees and numerous Jewish economic, educational, and health institutions. It included almost all legal Jewish political parties: Bund, Poale Zion-Left and Poale Zion-Right, Ihud, Hashomer Hatzair, and Jewish Communists (members of the Polish Workers’ Party). On the CKŻP and its activities, see, among others, Helena Datner-Śpiewak, “Szkoly Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce w latach 1944–1949,” *BŻIH* 1–3, no. 169–171 (1994): 101–119; Helena Datner-Śpiewak, “Instytucje opieki nad dzieckiem i szkoły powszechne Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce w latach 1944–1949,” *BŻIH* 3 (1981): 37–51; David Engel, “The Reconstruction of Jewish Communal Institutions in Postwar Poland: Central Committee of Polish Jews, 1944–1946,” *East European Politics and Societies* 10, no. 1 (1996): 85–107; and Hana Szłomi, “The Communist Caucus in the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, November 1944–February 1947,” *Gal-Ed* 13 (1993): 81–100.
3. Two different reports presenting the situation of the Jews in Poland listed antisemitism as one of the main reasons for Jewish emigration from the country: (1) Memorandum submitted by the CKŻP to the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry in the spring of 1946 (Memorandum do Komisji Anglo-Amerykańskiej dla Spraw Palestyny) and (2) the Report of the Government Secretary for the Productivization of the Jewish Population, 12 June 1947 (Sprawozdanie z działalności Komisarza Rządu za cały okres); see, respectively, AŻIH (Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw, Poland), CKŻP Sekretariat 25 b; and AAN, Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej (Ministry of Public Administration, hereafter cited as MAP), 287, 2.
4. In this chapter, I shall use the term “antisemitism” to refer to violent attacks on Jewish individuals, groups, and communities.
5. See Anna Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie 11 sierpnia 1945 r.* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2000). For the Kielce pogrom, see Bożena Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946* (Wrocław: Bellona, 1992); Krystyna Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Antynomia półprawd* (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992), 89–142; and Yisrael Gutman, *Ha-yehudim be-polin aharei milhemet ha-olam ha-shniya* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1985), 34–41.
6. Regarding blood libel accusation, see AŻIH, CKŻP, Komisja Specjalna, 303/7, 1947, pp. 8–9, “Report on the activities of the Special Commission of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland,” Warsaw, 30 May 1947. Postwar antisemitic leaflets from Lubartów and Kraśnik are found in AURM, PRM, 5/137, p. 11; Archiwum Państwowe

- w Lublinie (State Archive in Lublin, Poland, hereafter cited as APwL), Urząd Wojewódzki Lubelski (Lublin Provincial Administration, hereafter cited as UWL), Wydział Społeczno-Polityczny (Political and Public Department, hereafter cited as WSP), 50, 19 March 1945.
7. See Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 43–61; Feliks Tych, *Długi cień zagłady: Szkice historyczne* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1999), 52; and Aleksander Smolar, “Tabu i niewinność,” *Aneks* 41–42 (1986). For contemporary sources on the influence of Nazi propaganda in the immediate postwar period, see *Dzieci oskar żają*, ed. M. Hochberg-Mariańska and N. Gruss (Cracow–Łódź–Warsaw: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna w Polsce, 1947); State Archives in Cracow, UW Krakowski (Provincial Administration of Cracow Province), WSP, 931; AURM, PRM, 5/137, pp. 3–5, 9–11 (report for February and May of 1945).
 8. For the best account of antisemitism in the immediate postwar years, see Jan T. Gross, *Upiorna dekada: Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i komunistów, 1939–1948* (Cracow: Universitas, 1998), 61–92; and Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm*, 15–75. Some original antisemitic leaflets are reprinted in *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce, 1944–1968: Teksty źródłowe*, ed. A. Cała and H. Datner-Śpiewak (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1997), 35–37. On the problem of the return of Jewish property, see Adelson, “W Polsce zwanej Ludową” in *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie do 1950 roku*, ed. Jerzy Tomaszewski (Warsaw: Wydawn. Naukowe PWN, 1993), 400; David Engel, *Beyn shihrirur li-vriha: Nitzolei ha-shoah be-polin vemaavak al-hanhagatam, 1944–1946* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1996), 47–48, 51.
 9. For example in June 1945 Jewish patients in the Lublin hospital were killed (AURM, PRM, 5/137, pp. 11–14). In February 1946 four young delegates of Mizrahi were pulled from a truck and killed on their way from Lodz to Cracow to a party convention (YIVO Archives, New York, RG 116, box 296). In August 1945 a grenade was thrown into the children’s house in Rabka (Cracow Province) and then the house was fired on with a machine gun (AURM, PRM, 5/137, p. 68). See David Engel, “Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland,” *Yad Vashem Studies* (1998): 69–70.
 10. At least 1,500 Jewish victims, according to Lucjan Dobroszycki, “Restoring Jewish Life in Post-war Poland,” *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 2 (1973): 66. A similar number is given by Marc Hillel, *Le massacre des survivants: En Pologne après l’holocauste (1945–1947)* (Paris: Plon, 1985), 284. Gutman argues that there were about 1,000 Jews killed in Poland in the immediate post-World War II years, see Gutman, *Hayehudim be-polin aharei milhemet ha-olam ha-shniya*, 33. According to Engel, there were several hundreds of Jewish victims in the years 1944–1946; see Engel, “Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland,” 60.
 11. Moshe Maltz, *Years of Horror—Glimpse of Hope: The Diary of a Family in Hiding* (New York: Shengold, 1993), 139–140.
 12. Maltz, *Years of Horror*, 127. For similar encounters, see William Kornbluth, *Sentenced to Remember: My Legacy of Life in Pre-1939 Poland and Sixty-Eight Months of Nazi Occupation* (Bethlehem, Penn.: Lehigh University Press, 1994), 146; Halina Birenbaum, *Powrót do ziemi praojców* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1991), 7; Thomas Toivi Blatt, *From the Ashes of Sobibor: A Story of Survival* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 222.

13. On the difficulties with finding apartments for Jews, see AAN, Krajowa Rada Narodowa (National Council of the Homeland, KRN), Biuro Prezydialne, Wydział Prawny, f. 148, pp. 10–11, memorandum to Bolesław Bierut on the need of improvement in living conditions of the Jewish population in Lublin (Memoriał w sprawie konieczności poprawy warunków mieszkalnych ludność żydowskiej przebywającej na terenie miasta Lublina), Lublin, 19 December 1944; Yonas Turkow, *Nokh der bafrayung* (Buenos Ayres: Tsentral Farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1959), 185–186.
14. Maltz, *Years of Horror*, 147.
15. See Mina Deutsch, *Mina's Story: A Doctor's Memoir of the Holocaust* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1994), 104; Kornbluth, *Sentenced to Remember*, 158. For an example of Polish workers protesting against employing Jews, see the State Archive in Wrocław, UW Wrocławski, WSP, 30, pp. 61–64, monthly report for June 1946; State Archive in Szczecin, UW Szczeciński, 1231, p. 28, 33408, p. 129.
16. See the diary entry from late February of 1945: “So far we haven’t been able to carry out our plan to build fences around the mass graves and around the Jewish cemetery, or to exhume the bodies of Jews for re-interment in the Jewish cemetery, for the simple reason that it [is] dangerous for Jews to show their faces on the outskirts of town where the mass graves are located” (Maltz, *Years of Horror*, 153). See a complaint sent by Szmul Pelc regarding the profanation in Bełżec in the State Archive in Lublin, UW Lubelski, WSP, 46, 23 October 1945.
17. Turkow, *Nokh der bafrayung*, 33–51.
18. *Ibid.*, 41.
19. Norman Salsitz and Amalie Petranker Salsitz, *Against All Odds: A Tale of Two Survivors* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1990), 385; AŻIH, CKŻP, Sekretariat, 138, protocol signed for the CKŻP based on eyewitness accounts, April 1945; AURM, PRM, 5/137, pp. 6–8, protocol for CKŻP based on the report from Chełm, cited in *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce*, ed. Cała and Datner-Śpiewak, 26–27.
20. AURM, PRM, 5/137, p. 68; AP in Lublin, UW Lubelski, WSP, 50, report regarding the issues of security of the Jews and of Jewish property in Lublin Province (“Memoriał w sprawie bezpieczeństwa życia i mienia żydostwa lubelskiego, Wojewódzki Komitet Żydowski w Lublinie do obywatela wojewody m. Lublina”), Lublin, 25 March 1946.
21. Blatt, *From the Ashes of Sobibor*, 223.
22. Samuel Honig, *From Poland to Russia and Back, 1939–1946: Surviving the Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Willowdale, Ontario: Black Moss Press, 1996), 234. Also see Birenbaum, *Powrót do ziemi praojców*, 24–25.
23. The region of Lower Silesia was relatively safe for the Jews until the summer of 1946; see Bożena Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 1945–1950* (Wrocław: Wydawn. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2000), 82.
24. Helena Szereszewska, *Memoirs from Occupied Warsaw, 1940–1945* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1997), 489.
25. See Adam Starkopf, *Will to Live: One Family's Story of Surviving the Holocaust* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 225–226.
26. Celina Widawski, *The Sun Will Shine Tomorrow* (Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia: Essien, 1993), 86.
27. Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 587.

28. Archive of the Labor Movement, at the Lavon Institute in Tel Aviv, VI-461B-438-132, p. 39, letter to the Local Jewish Committee in Rychbach, signed by D. Meler and G. Alpert.
29. Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska, *A Social Analysis of Postwar Polish Jewry* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), 120.
30. Kazimierz Czarnota, ed., *Dzieci żydowskie oskarżają* (Warsaw: Amerykańsko-Polsko-Izraelska "Fundacja Shalom," 1993), 35-36.
31. Czarnota, *Dzieci żydowskie oskarżają*, 28.
32. On the Zionist leadership in postwar Poland, see Anita Shapira, "The Yishuv Encounter with the Survivors of the Holocaust," in *She'erit hapletah, 1944-1948. Rehabilitation and Political Struggle, Proceedings of the Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990), 82.
33. Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 580. For an account of this debate, see Shapira, "The Yishuv Encounter with the Survivors of the Holocaust," 82-83.
34. These attempts—with limited resources and staff—were not always successful. See, for example, Deutsch, *Mina's Story*, 101. On Jewish Communists, see Maciej Pisarski, "'Na żydowskiej ulicy': Szkic do dziejów żydowskiej frakcji PPR i zespołu PZPR przy CKŻP, 1945-1951," *BŻIH* 2, no. 97 (1997): 35-48.
35. CK ŻP, *Zarys działalności CKŻWP w okresie od 1 stycznia do 30 czerwca 1946* (Warsaw: Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce, 1947), 3.
36. A 1IH, CKŻP, Sekretariat, 25 B.
37. Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 670.
38. See A 1IH, CKŻP, Komisja Specjalna, 303/7, pp. 6-12, Warsaw, 30 May 1947, Report on the activities of the Special Commission of the Central Committee of the Jews in Poland (Sprawozdanie z działalności Centralnej Komisji Specjalnej przy Centralnym Komitecie Żydów w Polsce), 7.
39. Jan Tomasz Gross, "In the Aftermath of the Kielce Pogrom: The Special Commission of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland," *Gal Ed* 15-16 (1997): 121.
40. See Natalia Aleksium, "Zionists and Anti-Zionists in the Central Committee of the Jews in Poland: Cooperation and Political Struggle, 1944-1950," *Jews in Eastern Europe* 2, no. 33 (fall 1997): 32-50.
41. AAN, Akta Szymaana Zachariasza, f. 19, pp. 11-12, protocol of the 1 April 1946 meeting of the central faction of the PPR in the CKŻP.
42. A 1IH, CKŻP, Prezydium 4, protocol 95 of presidium meeting of 19 November 1946, pp. 26-27.
43. Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 670.
44. *Ibid.*, 505-506.
45. Feliks Siemiński, Wiesław Skrzydło, and Jan Ziemiński, eds., *Konstytucja i podstawowe akty ustawodawcze Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej* (Warsaw: Wydawn. Prawnicze, 1978), 12.
46. See "Sprawozdanie referatu do spraw pomocy ludności żydowskiej o stanie bezpieczeństwa Żydów" (Report of the Office for Aiding the Jewish Population regarding the issue of security of the Jewish population, August 1945), reprinted in Cała and Datner-Śpiewak, *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce*, 33.
47. "Memoriał CKŻP do Prezesa Rady Ministrów E. Osóbki-Morawskiego" (Memorandum of the CKŻP to E. Osóbka-Morawski), reprinted in Cała and Datner-Śpiewak, *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce*, 41-44.

48. See Natalia Aleksiu, ed., "The Situation of the Jews in Poland: As Seen by the Soviet Security Forces in 1945," *Jews in Eastern Europe* 3, no. 37 (winter 1998): 52–68.
49. This kind of crime occurred in Bytom (Katowice Province), Cracow and Chrzanów (Cracow Province), Bielawa, Legnica, Strzegom and Wałbrzych (Lower Silesia), Rzeszów, Szczecin, and Wieluń (Łódź Province). See Gross, "In the Aftermath of the Kielce Pogrom," 121.
50. Cała and Datner-Śpiewak *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce*, 60. On activities of the All-Polish Anti-Racist League, see Władysław Bartoszewski, "The Founding of the All-Polish Anti-Racist League in 1946," *Polin* 4 (1989): 243–254.
51. Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 613.
52. A`IH, CKŻP, Sekretariat 25 B.
53. Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 664–669 and 672.
54. *Ibid.*, 670–671.
55. Engel, *Beyn shihrur li-vriha*, 39–44.
56. Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej Ludową," 414, 417.

Teaching about the Holocaust in Poland



MICHAEL C. STEINLAUF

*I*n post-Communist Poland, attention has finally begun to be paid to the question of how the history of the Jews in Poland, and above all the Holocaust, is taught in Polish schools. In particular, existing textbooks have been subjected to critical analysis. This pioneering undertaking, coupled with ongoing attempts to remedy the deficiencies that these studies have revealed, has been the work of scholars connected to the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.¹ The purpose of the present chapter is, first of all, to summarize the results of this important work, knowledge of which has largely been confined to Poland. Secondly, I would like to situate the issue of contemporary Polish textbooks in a larger historical context.² Here, as elsewhere in the complex history of Polish-Jewish relations, the metaphor of the palimpsest is particularly useful. A palimpsest is a parchment or tablet that has been written upon or inscribed several times without, however, entirely removing the previous texts; these therefore remain at least partially visible. To better understand the astounding absences and distortions concerning Jewish history and the Holocaust in Polish textbooks of the 1990s, it helps to see them as palimpsests, texts through which earlier narratives, the product of earlier moments in Polish history, still partially emerge. It is to these earlier moments and the narratives they inspired that I shall first turn.

The Polish Experience during World War II and the Holocaust

In the course of World War II, the Nazis unleashed a merciless physical and moral assault on Poles and Poland. Amidst this hellish onslaught on their own society, Poles witnessed the entire process of the Holocaust, from beginning to end. A handful of Poles saved Jews, some Poles blackmailed, denounced,

and murdered Jews, but what characterized the Polish experience as a whole was witnessing. It is Poles who saw the ghetto walls go up and watched their neighbors imprisoned behind them. Poles watched the ghettos burn, saw their neighbors herded into sealed trains, watched the so-called transports arrive at their destination, smelled the smoke of the crematoriums, and witnessed the hunting of escapees. To witness murder on such a scale, at such close range, for such a long time, is an experience not easily comprehended. This should not surprise us. The inability to accept, assimilate, grasp—that is, to truly witness—the events of the Holocaust as they were occurring was not unique to Poles. It characterized the responses of all the contemporaries of the Holocaust, including those of its victims and perpetrators. Moreover, this “event without a witness,” as Shoshana Felman has termed it, continues to haunt us more than half a century after its terminus.³

Nevertheless, the situation of the Poles in relation to the Holocaust was unique, and not only because of the traumatic nature of the witnessing. This trauma was exacerbated, first of all, by the Polish attitude to Jews before the war. By the 1930s and continuing throughout the war, the great majority of Poles, to put it most simply, did not like Jews. Whether this dislike was the result of prewar Jewish economic power or Jewish sympathy for Bolshevism, whether it emerged out of church doctrine or the ideology of exclusivist nationalism or Nazi propaganda is not important in this respect. What does matter is that this dislike did not as a rule mean that Poles wished to see the Jews murdered. On the other hand, it did mean that many Poles wished that Jews would simply disappear. This is borne out by the widespread popularity in Polish society and politics, both before the war and during it, of mass emigration as a solution to the so-called “Jewish question.”

Second, the fate of the Jews proved economically profitable for the Poles. In a rare insight, Kazimierz Wyka sensed the consequences of this in 1945:

From under the sword of the German butcher perpetrating a crime unprecedented in history, the little Polish shopkeeper sneaked the keys to his Jewish competitor's till, and believed that he had acted morally. To the Germans went the guilt and the crime; to us the keys and the till. The storekeeper forgot that the “legal” annihilation of an entire people is part of an undertaking so unparalleled that it was doubtless not staged by history for the purpose of changing the sign on someone's shop. The methods by which Germans liquidated the Jews rest on the Germans' conscience. *The reaction to these methods rests nevertheless on our conscience.* The gold filling torn out of a corpse's mouth will always bleed, even if no one remembers its national origin.⁴

Such a sequence—to dislike one's neighbors, to wish them gone, then to observe their horrendous total annihilation, and finally to inherit what had once been theirs—can only produce profound psychic and moral disturbance. This is the context within which we must consider the fact that watching Jews being

murdered seems to have increased the levels of hatred and violence which Poles directed toward them. As Feliks Tych has pointed out, the Kielce pogrom would have been inconceivable before the war.⁵ Polish opinion polls of the 1990s continue to show the highest levels of antisemitism precisely in the generation that came of age during the Holocaust and immediately after, a generation whose entire experience of Jews consisted in watching them die.⁶

Memory of the Holocaust in Communist Poland

For forty-five years of communist rule, the consequences of Polish witnessing of the Holocaust were driven underground to fester. In the essential communist narrative, the Holocaust became an object lesson in the horrors of the last stage of monopoly capitalism, another proof that the only alternative to “progress” was “barbarism.” The site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, for example, became a monument to internationalism and commemorated the “resistance and martyrdom” of “Poles and citizens of other nationalities,” among whom, alphabetically and therefore “democratically,” Żydzi (Jews) came last. Nevertheless, for some twenty years after the war, in contexts in which referring to Jews was unavoidable, their fate continued to be seen as something exceptional. Indeed, unlike the 1944 Polish Uprising, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising lent itself to an “internationalizing” narrative and therefore merited its own monument forty years before its Polish counterpart.⁷

In the second half of the 1960s, the orthodox communist narrative began to unravel. The results of March 1968, which Jerzy Szacki later called “the funeral of communist ideology,” were to introduce into political discourse the rhetoric of Polish nationalism in order to legitimize, albeit in different ways, both the government and the opposition.⁸ But the same moment also witnessed a so-called anti-Zionist campaign, fabulously irrational, that forced some twenty thousand Jews out of Poland. Conventional Polish historiography has seen the campaign as a political pretext, but, as I have argued elsewhere, the memory of the Jews and, above all, the memory of the Jews’ destruction were essential subtexts in the events of March 1968.⁹

The forces responsible both for smashing the reform movement and for the antisemitic campaign were mobilized by the so-called Partisans, a faction of the Communist party led by Gen. Mieczysław Moczar. The Partisans claimed to speak in the name of the Polish nation as a whole. Key to their message, as their name suggested, was the need for Poles to regain and celebrate the memory of Polish sacrifice during the war, above all, the role of the Home Army, whose memory official history had erased under Bierut and marginalized under Władysław Gomułka. Now, however, the Partisans took over the key institutions responsible for the memory of the war years, including the veterans’ association, the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (ZboWiD). Tens of thousands of former Home Army members found it possible to come out of the closet, so to speak, and step proudly into the public arena.

Having mobilized the generation most closely identified with the war years, the Partisans gave them a mission. They proclaimed a struggle against a worldwide anti-Polish conspiracy (anti-proletarian as well, to be sure) whose agents were Germans and Jews. According to the ZboWiD, these crafty and implacable foes, who had been the *bête noire* of Roman Dmowski and his followers before the war, now aimed, among other things, to deny the martyrdom of the Polish nation during the war, and more, to exonerate the Germans of the murder of the Jews and pin the blame for it on the Poles. The Holocaust, in other words, had been transformed effectively into a German-Jewish conspiracy against Poles. Twenty years after the event, the anti-Zionist campaign demonstrated that the murder of the Jews had become an obstacle that stood between Poles and their own past, preventing them from repossessing that past as a narrative of their own exemplary martyrdom. The meaning of the Holocaust had thus become Polish victimization *by* the Holocaust.

While Moczar's own power soon waned, that of his associates and followers did not. Czesław Pilichowski, for example, who began his political career as a prewar Polish fascist, became director in 1968 of the High Commission to Investigate Nazi War Crimes, which he ran until his death in 1984. A flood of new recruits, primarily of peasant background, who had come of age during the war, swarmed into the Communist party, where they replaced the older cadre, of Jewish origin, that had been expelled. Finally, a new narrative of the war years emerged in Polish publications, both scholarly and popular. This new narrative was born in 1967, when the Partisans launched an attack on the prestigious *Wielka Encyklopedia Powszechna* (Great universal encyclopedia). In a volume published the previous year, an article on Nazi camps had correctly distinguished between "concentration camps" (*obozы koncentracyjne*), where prisoners lived and worked under conditions designed to hasten death, and "annihilation camps" (*obozы zagłady*), whose only purpose was murder and nearly all of whose victims were Jews. The Partisans proclaimed there were no differences among Nazi camps and by the following year subjected the entire encyclopedia to an analysis purporting to show a bias against Polish martyrdom in favor of the suffering of Jews and Germans. The agitation resulted in the dismissal of most of the encyclopedia's staff (some of whom, of course, were of Jewish descent) and the insertion of a "corrected" article, in the encyclopedia, which affirmed that Nazi camps were all intended to exterminate anyone who passed through their gates, be they Poles or Jews.

Polish History Textbooks and the Holocaust in Post-Communist Poland

Thirty years after the so-called anti-Zionist campaign, and ten years after the fall of communism, the hand of the Partisans is still distinctly legible in Polish history textbooks.¹⁰ In 1997, the Ministry of Education of the Third Polish Republic received the results of a Jewish Historical Institute study, commissioned

by the ministry, on the depiction of Jews and Jewish history in Polish textbooks. The report noted the small number of references to Jews, and the relatively large number of errors present even in this limited information, and characterized it as a whole as follows: "Jews appear one knows not how or why: as a rule, there is no mention of what they did, why and from where they arrived in Poland, where they lived and their largest centers, what their role was in society and what role they played in its development. It is in essence a history without a beginning and without an end, since there is also no sense under what circumstances and for what reasons Jews vanished nearly entirely from the Polish landscape."¹¹

The majority of textbooks subsume the fate of the Jews during World War II under the fate of the Polish population as a whole. Some do not even treat the Jews separately in this respect. A popular history textbook for fourteen-year-olds (eighth grade of lyceum) speaks of the Nazis "preparing the biological destruction of the Polish people,"¹² while the most widely distributed history textbook for ten-year-olds (fourth grade of elementary school) tells the story as follows: "The Nazi Germans occupied Poland during the years 1939–1945. The occupiers wanted to destroy as many Poles as they could and force those who remained alive to work for the Germans. . . . To destroy the Poles the Nazis set up concentration camps, called death factories. Thousands of Poles died in the camps as a result of hunger, cold, hard labor and beatings. The largest death camp was located in Oświęcim, 'Auschwitz.' Today there is a museum there to remind the world of Nazi crimes."¹³ When the Jews are discussed, Polish aid is inevitably emphasized, with exaggerated figures cited for the amount of this aid. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is often mentioned, but even this tends to vanish into the Polish narrative, as in the following: "A specific kind of fighting of the Polish underground was the undertaking in 1943 of battle with the occupier by Polish Jews locked in ghettos."¹⁴ Jews are frequently described as passive in the face of their own destruction; Poles, in contrast, are depicted as engaged in resistance.

One textbook author has a lot to say, comparatively speaking, about the Jews. For Andrzej Szcześniak, the author of two highly popular textbooks and a guide for teachers, who has been engaged in such work since the 1970s, the heroic Polish nation is always battling conspiracies.¹⁵ While in Szcześniak's current books the web of capitalism has been replaced by that of international finance, the Jew has remained throughout in the spider's role. According to Szcześniak, whose proof-texts have included the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and the writings of Father Stanisław Trzeciak and Bolesław Tejkowski,¹⁶ Jews developed the goal of a Jewish state in Poland in the early twentieth century and finally realized their goal in the form of the *Żydokomuna*, the Communist Jewish *kabal* that supposedly ruled Poland after World War II. As for the war itself, while he devotes space to the situation of the Jews, it is Poles who were "sentenced to annihilation" by the Nazis, while the Jews were "relocated" (*przesiedleni*).¹⁷

A trained schoolteacher who joined the Communist party in 1952, Szcześniak first became involved in educational policy in 1969, when he was put in charge of the office of curriculum of the Ministry of Education. There, Szcześniak introduced far-ranging changes in the teaching of history. He defended a doctoral dissertation on the Home Army in 1973 and published his first textbook in 1974. Beginning in 1992, when Jerzy Tomaszewski attacked his textbooks in the pages of *Polityka*, Szcześniak has periodically been an object of controversy.¹⁸ Nevertheless, his books have retained their certification from the Ministry of Education under a succession of post-communist governments. In 1999, after an article about Szcześniak appeared in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, controversy flared again. His books provoked a letter of protest to the Ministry of Education signed by nearly three hundred Polish intellectuals, including Nobel laureates Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska. The nationalist press defended him and published, among other things, an exposé of the old communist affiliations of those who signed the letter against him.¹⁹ The Ministry of Education refused to “take sides” in this controversy, nor, in the aftermath of the Jewish Historical Institute’s 1997 report, were there any changes in the depiction of Jews and the Holocaust in Polish textbooks.²⁰

To be sure, there are a few textbooks that attempt to talk about Jewish history and the Holocaust. Indeed, in post-communist Poland, any textbook that receives two positive reviews may be accredited for use in the classroom. It is then up to individual teachers to decide which textbooks to use. During the 1990s there have also been pioneering programs to educate teachers about the Holocaust, organized at the Jewish Historical Institute, the Auschwitz Museum, and the Center for Jewish Culture in Cracow.²¹ It is now possible to study Hebrew at several secondary schools in Warsaw, Cracow, and Poznań. But all such initiatives have involved only a tiny proportion of teachers and students. This is somewhat surprising, considering that in Polish society as a whole, particularly in intellectual circles, there has been considerable interest in things Jewish since the 1980s. This is the same country, let us recall, in which an annual festival of Jewish culture draws thousands of young Poles to dance in the streets of Cracow, and in which, over the past ten years, more than twenty books by Isaac Bashevis Singer have been translated into Polish. Indeed, the original Solidarity movement drew its strength from a national vision that was inclusive rather than exclusive, that developed a narrative of the Polish past which directly challenged the chauvinism of the Partisans. If the pluralist narrative nowadays seems on the defensive in Poland as a whole, it may never have reached Polish schools.

Debates about what constitutes a national history curriculum—and therefore a modern national identity—are today a central preoccupation of countries as diverse as the United States, Great Britain, Israel, Estonia, Taiwan, Spain, and Russia.²² If in Poland this debate seems little advanced, it is not only because of the inertia of teachers and educational institutions in the post-communist world or the relative strength of right-wing parties. It is because facilitating this debate requires confronting, in the broadest public arena, a uniquely painful

and still largely uncomprehended national memory: that of the Jews murdered before Polish eyes over half a century ago.

Notes

I would like to thank Dr. Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, Dr. Cindy Ballenger, Dr. Alina Cała, Professor Miles Orvell, Professor Michael Taub, and Professor Jerzy Tomaszewski for their help in the preparation of this chapter.

1. An entire issue of the *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* (hereafter cited as *BŻIH*) (vol. 3–4, July–December 1997) was devoted to analyses of the presentation of Jewish subject matter in Polish history textbooks. This issue also includes a report, based on these studies, that was solicited by the Polish Ministry of Education. See Jerzy Tomaszewski, Feliks Tych, and Hanna Węgrzynek, “Wnioski z analizy funkcjonujących obecnie podręczników szkolnych do nauczania historii, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem sposobu przedstawiania dziejów Żydów i Państwa Izrael w wykładzie historii Polski oraz historii powszechnej,” *ibid.*, 26–41. See also two articles by Feliks Tych, “Problem Holokaustu w polskich podręcznikach szkolnych do nauczania historii,” *BŻIH* 4 (December 1998): 34–43, and “Obraz zagłady Żydów w potocznej świadomości historycznej w Polsce,” *BŻIH* 1 (March 1999): 3–13. These and several other relevant articles by the director of the Jewish Historical Institute, are collected in his *Długi cień zagłady: Szkice historyczne* (Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 1999). See also the essay by the Lublin-based scholar Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska (it includes analyses of Jewish subject matter in several Polish textbooks), “Teaching and Politics: Educating for or against Prejudice?” in *Shadow of the Holocaust*, ed. I. A. Altman (in Russian) (Moscow: Fond Kholokosta, 1998). For more popular treatments of the subject, see, for example, Jerzy Sławomir Mac, “Amnezja narodowa,” *Wprost*, 17 May 1998; Feliks Tych, “Cień żwirowiska,” *Polityka* nr. 47, 21 November 1998. In English, see Hanna Węgrzynek, *The Treatment of Jewish Themes in Polish Schools* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1998).
2. For a fuller development of this context, see Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997).
3. Shoshana Felman, “The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*,” in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992), 211.
4. Kazimierz Wyka, “The Excluded Economy,” in *The Unplanned Society: Poland during and after Communism*, ed. Janine Wedel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 41, emphasis in the original. For the original text, see Kazimierz Wyka, *Życie na niby: Pamiętnik po kłęsce* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), 157. Dr. Alina Cała has suggested that the final image in this passage probably alludes to the widespread plundering of the sites of death camps and Jewish cemeteries after the war by those in search of gold.
5. Feliks Tych, “Świadkowie Shoah: Zagłady Żydów w polskich pamiętnikach i wspomnieniach,” in his *Długi cień zagłady*, 52.
6. Ireneusz Krzemiński, ed., *Czy Polacy są antysemitami? Wyniki badania sondażowego* (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 1996).

7. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 68–73.
8. Jerzy Szacki, “8 marca 1988 roku,” *Krytyka* (Warsaw) 28–29 (1988): 22.
9. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 75–88; see also Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce, 1967–1968* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2000).
10. On Jewish subjects in Polish history textbooks under communism, see Anna Radziwiłł, “The Teaching of the History of the Jews in Secondary Schools in the Polish People’s Republic, 1949–88,” *Polin* 4 (1989): 402–424.
11. Tomaszewski, Tych, and Węgrzynek, “Wnioski z analizy funkcjonujących,” 27.
12. Cited in Alina Cała, “Recenzja podręczników do historii Polski XX w.,” *BŻIH* 3–4 (July–December 1997): 79.
13. Cited in Tomaszewski, Tych, and Węgrzynek, “Wnioski z analizy funkcjonujących,” 36.
14. Andrzej `bikowski, “Historia polskich Żydów XIX–XX wieku w podręcznikach szkolnych,” *BŻIH* 3–4 (July–December 1997): 71.
15. Anna Bikont and Maria Kruczkowska, “Nadal reprezentują opcję polską,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 6–7 March 1999.
16. Stanisław Trzeciak was a notorious prewar antisemite who devoted more energy to publicizing the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* than any churchman in Poland; see Ronald Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism in Poland, 1933–1939* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), 94–101. Tejkowski, who heads a tiny right-wing party in contemporary Poland, accuses the Jews of running the Vatican as well as the Polish government.
17. Cała, “Recenzja podręczników,” 92.
18. See, for example, the article by Jerzy Tomaszewski, “Podręcznik, który źle uczy,” *Wiadomości Historyczne* 4 (1995): 223–229, and the reply by Andrzej Szcześniak, *ibid.*, 230–236. See also Bikont and Kruczkowska, “Nadal reprezentują opcję polską.”
19. See Jerzy Robert Nowak, “Żalсна lista,” *Nasza Polska*, no. 13, 31 March 1999. See also, by the same author, “Mam polskie obowiązki,” *Nasza Polska*, no. 11, 17 March 1999. See also an interview with Szcześniak, “Bitwa o świadomość historyczną” *Mysł Polska*, no. 13, 28 March 1999; and his letter to the editor responding to the article (“Nadal reprezentują opcję polską”) by Bikont and Kruczkowska, *Nasza Polska*, no. 11, 17 March 1999.
20. As of February 2001, none of Andrzej Szcześniak’s textbooks had been reprinted. Teachers are, of course, free to use the older editions. A new high school history textbook coauthored by Szcześniak and published by a right-wing Catholic publisher contains nothing about Jews. See Waldemar Bednarski, Sławomir Pać, Andrzej Leszek Szcześniak, *Polska i Świat: Wspólne dziedzictwo: podręcznik dla drugiej klasy gimnazjum* (Radom: Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne, 2000).
21. See Zbigniew Pendel, “Lekcje o Holocaustcie,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 February 1999 (about a course at the Auschwitz Museum); and Burton Bollag, “In the Shadow of Auschwitz,” *American Educator* (spring 1999): 38–49 (about a course at the Jewish Culture Center in Cracow).
22. See Suzanne M. Wilson, “Research on History Teaching,” in *The Handbook of Research on Teaching*, ed. V. Richardson, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 2001), 527–544. Among the relevant sources that Wilson mentions are Gary B. Nash, Charlotte A. Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); Todd Gittlin, *The Twilight of Common*

Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995); C. Husbands and A. Pendry, *Whose History? School History and the National Curriculum* (East Anglia: History Education Group, 1992); D. McKiernan, "History in a National Curriculum: Imagining the Nation at the End of the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 25 (1993): 33–51; J. Slater, "History in the National Curriculum: An Agenda for the Future," *Discoveries: A Journal for History Teachers* 2 (1990): 4–10; W. Marriott, "History, the National Curriculum, and 'Education for All': A Multicultural 'Swansong'?" *Discoveries: A Journal for History Teachers* 2 (1990): 11–13; and P. M. Chou, "The Democratization of the Taiwanese Social Studies Curriculum: A Study of Practice" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1999).

Collective Memory and Contemporary Polish-Jewish Relations



ZVI GITELMAN

*I*t is a commonplace that Poles and Jews have had a difficult relationship historically and today hold negative views about each other. Like many generalizations, this does not apply to all members of each group, and whether the two groups are unfavorably disposed toward each other today should be empirically testable. Groups in contact often hold definite views about each other, but the views of contemporary Jews and Poles are formed largely in the absence of the other. The great majority of Jews alive today have not encountered Poles in their homeland, and few Poles living in Poland have ever met or seen a living Jew. Nevertheless, it turns out that when compared to Americans or even to many other nations in east central Europe and the former Soviet Union, Poles do indeed have negative feelings about Jews. Curiously, there is no empirical evidence, though much of the anecdotal sort, of Jews' attitudes toward Poles. We do not seem to have much hard evidence about contemporary Jews' attitudes toward their neighbors wherever they live nor about the image of Poles held by Israeli Jews and those in the large Diaspora communities. This chapter attempts to describe how ordinary Poles feel about Jews and explain the sources of those feelings, as well as to probe the sources of American Jews' impressions of Poles.

The Psychological and Historical Sources of Prejudice

Prejudice, whether positive or negative, is a feeling, about another person or group, that is held prior to an actual experience with that person; or, if there has been such an experience, the feeling is not based on it. Poles and Jews have had little direct contact with each other in the past half-century and more, so their attitudes toward each other are not based on actual experience with the other. Yet, they do seem to have prejudicial views about each other. It is relatively easy

to explain why Poles and Jews disliked each other in the past. It is more difficult to understand the persistence of such sentiments more than half a century after over 90 percent of the Jews of Poland were murdered and when only some 5,000 to 10,000 are left in a population of about 40 million.

Decades ago, Gordon Allport defined negative ethnic prejudice as “an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group.”¹ As Allport pointed out, “Sometimes, the ill-thinker has no first-hand experience on which to base his judgment.” At one point Americans held rather negative views of Turks, though “few had ever seen a Turk nor did they know any person who had seen one.” But their image was formed on the basis of what they had learned about the Crusades and had heard about the massacre of the Armenians in 1915.² It is not necessary for Jews and Poles to have encountered each other for them to have views about one another. Though in the 1990s there was a significant increase in the number of face-to-face Polish-Jewish contacts, the great majority of Poles today have rarely if ever seen a Jew, and few Jews have been to Poland.

Allport distinguishes between prejudgments and prejudices: “Prejudgments become prejudices only when they are not reversible when exposed to new knowledge.”³ Whether, when examining how Poles and Jews view each other, we are dealing with prejudgments or prejudices remains to be seen. But we can conclude that a “belief in essence” has developed among both Poles and Jews. Psychologically, it is easier to generalize about a group than to form differentiated views about them. This “principle of least effort” leads to the belief that there is some essential trait or syndrome of traits that characterizes all members of the group and that permits generalization about it.⁴ These are the mechanisms likely to be operating in the formation of Polish and Jewish views of each other.

The raw material that has been processed and fed into those mechanisms is the simplified version of the history of the relationship that both groups have more or less canonized, especially since World War II. The historian might point out that over the millennium of Polish-Jewish history two major traditions in Polish attitudes toward Jews can be discerned. One may be described as inviting, protective, even at times benevolent, and the other exclusionary and hostile. Polish literature is replete with examples of both attitudes.⁵ Most would say that the tradition of hostility has prevailed in the last two centuries—though some historians describe the period 1830–1863 as one of “Polish-Jewish brotherhood”—and perhaps that has created a Jewish consciousness of deep-rooted Polish antisemitism.

Polish hostility to Jews while they were a highly visible group in Poland derived in part from the teachings of the Catholic Church. Until very few years ago the Catholic Church taught that Jews were guilty of deicide and were condemned to wander the earth, and settle in places such as Poland, as punishment for their mortal sin. In a country that was and remains overwhelmingly and fer-

vently Catholic, such a doctrine was not simply of theological interest but had profound daily implications. Three years before the Nazi invasion of Poland, the primate, Cardinal Hlond, said in a pastoral letter, to be read in all parishes: "A Jewish question exists and there will be one so long as the Jews remain Jews. It is an actual fact that the Jews fight against the Catholic Church, they are free-thinkers, and constitute the vanguard of atheism, bolshevism and revolution. The Jewish influence upon morals is fatal, and the publishers spread pornographic literature. It is also true that the Jews are committing frauds, practicing usury, and dealing in white slavery. It is true that in the schools, the Jewish youth is having an evil influence . . . upon the Catholic youth."⁶ Then he added, "Not all the Jews are, however, like that." That did not stay him from calling for an economic boycott of the Jews.

In the 1990s a Polish friend pointed to a painting, in a church in Sandomierz, that depicted Jews killing a Christian child for his blood and asked the priest why such a painting was still displayed. At first puzzled by the question and then angered by the young Pole's persistent questioning of a depiction he assumed was realistic, he threw her out of the church.

A second source of tension between the two peoples was the economic competition that arose when the division of labor, wherein each occupied specific niches in the economy, began to break down. As Jews and Poles became economic competitors, the ethnic element inevitably appeared, just as it has among other groups. When, in the United States, Jews, Koreans, or Chaldeans begin to take over stores in neighborhoods populated by other ethnic groups, tensions rise to the point where sometimes riots ensue.

There are many other reasons that could be adduced for Polish hostility to Jews. I would single out three that to me seem important. Despite the celebrations of diversity and multiculturalism that are much the fashion in the United States today, the fact is that most people most of the time prefer people who are like themselves to those who are not. Beginning with the family, extending to the kinship group or those who share a territory and a language, and culminating perhaps in the nation, the "in-group" is preferred to the "out-group," "we" to "they." This is generally called "ethnocentrism." In many cases, the in-group is defined precisely in terms of the out-group: Who are we? Not they! As Alina Cała observes of modern Poland, "Many people felt themselves to be members of a given community only in so far as they denied this right to others. 'I am a Pole because I am not a Jew'—was their motto. Despite the fact that this allusion was more rational with respect to the difference between them and Russians or Germans, it was the Jews who became the 'adversary' of a large part of Polish society."⁷ In Poland, Jews were the perfect out-group—or, to lapse into the current jargon, the Other. They differed from Poles in every external marker conceivable: they looked different, dressed differently, spoke a different language, ate different foods—and were forbidden from eating typically Polish food such as ham—and, very importantly in the Polish context, believed and prayed differently. Even when more and more Jews began to lose their external markers

and dress, speak, and eat like Poles, they were often resented for trying to “pass” and insinuate themselves into Polish society. But up until World War II most Jews continued to be different from Poles in their occupations, family lives, places of residence, and holidays. This sufficed to arouse feelings at least of distance and difference, and often of suspicion and mistrust, on the part of the majority. Moreover, that majority often felt threatened by external forces. Whether it was by the Turks and Islam, the Russians and Orthodoxy, or the conquering Germans, Austro-Hungarians, and Imperial Russians—and later the Bolshevik Russians (twice) or the Nazi Germans—Poles seemed to be under constant attack, at least in the last two centuries. Like other such groups, they regarded those living among them but who were very different as potential or real allies of their enemies. The most recent such expression was the belief among some Poles that Communism was a Jewish conspiracy, the *Żydokomuna*, and that both the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland in September 1939 and the installation of a Communist government after the Second World War were the work of Jew-Bolsheviks, whose presence in the pre-1968 government and, especially, security police did not pass unremarked. “The stereotype of the Jew became detached from reality and social practice, serving to release frustration, cement artificial unity, and to project popular feelings of powerlessness and sin. This is the reason why anti-Semitism can still be aroused in Poland even without the physical existence of Jews there.”⁸

Until the late eighteenth century and certainly in the interwar period, Poland resembled an ethnic rather than a civic type of multinational state. The ethnic state is designed explicitly to serve the interests of one people or ethnic group, while the nexus of the civic state is not ethnicity but adherence to a common set of laws and political ideas and ideals. Modern, independent Poland, dominated by the political right in the interwar period, defined itself as “Polska dla Polaków,” (Poland for Poles); and the third of the population that was not Polish but Ukrainian, Jewish, German, Belarussian, and Lithuanian was relegated to a secondary status, often discriminated against. Boundaries between Poles and others were reinforced by differences in language, religion, and, to a large extent, territorial concentration, and were then institutionalized in Polish law and policy. Perhaps Lithuanians were less marginalized because they shared the same religion with the Poles and had been united with them in an empire—after all, the Polish national epic begins with the words, “*Litwo, ojczyzna moja*” (Lithuania, my fatherland)—but the dispute over Wilno/Vilnius/Vilna came between the peoples. In fact, all the minorities—ironically, except the Jews—aimed at revising Poland’s borders and did potentially pose a threat to the territorial integrity of the interwar state, but government policy only exacerbated their grievances.⁹

Thus, in modern times, Polish hostility toward Jews seemed to be economic, social, and political. Perhaps there was antecedent Jewish distrust of Poles or contempt for them, but Polish hostility bred a Jewish reaction of distrust and reciprocated hostility, though growing numbers of Jews believed the gap could

be bridged through Polonization. They became “Poles of the Mosaic faith” (or of the socialist and Communist faiths), as their German-, Hungarian-, and Russian-Jewish counterparts had before them—with roughly similar results. But there may have been other sources of Jewish negative attitudes toward Poles. Jews may have regarded Poles (and most other east European peoples) as culturally inferior. They were, after all, largely illiterate peasants as late as 1900, while most Jews were neither. Religious Jews held that Poles believed in a false and pernicious doctrine. The two boundary lines that, if crossed, meant leaving the Jewish community were marriage with Poles and conversion to Christianity. Often, the two went together, and both were construed as betrayal. In 1928, in a small town near Lublin, the following scene took place when a daughter of a rabbi fell in love with a Polish policeman and insisted on marrying him after converting to Catholicism: “On the Sunday of her *shmad* [conversion], Catholics . . . paraded down the main street . . . carrying icons . . . and singing hymns. . . . The young girl sat erect, and with a defiant smirk waved from her carriage to the townspeople. Her poor parents followed the carriage, crying and screaming and beating their heads to a bloody pulp on the sides of the wagon pleading with their daughter not to go through with this woeful deed. . . . After this shameful tragedy, the girl’s family secluded themselves and never went out of the house. Her three sisters never married, neither did their cousins in the nearby town. No one would marry them.”¹⁰

Ethnic or religious minorities must preserve themselves by maintaining their numbers. Inter-marriage and conversion threaten their existence. But one wonders whether, along with loyalty to their own, anti-Polish feelings were not also behind the kind of behavior described above.

Polish and Jewish Attitudes after the Holocaust

Now that few Jews live in Poland, and nearly all of them have lost their distinctive ethnic markers, why do anti-Jewish sentiments persist? Are they merely “survivals of the past” which will disappear with the passing of generations, or do Poles “imbibe antisemitism with their mothers’ milk,” as former Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir, a native of Poland, once said?¹¹ The existence of anti-Jewish images in many common Polish expressions and idioms has been well documented. Josef Sommerfeldt, a Nazi “scholar” based in Cracow in 1942, compiled an extensive list of these.¹² Alina Cała’s fascinating 1995 study on the image of the Jew in Polish folk culture and Olga Goldberg-Mulkiewicz’s studies on Polish folk art attest to the existence of many antisemitic motifs in Polish speech and art.¹³ These have survived the absence of Jews because they have become part of the vocabulary of Poles who have never seen a Jew. As we shall see, anti-Jewish sentiment survived well the removal of Jews from Poland. As a Polish historian notes, “The Holocaust did not change the Polish stereotype of the Jew.”¹⁴ It may have reinforced and sharpened Jewish stereotypes of Poles. The pogroms in Cracow in 1945 and, especially, Kielce in

1946 testify to the failure of the Holocaust to eliminate violent antisemitism from among the Poles.¹⁵ They are also important collective memories for Jews and play a significant role in shaping Jewish images of postwar Poland.¹⁶ Wróbel suggests that both Poles and Jews have developed postwar “civic religions” that “have turned the past into a collection of untouchable dogmas, supported stereotyping, and opposed impartial scholarly research. Both of them continue to stress the ‘otherness’ of the Poles and the Jews, to tell them that they are alone in a hostile world, and that each must rely exclusively on its own group.”¹⁷ The Communist governments cynically manipulated Polish feelings toward Jews, as in the 1968 events, and even in post-Communist Poland antisemitism entered into the political arena in the presidential election campaign of 1990 and in public remarks by a few politicians. Moreover, while the Polish Catholic Church speaks with several voices, among the loudest and most authoritative is that of Cardinal Glemp, primate of Poland. In a speech delivered in August 1989 at one of the holiest sites in Poland, he said, “Alongside the Jewish innkeeper who got the peasants drunk, alongside the Jewish propagator of Communism, there were among the Israelites people who gave their lives and talents to Poland.” He asked Jews who “have great power over the mass media in many countries and [Jews] control them” to rein in their anti-Polonism because “if there won’t be anti-Polonism there won’t be such antisemitism among us.”¹⁸

Others have documented the history of Jews in postwar Poland and the hostility expressed toward them at various times by the government, political leaders, the Catholic Church, or ordinary people.¹⁹ What interests us is why such attitudes persist in the absence of Jews.

One possible explanation is Leon Trotsky’s argument, in his *History of the Russian Revolution*, that consciousness lags behind reality. The “fetters of conservatism” preserve ideas in people’s heads long after they have become irrelevant. There is a “chronic lag of ideas and relations behind new objective conditions” and only catastrophe can upset peoples’ ideas.²⁰ If that is the case, surely World War II was a sufficient catastrophe to change the attitudes of those who survived it or were born to the survivors. But that does not seem to have happened. A perhaps more fruitful line of analysis uses the concept of “collective memory” to explain the transmission of ideas, values, and attitudes across generations. Some might prefer to call this simply socialization, though collective memory includes one’s own experiences whether as child or adult.²¹ This much-discussed concept may help explain the phenomena we observe.

Maurice Halbwachs suggested that memory is not strictly individual but is formed in society: “It is . . . in society that [people] recall, recognize, and localize their memories.” He asserted that “memories as psychic states subsist in the mind in an unconscious state” but can be evoked and “reconstructed on the basis of the present.”²² In postwar Poland, increasingly, the memory of Jews is a transmitted image, not a personal memory. At times, there is discerned a present social or political need to invoke the past, as in explaining the misery of life

under Communism. At other times, perhaps we are dealing with simple socialization to anti-Jewish sentiments, even through the seemingly innocent repetition of common idioms and folk sayings. Families and religious groups are among the agencies that preserve and transmit memory. The memory of religious groups “claims to be fixed once and for all” and obliges others to adapt themselves to its dominant representations or “it systematically ignores them.”²³ One could argue that once the Catholic Church decided that the Jews were guilty of Christ’s death—without which, presumably, the doctrines of salvation and resurrection might not have come about—and that they were to be punished for it, “memory” of the crucifixion was passed on from generation to generation. As two Polish scholars note, “What has once entered the cultural subconsciousness cannot easily be removed.”²⁴

Halbwachs observes that memory is selective, eliminating some recollections and arranging others “according to an order conforming to our ideas of the moment.”²⁵ Names are given to recalled images and loaded with meaning. Perhaps many Poles simplified the complex reality of Jews and simplified memories in order to justify events in the past or developments in the present with reference to Jews. In any case, Poles who did have contact with Jews remembered those contacts selectively, distilled lessons from them, and transmitted them to peers and, especially, descendants. Shared memories are a way to establish bonds and a sense of belonging and may be projected onto larger arenas. As Iwona Irwin-Zarecka observes, “*Private* memories acquire public relevance.” People do not set up monuments to hardships they have experienced, but they do “tell stories, and perhaps even more importantly, act on their then-acquired view of life, work and money.”²⁶ By the same token, Jews who have never been in Poland “inherit” memories from relatives, or even from teachers, acquaintances, or books and films, and make them part of their *weltanschauung*. Remembrance is often used to sustain a people—note the popularity of the Hebrew commandment *zakhor* (to remember) among people who have very little knowledge of the language. One powerful collective memory is that of suffering. “The narrative of shared suffering greatly strengthen[s] the sense of moral obligation to the communal past” and the sense of solidarity among those who share these “memories.”²⁷ As the Passover Haggadah puts it, “in each generation a person is obliged to see himself as if he had gone out of Egypt.” Privately told stories, public remembrances, or both create these memories. The March of the Living, bringing now six thousand young Jews from Israel and the Diaspora to Poland to reenact Holocaust suffering in some symbolic way, is a salient example of this memory work. Since 1989, commemorations in writing, speech, art, and film of Polish suffering, as at Katyn, during the war, or under the Communist regime, serve a parallel purpose.

When feelings of injustice are involved, even distant conflicts remain alive in the collective memory. Poles are “deeply upset that the Jews appeared to care more about the wrongs committed by Poles than those by Nazis themselves. . . .

Missing until very recently was any recognition that the persistent denial of responsibility on the part of the Poles, especially when contrasted with the considerable efforts at moral accounting in West Germany, was the key to the Jews' reaction."²⁸ Irwin-Zarecka suggests that this is especially true in Poland, where national honor is a very important value and where self-criticism may not be as easily practiced as in some other societies. Her observations help us understand the passionate and widely reported discussions in Poland in 2000 and 2001 of atrocities perpetrated against the Jews by Poles during the war. The publication in 2000 of a book detailing the mass murder of the Jews of Jedwabne by their neighbors ignited an extensive and wide-ranging discussion of Poles' complicity in crimes against Jews and Jews' collaboration with the Soviet occupiers of eastern Poland in 1939.²⁹

Collective memory is not an inert thing to be passed on but a resource to be mobilized, much as ethnicity can be instrumentally constructed. The past is conjured up and interpreted in order to serve present needs. Jews might be remembered in order to explain the failures of the prewar republic and the advent of Communism. Insofar as the Catholic Church became the major institutionalized opposition to Communism before the appearance of Solidarity, antisemitism was built into the institution and its values, which were seen as the polar opposite of Communism. The non-Christian socialist and Communist atheists were the cosmopolitans, the non-patriots, the Soviet toadies. Who better symbolized them than the "rootless cosmopolitan," the Jew whose loyalty was either to a mythic homeland far away or to an intangible international one, but certainly not to Poland.

There is another way that Jews in Polish memory can be understood. Especially for younger generations, the word may have lost substantive meaning and serves as a pejorative to be invoked even when its literal meaning would not make sense, as, for example, when one calls a fervent Catholic such as Tadeusz Mazowiecki a Jew. "Żyd or Żydek was condensed down to a code word which no longer had literal meaning. Almost no one knew what a Jew was, but everyone knew that to be called one was bad." Thus, Cracow schoolchildren who express negative views of Jews "are not referring to Jews whom they do not know, but to Poles whom they do not like."³⁰ In a recent national sample, over 60 percent of the respondents said they had heard terms such as Żyd, Żydek, and "Icek" (a mocking nickname for Isaac) used as pejoratives, for example, in describing supporters of a rival team or people with views different from one's own.³¹ Such a term can be filled with different contents as the person using it wishes. One should bear this in mind when examining survey data on Poles' and others' attitudes toward Jews. We must be cautious and ask what kind of responses are questions about Jews evoking—that of a concrete group or person, or an abstract idea? In either case, whatever is meant, attitudes toward Jews are likely to have behavioral consequences for Jews both inside and outside Poland in regard to the country and its people.

Contemporary Polish Attitudes Toward Jews

There is ample evidence, some of it cited earlier, that negative views of Jews survive in Polish everyday speech and in the minds of Polish political and religious leaders. There is also some evidence about mass attitudes. As mentioned, one must treat it with caution because it is not clear what “Jews” means to respondents, and it may mean different things to different respondents. However, since one can put some of the evidence in a comparative context, it may provide some insights into contemporary Polish attitudes. Studies done in Poland by Poles and two surveys generated by the American Jewish Committee but conducted by Polish researchers will be cited. Some of the results can be compared with parallel surveys done elsewhere in east central Europe and the former Soviet Union.

In an open question posed to Polish respondents in 1966 about which nations they disliked, 4.1 percent mentioned Jews, as opposed to the 67 percent who mentioned Germans, 17 percent who mentioned Czechs, 14 percent who mentioned Chinese, and 13 percent who mentioned Russians.³² But Jews were not mentioned among the peoples that respondents liked most (nor were Chinese or Ukrainians). In 1972 in a somewhat similar survey, which asked which people respondents generally disliked, 3 percent mentioned Jews and 2.3 percent Israelis. Germans were, not surprisingly, the most disliked. However, when the same questions were presented to students, Israelis and Jews ranked very high—Israelis the highest—among those disliked.³³

More significant were the studies carried out by OBOP, the Center for Public Opinion Research, of attitudes toward twenty-five ethnic groups in a random national sample of adults residing in Poland. The study was repeated from 1975 to 1990 and the results regarding Jews are presented in table 21.1. Over time there is a significant drop in expressions of dislike of Jews. One wonders whether this reflects real change or increasing appreciation among the public that it may be “incorrect” to express dislike for Jews, though there are no obvious reasons that such an appreciation should have grown in the Polish public. In any case, the percentage disliking Jews remains higher than those liking Jews, though the latter rises modestly. OBOP also observed a steady decline in the proportion of respondents expressing dislike of Jews in answer to open questions. Moreover, in the 1970s Jews were second only to Germans in the proportion of people who expressed antipathy toward them (among the twenty-five nationalities about whom OBOP inquired), but in 1989 greater antipathy was expressed toward Arabs, Germans (East and West), Ukrainians, and Gypsies. Jews were still among the least liked groups, but they had risen somewhat in the estimation of Poles.

Older Poles—those over sixty and hence with memories of the prewar and war periods—were most polarized in their attitudes toward Jews, and it is among those who witnessed the Holocaust that the most anti-Jewish feelings are expressed. This was the case also in a recent study of reactions to Pope John Paul II’s visit to Israel.³⁴ Among the sixteen to nineteen year olds, 77 percent

TABLE 21.1 *Percentage of Poles Who Like or Dislike Jews*

	1975	1977	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Like	4	5	7	6	8	9	13	9	11	11	14	15
Dislike	41	38	25	23	24	20	23	18	16	19	21	20
Indifferent	54	57	67	71	68	71	64	73	73	70	65	65
Diff. btwn.												
1 & 2	-37	-33	-18	-17	-16	-11	-10	-9	-5	-8	-7	-5

Source: Franciszek Ryszka and Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania, "Antysemityzm polski: Szkic do opisu i diagnozy," in *Bliscy i dalecy*, ed. G. Gesicka et al. (Warsaw: Instytut Socjologii, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 1992), 190.

Note: figures do not add up to 100% because of rounding.

were neutral in their attitudes toward Jews. Men were slightly more hostile to Jews than women. Intelligentsia (mental workers) with higher education are the only social category in which the proportion of those liking Jews (27 percent) is higher than those disliking them (25 percent). In general, the higher one's education, the greater the sympathy expressed toward Jews. Those who live in large cities are more sympathetic and those who live in rural areas least sympathetic toward Jews. These correlates of attitudes to Jews are found in other studies as well.³⁵

In a 1988 social-distance study that measured attitudes toward fourteen peoples, using Bogardus scales, only Arabs and Blacks were deemed less desirable (as neighbors, friends, etc.) than Jews. In 1990 and 1991, more people expressed dislike of Blacks, Romanians, Russians, Arabs, Germans, and Gypsies than of Jews. Nearly 20 percent expressed dislike of Jews, lower than in earlier years, and the number of groups disliked even more had expanded. Taken together with other studies, these results lead Franciszek Ryszka and Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania to conclude that in the view of Poles, Jews are at the "border" of those who are considered of European and Christian culture and those who are not. The proportion of those who could not express an opinion because they were not familiar with Jews hovered around 30 percent. In 1998, the three groups that Poles would least want as spouses were Gypsies, Blacks, and Jews.³⁶

In May 1992 a representative sample of adult Poles was surveyed. Distinguishing between "traditional" antisemitism (rooted in religion), which they found was limited to those over sixty, poorly educated, and living mainly in rural areas and small towns, and "modern" antisemitism, which is justified by ideology, the researchers concluded that 17 percent of Poles manifested the latter type of antisemitism.³⁷ Respondents learned about Jews mostly from the mass media, films, books, and magazines, but only since the late 1980s. By contrast, discussions with family and friends—reported by 48 percent and 30 percent of respondents, respectively, as the source of information—have been a constant source. Interestingly, educational institutions and the Catholic Church are rela-

TABLE 21.2 *Amount of Influence Jews Have in Our Society*

	Too much (%)	Too little (%)	About right (%)	Don't know (%)
Hungary	17	13	51	19
Poland	26	5	27	42
Czechoslovakia	11	21	27	41
Czechs	5	23	28	44
Slovaks	25	16	25	34
Austria	28	7	48	17

Source: Renae Cohen and Jennifer Golub, *Attitudes toward Jews in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia: A Comparative Study* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1991).

tively minor sources. Michael Steinlauf concludes that this is a legacy of Communism: “[I]t is above all personal narrative, transmitted behind closed doors by family and friends, that has been relied upon for making sense of the world.”³⁸

Over half the respondents thought Jews have too much influence in the world.³⁹ However, the authors interpret some of the data as indicating favorable views of Jews. For example, 65 percent say Jews are industrious and hard working, and 35 percent suggest that other nations should guard their traditions as Jews do. However, 79 percent think Jews stick together (it is difficult to interpret this) and 39 percent agree that “I am not an antisemite, but I think one should be careful with Jews.”⁴⁰ Both the data and the analyses are very rich and cannot be fully explored here. The research team concluded that antisemitic attitudes were highly correlated with nationalistic attitudes. Poles define themselves in opposition to Jews and Germans, and that leads to animosity toward Jews, to which most respondents admit.

The American Jewish Committee has funded at least five surveys of attitudes toward Jews in formerly Communist countries. In 1991, the question, “Do you feel that the Jews have too much influence, too little influence, or the right amount of influence in our society?” was asked in four countries, and the results are displayed in table 21.2.⁴¹ Another survey question asked, “How do you feel about having Jews in your neighborhood? Would you like to have some Jewish neighbors, would it make any difference to you, or would you prefer not to have any Jewish neighbors?” (see table 21.3).⁴²

Looking just at these two tables, one could say that Poles display the most negative feelings toward Jews, though they are not very different from Slovaks and Austrians (who had a Jewish prime minister, Bruno Kreisky) on the first question. It should also be noted that regarding neighbors, Poles were more negative toward Blacks, Arabs, Asians, and Gypsies than toward Jews, and about equally negative toward Russians and Germans. Hungarians and Czechs see Jews as far more desirable than any of these other groups.⁴³ By 1995, the proportion of Poles who would not want Jewish neighbors declined from 40 percent (1991)

TABLE 21.3 *How Do You Feel about Having Jews in Your Neighborhood?*

	Number of Respondents	Like to have (%)	Wouldn't matter (%)	Prefer not (%)	Don't know (%)
Hungary	1,201	16	65	17	2
Poland	1,200	3	51	40	7
Czechoslovakia	1,132	5	62	23	10
Czechs	739	5	66	20	9
Slovaks	337	5	52	32	12

Source: Renae Cohen and Jennifer Golub, *Attitudes toward Jews in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia: A Comparative Study* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1991).

Note: figures do not add up to 100% because of rounding.

to 30 percent, and only 16 percent opined that Jews had too much influence in society, a decline of 10 percent from 1991.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, in a national survey taken in 2000, 55 percent of Poles had heard the opinion expressed that Poland is ruled by Jews and 49 percent had heard that Jews rule the world, though over half felt that such expressions should be publicly condemned or even that they should be considered crimes.⁴⁵ One cannot be certain that this reflects a genuine decline in anti-Jewish outlooks or a growing reluctance to express such outlooks. For further comparison, we note that in 1999 Slovaks expressed substantially greater willingness than they had in 1991 to have Jews as neighbors (16 percent said they would like Jewish neighbors) and Czechs also displayed more positive feelings about Jewish neighbors.⁴⁶

Finally, one of the survey questions reveals a good deal about how the majority nation views the Jews within its midst. "Which statement comes closer to your opinion: Jews are an integral part of our nation, or Jews are outsiders to our society?" (see table 21.4).⁴⁷ Historical-cultural reasons may explain the differences between Hungarians and Poles on this question. In Austro-Hungary Jews were counted as Magyars because language was made the criterion for ethnic identification when the Magyars wanted to increase their proportion in the multinational empire. Jews were more acculturated and even assimilated in Hungary and the Czech lands than in Poland, though not in Slovakia.

In 1996 in Russia, 14 percent of a national sample (1,581 people) expressed the view that Jews had too much influence in Russia, 21 percent said too little, 29 percent said the right amount, and 36 percent had no opinion. Seventeen percent did not want Jewish neighbors, about two-thirds did not care, and 13 percent would have liked to have Jewish neighbors.⁴⁸ On these measures and at those times, at least, citizens of the Russian Federation were more kindly disposed toward Jews than were the Poles. As Robert Brym notes, "Most surveys show that roughly 15% of Russians hold negative opinions about Jews and about a third claim to hold no opinion."⁴⁹ But at times of economic and political un-

TABLE 21.4 *Which Statement Comes Closer to Your Opinion: Jews Are an Integral Part of Our Nation or Jews Are Outsiders to Our Society?*

	Integral (%)	Outsiders (%)	Neither (%)	Both (%)	Don't know (%)
Hungary	75	10	3	4	8
Poland	44	16	11	8	21
Czechoslovakia	52	11	13	5	20
Czechs	54	12	12	3	19
Slovaks	49	9	14	7	21

Source: Renae Cohen and Jennifer Golub, *Attitudes toward Jews in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia: A Comparative Study* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1991).

Note: figures do not add up to 100% because of rounding.

rest, anti-Jewish feeling rises considerably higher.⁵⁰ In the Czech Republic in 1999, only 8 percent thought Jews had “too much influence . . . in our society,” and 17 percent preferred not to have Jews as neighbors. In Slovakia, more fervently Catholic, less urbanized, and with a Nazi collaborationist government in the 1940s, 15 percent thought Jews had too much influence and 16 percent did not want Jewish neighbors.⁵¹

The overall picture that emerges is that Poles are somewhat more hostile to Jews than most of the peoples living in neighboring states, but there seems to be a trend toward diminishing hostility. This trend may continue over time, as the youngest cohorts display the most favorable attitudes toward Jews.

The Attitude of American Jews toward Poles

It is striking that, while there are numerous studies of attitudes of others in America toward Jews, I was unable to find a single study of Jewish views of others. The Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, and other organizations have sponsored many studies of how various groups in America and in Europe feel about Jews, but it seems that no one has investigated how Jews feel about other ethnic groups.⁵² It is understandable that Jewish “defense” organizations would not sponsor research on how Jews view others, but it is surprising that no one else seems to have done so. The General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center nearly every year since the 1970s shows that Jews are among the most tolerant toward other ethnic groups, but there are no data about attitudes toward Poles or Polish Americans.⁵³ There is, of course, much literature about American-Jewish political liberalism.⁵⁴ My observations and common sense would indicate that Jews, like others, must entertain some prejudicial attitudes toward other peoples. These are probably found differentially in age, educational, and denominational groups among Jews, but we can only speculate on what those distributions might be.

In the absence of empirical evidence, my impression is that American Jews have largely negative attitudes toward Poles, and there is some evidence that young Poles are aware of it.⁵⁵ I have accompanied about a dozen American-Jewish tour groups to Poland since 1989, most consisting of two dozen or more middle-aged and elderly Jews. In 1997, after lecturing over several weeks to a group of sixty high school students in Detroit, I accompanied them on the March of the Living to Poland. I have also participated in Jewish organizational life for many years. This is my inadequate evidentiary base for the assertion that many American Jews regard Poles as incorrigibly antisemitic.

I suggest that there are many sources of this outlook. Poles in America have generally been the object of ridicule (“Polish jokes” were all the rage some years ago), and Jews may have been influenced by the general image of a somewhat primitive, uneducated, and unsophisticated group, perhaps akin to the “dumb Swedes” of generations ago. American-Jewish impressions of Poles are for the most part not direct but transmitted as part of the collective memory by immigrants. Whether they came in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or as refugees after 1945, many Jewish immigrants from Poland were deeply scarred by the antisemitism they had experienced, and this has become ingrained in the folklore of immigrant Jewry. Perhaps there is an element of Americanization involved here—rejecting the “old country” and its people may be an element in the psychological Americanization of the immigrant and part of his or her patriotism.

Holocaust survivors are regarded as especially authoritative on Polish attitudes toward Jews. Irwin-Zarecka is probably right when she says, “[T]he experience of surviving was too varied (in its balance of acts of decency and acts of betrayal, and in its degrees of connectedness with the actions and attitudes of Polish Christians) to allow for a singularly negative view of the Poles”; but “It was the pain of seeing the death of one’s people greeted with wide indifference and often satisfaction that would be imprinted on the Jews’ memory of Poles and Poland.”⁵⁶ Speaking or writing with the authority of experience, firsthand knowledge, and survival, the survivors have undoubtedly had a great influence on the image of Poland among American Jews.

Negative feelings about Poland may be part of a more general *shlilat hagalat*, negation of the Diaspora, a Zionist principle that has penetrated some segments of American Jewry, though they are wont to temper it by asserting that “America is different.” Often, American-Jewish travelers in central Europe will ask local Jews, “Why don’t you go to Israel?” To the retort, “Why don’t you?” they will answer, “Ah, but we live in America and you live here. This is no place for a Jew.” As the quintessential Diaspora, with its large and effervescent Jewish population annihilated in the Shoah, Poland serves as the proof case either that America is the only place Jews can feel safe or that the Zionists are right about the *galut*. All the attributes of *galut* were present in Poland: social and governmental antisemitism, poverty, powerlessness, backwardness.

For some, Poland is the very antithesis of Israel, where Jews are produc-

tive, powerful, and proud. Polish Jews who meet an American co-ethnic often hear the indignant question, "How can you live here?" I suspect it is a twofold question for many: How can you live in this mass Jewish cemetery, and how can you live among these horrible Poles? There may even be a third challenge hidden here, which none dare frame explicitly: the very presence of Jews in Poland negates the idea that everything was totally destroyed and all is lifeless. Many American Jews are profoundly ambivalent about supporting the Jewish revival that has been going on in Poland since the late 1980s. "It's a waste of time and money. If they really want to be Jewish, they should go to Israel." "I wouldn't spend a dime here, giving money to those Poles who killed our people." Significantly, Polish Jews have not been invited as a group to participate in the March of the Living until very recently, perhaps because the only Polish Jews are supposed to be dead Jews.

For most American Jews, Poland is the place the Shoah occurred. Some American newspapers refer to "Polish concentration camps," meaning camps located in Poland, but readers may infer that these were run by Poles. Even camps that were not in Poland, such as Bergen-Belsen, are assumed to have been there. Some believe that the death camps were in Poland because of Polish antisemitism, ignoring the fact that if one wants to kill Jews one would logically go to the single largest Jewish population, or to the convenient junction of railroads at places such as Auschwitz.

Of course, the stereotype of Polish antisemitism—which like all stereotypes has truth in it except that it becomes overgeneralized and attributed to each Polish person—itself breeds resentments against Jews. Some Poles feel that nothing they can do or say can dislodge the negative feelings Jews have toward them, just as nothing Jews can do or say could change the mind of the convinced antisemite. As Piotr Wróbel observes, "Both sides have selective perceptions of the past and know almost nothing about each other. One man's history is another man's lie."⁵⁷

Intolerance or prejudice produces a parallel reaction. A Jewish college student in 1947 or 1948 explained why he was intolerant of certain non-Jews: "I am intolerant because I have been a victim of intolerance during my early formative years. These hatreds and prejudices I have developed are reactions used as a defense mechanism. If Joe Doakes hates me I naturally will return the compliment."⁵⁸ As Gordon Allport notes, "Victims of prejudice may . . . inflict on others what they themselves receive."⁵⁹ He notes, however, that victims of prejudice are usually either very prejudiced themselves or very low in prejudice: "Being a victim oneself disposes one either to develop aggression toward *or* sympathy with other out-groups."⁶⁰

It is perhaps surprising that as highly educated a group as American Jews would content themselves with fairly simplistic views of Poland and be satisfied with categorization rather than deeper inquiry. The 1995 *March of the Living Study Guide* runs some 270 pages. Not a single page is devoted to Polish history or culture, and only 13 pages deal with Polish Jewry before World War

II.⁶¹ It is as if Polish Jewry existed in a vacuum or could just as easily have been in some other country. Begun in 1988, the march has been widely praised and also criticized. It now involves six thousand Jewish teenagers annually and undoubtedly plays a very important part in shaping their views of Poland and those of their families, friends, and educators. The march portrays Poland as a Jewish wasteland, and some groups are taught that it is a country seething with antisemitism. Indeed, some groups actually hope to encounter antisemitism so that they can confirm their views and perhaps even experience in a benign way that which culminated in the Holocaust.

Many American-Jewish adults have made their own journeys to Poland in the last decade. They go not to “have a good time,” but to “lay claim to space” and to fulfill the mitzvah of *zakhor*. A trip to Poland is “ritualistic rather than ludic—a form of religious service rather than leisure.”⁶²

In recent years victimization has become a popular condition or stance. As advanced societies have become more generous to the disadvantaged, all kinds of groups have claimed victim status in order to right wrongs, gain sympathy, and perhaps be compensated. “Designating the oppressor carries exploitative potential. There is indeed only a fine line, often crossed in political arguments, between somber remembrance of the victims and capitalizing on the emotional charge of memory for immediate communal returns.” Self-definition as a victim also marks the boundary between “us” and “them” and helps consolidate a sense of community among the oppressed.⁶³ Where once young Jews might have been embarrassed by the powerlessness of Polish and other Jews during the Shoah, today that powerlessness, while not to be emulated, may for some be a badge of honor. Part of the Polish-Jewish battle over the legacy of World War II involves rival claims for victimhood. Who suffered more is an issue in the relationship between the two peoples.

One concomitant of victimhood is the right to claim an apology. In recent years Poles “have become accustomed to receiving apologies, as a nation, not only from the Germans but also from the Russians for atrocities such as Katyn.”⁶⁴ Asians are outraged by the consistent refusal of the Japanese to apologize for their role in the war. Jews too have become very concerned about apologies. Every sentence of Pope John Paul’s statements in Israel was parsed to determine the degree of apology. Nearly three-quarters of Poles surveyed agreed that the pope was right to apologize for “Christian shedding of Jewish blood” during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and most thought his trip would result in better Catholic-Jewish and Polish-Jewish relations. The proportion agreeing that Jews are the “older brothers in faith” of Christians rose from 40 percent in 1996 to 52 percent after the pope’s trip.⁶⁵

The French government, Swiss banks, Italian insurance firms, American automobile companies, and others have been asked for both apologies and compensation for what they did during the war. Jews seem happier with the Germans than with the Austrians since the former have apologized for their war-time actions, whereas the latter continue to uphold the myth that they were

Nazism's first victim. Poles obviously do not feel they have anything to apologize for, since they were clearly victims and not perpetrators. Jews, on the other hand, while acknowledging Polish victimhood, seek apologies for the actions and inactions of Polish individuals, the Catholic Church, the Home Army, and others.

Looking Ahead

Collective memories and individual beliefs are not immutable, though they do not change easily. It is clearly in the interests of both Poles and Jews to settle the differences between them to the extent possible, though neither side regards this as a high priority. In order to do that one would first have to ascertain the beliefs about Poles and Poland held by American Jews. No one will be surprised that an academic calls for research. But it is needed because one has to know the problem before one seeks a solution. At the same time, continued and consistent monitoring of Polish views of Jews is called for. Both should be used for the main aim, which is to educate each group about the other, perhaps through ongoing meetings between opinion makers in each nation. At another level, what each people learns about the other needs to be examined—and presumably changed—systematically. One study of Polish school texts concludes that the historic role of Jews in Poland is almost entirely neglected and what little there is has been distorted.⁶⁶ If the *March of the Living* text is any example, as much remains to be done on the Jewish side as on the Polish side.

Notes

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3. *Ibid.*, 9.
4. *Ibid.*, 169.
5. Harold Segel, *Stranger in Our Midst: Images of the Jew in Polish Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).
6. Cited in Simon Segal, *The New Poland and the Jews* (New York: Lee Furman, 1938), 79–80.
7. Alina Cała, *The Image of the Jew in Polish Folk Culture* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995), 230.
8. *Ibid.*, 231.
9. Stephan Horak, *Poland and Her National Minorities, 1918–39* (New York: Vantage Press, 1961).
10. Henry Gitelman, *I Am Drenched in the Dew of My Childhood: A Memoir* (privately published, 1997), 21.
11. It should be noted that some of Shamir's immediate family were murdered by Polish neighbors during the Nazi occupation.
12. Josef Sommerfeldt, "Die Juden in den Polnischen Sprichwörtern und Sprichwörtlichen Redensarten," *Die Burg: vierteljahresschrift des Instituts für Deutsche ostarbeit* 3 (Cracow, July 1942); this was a Nazi quarterly journal.

13. Cała, *The Image of the Jew*; Olga Goldberg-Mulkiewicz, "Kavim lidmuto shel hayehudi bayetsirah hapolanit ha'amamit," *Folklore Research Center Studies* 1 (1970): 149–154; and Olga Goldberg-Mulkiewicz, "The Stereotype of the Jew in Polish Folklore," in *Studies in Aggadah and Jewish Folklore*, ed. Issachar Ben-Ami and Joseph Dan (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983), 83–94.
14. Piotr Wróbel, "Double Memory: Poles and Jews after the Holocaust," *East European Politics and Societies* 11, no. 3 (1997): 569.
15. See Anna Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie, 11 Sierpnia 1945 r.* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2000).
16. Several excellent articles on conflicts between Jews and Poles in the immediate post-war period can be found in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (2000) ("Focusing on the Holocaust and Its Aftermath").
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18. Cited in Carol Ritter and John Roth, eds., *Memory Offended: The Auschwitz Convent Controversy* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 220–224.
19. See the excellent, balanced discussion by Michael Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 122–144, and the literature cited there. A thoughtful article is Joanna Michlic-Coren's "The Troubling Past: The Polish Collective Memory of the Holocaust," *East European Jewish Affairs* 29, no. 1 (1999). See, more polemically, Paul Lendvai, *Antisemitism without Jews* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971); and Michael Checinski, *Poland: Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism* (New York: Karz-Cohl, 1982). Another "inside" view is that of Hirsh Smolar, *Oif der letster pozitsie, mit der letster hofnung* (Tel Aviv: Peretz farlag, 1982). A thoughtful essay which draws heavily on belles lettres is Madeline G. Levine's "Wrestling with Ghosts: Poles and Jews Today," Woodrow Wilson Center: East European Studies, Occasional Paper Number 36, March 1992.
20. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1932), 1: xviii.
21. I am grateful to Professor Howard Schuman for alerting me to a difference between socialization and collective memory.
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23. *Ibid.*, 90–92.
24. Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, "After the Fall: Attitudes towards Jews in Post-1989 Poland," *Nationalities Papers* 26, no. 2 (1998): 267.
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29. See Tomasz Szarota, "Diabelskie Szczegóły," *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Warsaw), 18–19 November 2000; Andrzej Kaczyński, "Nie zabijaj," *Rzeczpospolita*, 10 July 2000; Sergiusz Kowalski, "Jedwabne: Spóźniona debata," *Midrasz* 2, no. 46 (Warsaw, February 2001); and Jan Nowak-Jezioranski, "Wybuch neoantysemityzmu wyrządziłyby straszliwe szkody pozycji i dobremu imieniu Polski w świecie," *Rzeczpospolita* (Warsaw), 26 January 2001.

30. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Orla-Bukowska, "After the Fall," 270.
31. Bogna Wciorka, "Polacy-Żydzi, Komunikat," CBOS (Center for the Study of Public Opinion), 25 January 2001, 19.
32. Franciszek Ryszka and Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania, "Antysemityzm polski: Szkic do opisu i diagnozy," in *Bliscy i dalecy*, ed. G. Gesicka et al. (Warsaw: Instytut Socjologii, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 1992), 189.
33. *Ibid.* In the same anthology, an article by Anna Sawisz analyzes 149 viewer's letters (1985) reacting to Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*. See her "Obraz Żydów i stosunków polsko-żydowskich w listach widzów po emisji filmu 'Shoa,'" in *Bliscy i dalecy*, ed. G. Gesicka et al., 137–165.
34. Wciorka, "Polacy-Żydzi: Komunikat," 19.
35. *Ibid.*; *Polacy wobec ludzi innych narodów: Dynamika bliskości i dystansu, 1988–1998* (Warsaw, OBOP, 1999).
36. *Polacy wobec ludzi innych narodów: Dynamika bliskości i dystansu, 1998–1998*.
37. Ireniusz Krzeminski, ed. *Czy Polacy są antysemitami?* (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 1996), 300.
38. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 124.
39. Andrzej Ćwikowski, "Źródła wiedzy Polaków o Żydach: Socjalizacja postaw," in *Czy Polacy są antysemitami?* ed. Krzeminski, 93. In the CBOS survey (Wciorka, "Polacy-Żydzi: Komunikat") 49% had heard the opinion expressed that Jews had too much influence in the world, and 55% had heard that "Jews rule Poland."
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41. Renae Cohen and Jennifer Golub, *Attitudes toward Jews in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia: A Comparative Study* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1991).
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*, 8, 12, 19.
44. Jennifer Golub and Renae Cohen, *Knowledge and Remembrance of the Holocaust in Poland* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1995), 39.
45. Wciorka, "Polacy-Żydzi: Komunikat," 18.
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- New York University Press, 1994); Robert J. Brym, "Russian Attitudes towards Jews: An Update," *East European Jewish Affairs* 26, no. 1 (1996): 55–64.
51. *Czech Holocaust Survey and Slovak Holocaust Survey* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1999); and unpublished reports.
 52. In a national sample of American Jews surveyed early in 2000, 30% saw "many or most Catholics as antisemitic" as opposed to only 4% of Jewish leaders who held this view. "Hispanics" were the only "ethnic" group included in the survey. They were seen as antisemitic by 21% of the Jewish public and 6% of Jewish leaders. See Steven M. Cohen, "Religion and the Public Square: Attitudes of American Jews in Comparative Perspective," paper, Center for Jewish Community Studies, Philadelphia. I am grateful to Professor Cohen for allowing me to read this stimulating paper.
 53. Communication from the National Opinion Research Center, 26 February 2001.
 54. Much of this work is cited in William Spinrad, "The Politics of American Jews: An Example of Ethnic Group Analysis," in *Ethnicity, Identity, and History*, ed. Joseph Maier and Chaim Waxman (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1983), 249–272.
 55. A survey among over a thousand Polish tenth graders asked about the attitudes of thirteen nations toward Poles and found that Jews were perceived as the most unfriendly, with Russians and Gypsies next. Jolanta Ambrosewicz, "Researching Ethnocentrism in Poland," paper presented at the seventh conference of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas, Bergen, Norway, August 2000, p. 9.
 56. Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory: The Jew in Contemporary Poland* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 144–145.
 57. Wróbel, "Double Memory: Poles and Jews after the Holocaust," 574.
 58. Dorothy Tilden Spoerl, "The Jewish Stereotype, the Jewish Personality, and Jewish Prejudice," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 7 (1952): 276.
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 62. Jack Kugelmass, "The Rites of the Tribe: The Meaning of Poland for American Jewish Tourists," *YIVO Annual* (New York, 1993): 411, 419.
 63. Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 60.
 64. Chris Hann, "Ethnic Cleansing in Eastern Europe: Poles and Ukrainians beside the Curzon Line," *Nations and Nationalism* 2, no. 3 (November 1996): 405.
 65. Wciorka, "Polacy-Żydzi: Komunikat," 5 and 8.
 66. Hanna W. grzynek, *The Treatment of Jewish Themes in Polish Schools* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1998).

CHAPTER 22

*The Impact of the Shoah on
the Thinking of Contemporary
Polish Jewry*

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT



STANISŁAW KRAJEWSKI

*P*ostwar Poland is, roughly, my time and my place. I did not choose the place and time of birth—Who did?—but it is my place, with its good and bad features. I have actively participated in Jewish life since 1989 and to some extent in the previous decade. Before starting my journey to Jewish involvement in the 1970s, when I was in my twenties, I had belonged to the category of completely assimilated, non-Jewish Jews. This category is crucial for any attempt to understand the postwar Polish-Jewish condition.

In the following pages, I shall consider the impact of the Shoah, an impossible task. In one word—overwhelming. And this is for two reasons: the obvious Jewish one, and the less well understood Polish one. When I was young, memory of the war was a dominant theme in Polish society. For decades films and most works of fiction were about the war. In contemporary Poland, one need only say “the war” to refer to World War II. And for Polish Jews of all categories, the war has been even more of a watershed. We have been living in the shadow of the Shoah, which has had direct consequences (devastation, a dramatic decline in Jewish numbers, changes in the ownership of property) and indirect ones (whereby, for example, its memory could easily lead to an approval of Communism). Its most lasting psychological consequence is the fear of oppression and murder transmitted unwillingly to subsequent generations. That fear has contributed more than anything else to the hiding of one’s Jewish roots in postwar Poland. Another long-term effect of the Shoah is how foreigners have viewed Polish Jewry: for foreign Jews, Poland has become a huge Jewish

cemetery—and nothing more. Let me stress at once that despite this harsh legacy, today's Jewish community in Poland is not some half-real remnant bound to the dead. We are as real and as future-oriented as other Jewish communities around the world.

Let us begin with the complex question of numbers. It is impossible to know precisely how many Jews were living in Poland during various periods in postwar Poland or the size of today's community. The problem stems from the difficult question of who should be counted as "Jewish." Do we include marginally Jewish Jews? Do we include non-halachic Jews (children with only a Jewish father) and do we include Catholics of Jewish origin, or at least those among them who have some Jewish feelings?¹ Rather than trying to address all the questions, I shall focus on the category of "marginal Jews," divided into three types: (1) "non-Jewish," or completely assimilated Jews who have no connection to Jewish life; (2) hidden Jews who have not yet, or may never, come out of the closet, so to speak; (3) and Communist Jews. On the basis of my experiences, I believe, as do quite a few of my friends, that in Poland today there are more marginal Jews than there are official members of the Jewish organizations.² That is why there is no way to know the true number of Jews in Poland, as most hidden and assimilated Jews have chosen not to join Jewish organizations and are not counted. Therefore, I claim that nobody really knows the answer to the question of the size of Poland's Jewish population. The standard estimates of between 5,000 and 10,000 are misleading. While unregistered Jews are difficult to find and count in every country, this is particularly the case in Poland.

Polish Jewry in the Immediate Postwar Years

The first postwar years witnessed a rather complex picture. It was the period of the post-Shoah shock, the still fresh awareness of the losses. All Jews were survivors. They were on the move. People were coming back from hiding, from camps, and from Russia. Few were able to resettle in their homes: for two or three years gentiles had lived there, and the new dwellers were not ready to give up their new houses. Because of that some Jews were murdered and thousands had to escape. In addition to antisemitism, Jews were subjects of a more general disorder: the whole country was reemerging from chaos, affected by a radical change of borders and the population transfers of millions.

How many Jews were there? Those who survived in German-occupied Poland were joined by those who returned from Russia. By 1 July 1946, 243,926 people had registered with the Central Committee of Polish Jews (CKŻP), a figure that does not take into account those Jews who never registered in Jewish organizations.³ All statistics about the postwar Jewish population thus contain only a partial picture, leaving out many from among the marginal Jews as well as those Catholic converts. If all are taken into account, we arrive, it seems to me, at a figure of well over 300,000 Jews. Not a small figure by many stan-

dards, even if a mere 10 percent of the prewar Jewish population. And the number of Jews remaining in Poland was steadily decreasing.

Emigration, which was a major phenomenon during the immediate postwar years, was caused by several elements: the memories of the tragedy, the feeling that Poland had become a huge Jewish cemetery, the fear of antisemitism, and the Zionist impulse. A major stimulus for emigration, or even escape, was provided by the most sinister event of that time, the infamous pogrom in Kielce, on 4 July 1946, when 42 Jews were killed by soldiers and a mob, which gathered when rumors of a ritual murder had been circulated.

The Jewish community, which reached its peak in the summer of 1946, remained substantial even after the massive post-Kielce and Zionist emigration waves.⁴ In 1949, close to 100,000 Jews were registered in Poland on the occasion of the distribution of matzo for Pesach.⁵

Despite large-scale emigration, the period 1945–1949 was marked by a vibrant reconstruction of Jewish life. In 1946, the Joint supported 278 educational institutions with 20,631 students.⁶ While only a fraction of Polish Jews embraced religious life at the time, there were still eighty communities with twenty-five rabbis in 1947.⁷ Most social, educational, and cultural activities were conducted under the auspices of the secular left-wing CKŻP. The watchword was “productivization,” that is, teaching Jews skills needed in industry.

Despite the relatively high support for the Communist party, Jews and Jewish institutions suffered from communism as much as anyone else. Stalinist totalitarianism affected the Jewish sector as much as other sectors of Poland. In 1949 and 1950, all non-Communist political parties were banned in Poland, including Jewish ones. All Jewish institutions—from schools to theaters—were nationalized while the borders were sealed, putting a halt to emigration.⁸

With the liberalization in the Soviet Union and Poland beginning in 1956, a new wave of immigrants reached Poland. Among those thousands of Polish citizens who returned to Poland from Russia, there were 18,000 Polish Jews.⁹ But even after Stalin’s death in 1953 and the end to the terror, freedom was not granted in the late 1950s and 1960s. Despite the lack of freedoms, six state Jewish elementary schools and three Jewish high schools (all in Polish) continued to function until 1967, as well as organized activities for youth, such as Jewish scouting and Jewish summer camps.¹⁰ What is more, the Yiddish Theater continued to be active in Warsaw. In the 1960s, the youth clubs of the Communist-dominated Social Cultural Association of Jews in Poland were active and some of their members were involved in dissident activities.

Due to continued emigration, particularly in the period 1957–1958, the Jewish population continued to shrink. By 1961, the official Jewish population of Poland was 45,000.¹¹ We should nonetheless take into account the probability that the number of unaffiliated Jews (including those marginally Jewish, and their children) was comparable to the number of official members of the Jewish community.

1967–1969: Official Antisemitism, Forced Emigration

The 1967 Six-Day War gave rise to a so-called “anti-Zionist campaign” in Poland. The peak of this campaign coincided with the protests of students and intellectuals who demanded more freedoms; the protest movement was repressed, and anti-Polish Zionist agitators were accused of manipulating students. The state-controlled media preached antisemitism. For a few months in factories, in the army, in state offices, and in universities, Communist activists singled out Jews whom they condemned as disloyal, pro-Israel, or anti-social. Occasionally, they attacked non-Jews who looked Jewish or had Jewish-sounding names. The difference between Socialism and National Socialism was blurred in the eyes of Jews.

The antisemitic propaganda of 1968 was without parallel in postwar Europe, as were the resulting purges and the consequent emigration of a majority of Polish Jews. The direct responsibility rests on the ruling Communists, but the significance of that antisemitic, anti-liberal, and anti-intellectual campaign can be seen—to use the phrase of Adam Michnik—in the attempt to incorporate Polish extreme right-wing traditions in order to bring legitimacy to Communist rule. About 15,000 Jews left Poland officially and were forced to renounce their Polish citizenship.¹² Many left for Sweden and Denmark, where they got state assistance as refugees. Others went to Israel, the United States, or other Western countries.¹³ It was during the 1968 antisemitic campaign that some young citizens of Poland learned about their Jewish origin for the first time when their parents suddenly announced, “We are Jews and can’t stand the antisemitic campaign. We’re going to emigrate.”

1970–1989, after the Last Exodus: Decline and Independent Initiatives

The antisemitic propaganda of 1968 ceased after a few months. But it permanently changed the lives of Polish Jews, both those who emigrated and those who remained. For it was only after 1968 that I realized that we belong to one group and that Jewishness can be important, contrary to what my parents had believed. Many other Polish Jews were like my parents, a good part of whom were Communists and raised completely de-Judaized children, not infrequently in mixed marriages. Yet the fear and insecurity connected with Jewishness was often passed to the next generation. The parents transmitted to their children the feeling that Jewishness is irrelevant, obsolete, and that antisemitism is the only real dimension of a Jewish presence.

In 1968 I participated in the protest movement. I must stress that the March 1968 events, despite antisemitism, were shared by people like me and by leaders of the Catholic intelligentsia, which was also attacked for, among other things, being manipulated by Zionists. Although it is difficult now to believe, during the March 1968 events, all students, with the exception of official Communists, protested against antisemitism. The bond created then remains alive still today.

After 1968, Jewish life in Poland seemed to be slowly coming to an end. Jewish schools disappeared and intellectual activities ceased. Some older Jews still met in order to speak Yiddish, but that language too was disappearing. Neither Yiddish nor the domination of Communists in Jewish institutions was attractive to the younger generation of Jews. The Yiddish Theater in Warsaw had a very small audience that could understand the play without a Polish translation. In practice, the theater began to function as a museum since 1968. And since the government controlled the Jewish organizations, their leadership publicly supported the official anti-Zionist policy.

During the 1970s, Jewish topics were nonexistent in official cultural life. Although underground uncensored publications helped to break the taboo, their influence was limited. At the same time, in private semi-clandestine groups, some children of assimilated Jews began to explore their Jewish roots and look for Jewish knowledge. My own group, active from the late 1970s, was called—in the spirit of the Polish conspiratorial tradition—the Jewish Flying University. With no or minimal contact with the organized Jewish community, we learned, discussed, and eventually celebrated Jewish holidays.

Many of us who began exploring our Jewish roots were also involved in Polish national life during the dissident period of the 1970s and the eruption of 1980. Most young Jews and quite a few of the elder ones shared the enthusiasm of the initial *Solidarność* movement. To many it was like returning from an “internal emigration,” initiated by the 1968 campaign. The liberalization of 1980 and 1981 was helpful to Jewish identity-seekers because, for the first time since the late 1940s, many articles and books on Jewish topics were published, such as accounts of the Kielce pogrom.¹⁴ The public was hungry. I was therefore not really surprised that my wife’s book of photographs of Jewish cemeteries became a bestseller in the 1980s.¹⁵ These developments of the early 1980s later brought fruit in organized Jewish life.

Renewal: Jewish Life in Post-Communist Poland

The small renaissance of organized Jewish life began on the eve of the fall of communism when, in 1988, the New York–based Ronald S. Lauder Foundation inaugurated its educational summer camps. Freedom and educational possibilities have made possible the emergence of new Jewish institutions since 1989 and revitalization of some old ones, notably the Union of Jewish Religious Communities. While the formally Orthodox character is maintained, women have been granted equal rights in institutional life, and a woman, the sociologist Helena Datner, was president of the Warsaw Community from 1998 to 2001. Also, the criteria for membership have been liberalized in most communities: either Jewish ancestry or conversion is expected. In some communities a new generation of leaders is present, partly from among those who participated in the independent Jewish activities in the 1980s. There are some young Jews who see Jewishness

as primarily religious, but the majority is far from religion, young and old Jews alike.

After 1968 no Jewish schools functioned, and almost no Jewish education was offered in Poland. But Jewish education was revived in the 1990s with the formation of a Jewish kindergarten and Jewish elementary school in Warsaw, a Jewish elementary school in Wrocław, and ongoing educational activities, all of them supported by the Lauder Foundation. The combined membership in all the schools is well over two hundred students, some of them without Jewish roots. This leads to a natural involvement in Jewish life of some of the children of assimilated Jews. Due to involvement in the new Jewish schools, the parents of those students are also beginning to learn Jewish traditions.

In sharp contrast to the decades of Communist Poland, information on Judaism and Jewish history is now readily available. Scores of books have been translated, some written by local authors. There are also periodic publications such as the biweekly *Dos yiddishe vort*, in Polish and Yiddish; the monthly *Midrasz*, in Polish; and an irregular youth magazine, *Jidele*, in Polish. In addition, the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw publishes a scholarly journal.

Among the new institutions there is the Union of Jewish Students and the Association of Jewish Combatants. Other institutions, such as the Social-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, continue their cultural activities, although the Yiddish language, which was formerly its hallmark, is not known to the post-war generations. Both the old and the new institutions get support from the Joint. Financial self-sufficiency is not yet in sight. This may become a possibility only when successful professionals and business people decide to join the organizations in larger numbers. Things can also improve due to the ongoing restitution of former Jewish communal property.

Marginal Jews Today

Perhaps the main characteristic of the reemerging community is an almost complete generation gap. Old members of Jewish organizations have children who are unaffiliated (although they often live abroad). Those members who were born after the war have parents who do not belong to any Jewish organization. Those younger ones, who are culturally Polish, come from the pool of marginal Jews, or Poles of Jewish origin.

In Poland we have hundreds, thousands, and possibly dozens of thousands of so-called hidden Jews. Their number will remain unknown. Surviving during the Second World War was largely due to hiding one's Jewishness effectively. It was literally a matter of life and death. After the war Jewishness could mean danger. Moreover, it was simpler not to disclose Jewish origins if one sought a career in the Polish Communist regime.

So many Jews remained hidden—some until 1968, some until today. They were often intermarried and sometimes did not tell the spouse about their an-

cestry. In the meantime, these hidden Jews had children who had no knowledge of their Jewish ancestry. If 1968 did not provide sufficient stimulus to re-embrace some Jewish identity, their children and grandchildren are probably still unaware of their roots. Some became extremely committed and devout Catholics.

An example will be instructive. In the early 1990s, a Jewish friend in his forties bought an apartment in Warsaw. Soon it turned out that the woman living next door was Jewish, but had been raised Catholic and only recently learned about her parents' origins. The neighbor's Christian faith was thus shaken, but meanwhile her mother has become an even more devout Catholic. The neighbor's husband hesitated to inform his family about his wife's revelation of Jewish origins out of fear of antisemitism. But when he ended up telling his family, he learned that his father was Jewish. My friend also learned that another new neighbor of his was Jewish but was so shy and inhibited that he preferred to speak with nobody. In befriending a third neighbor, who resided in the floor above, my friend, in hearing a wartime childhood story, suspected that she too was born to a Jewish family. While all these neighbors continue their ways and have refrained from involvement in Jewish life, my friend could not help but feel that he unexpectedly came to live in a place with some Jewish vibrations.

One initiative to reach marginal Jews in Poland has been the Jewish Hotline service. The Jewish Hotline was formed in 1996 by the Jewish Forum, a Warsaw circle of Jewish professionals who have acquired a strong Jewish identity. Some of us have been active since our days in the Jewish Flying University, back in the late 1970s, when our first meetings resembled group therapy sessions. At that time, we had to express and try to overcome deep-seated emotions connected with Jewishness: uncertainty, shame, and, above all, fear. We were learning how to say "I'm Jewish" in a casual way.

Having struggled with the complexities of our Jewish identities and the exploration of Jewish roots, we decided to establish the Jewish Hotline in Warsaw; it is in operation every Thursday evening for anyone who wants to discuss anonymously problems related to Jewish roots, self-identity, and how this affects their relations with spouses, children, parents, or colleagues. The conversations are confidential, revealed to nobody, and we also provide information on Jewish institutions. People have been calling the one afternoon per week hot line since October 1996. About one-third of the phone calls have been with individuals who are trying to come to terms with the challenge of Jewishness. Among them are elderly people who feel uneasy that while making careers they completely abandoned their prewar Jewish upbringing and now feel their children should know something. But how to tell them? We can reassure them that their and their children's situation is rather typical. There are also young people who feel that a family secret points to Jewish origins (for example, nothing was known about a caller's mother's prewar past, and no family has survived). We can confirm to such callers that it is likely the mother is of Jewish origin, but to know for sure it would be best to talk with her. The most dramatic calls were those by

persons in their fifties who recently discovered that they had been Jewish babies rescued and raised during the war by Polish Catholic families as their own.

In our leaflet one reads, among other things, the following:

Do you have Jewish roots?

Is it your problem? Or is it your secret? And perhaps your passion, pride, hope? Are you ashamed because you are of Jewish origin? Are you afraid? Do you happen to hide it? Maybe you don't know what to tell your spouse or your colleagues, your boyfriend or girlfriend? Possibly, you don't know what you should tell your children? How to address the topic in your office? And when?

Perhaps you feel a pride or a bond with other Jews, but you don't know how to express it? Or you regret that you have been told so little about your Jewish ancestors? And maybe you would like to meet other Jews but you have no opportunity? Perhaps the presence of other Jews makes you feel uncomfortable? Maybe you think that antisemites are not completely wrong?

Perhaps you don't know how to respond to antisemitism? And maybe you are convinced that what really matters are universal problems and not particular dilemmas of Jews? Do you feel that Jewishness doesn't matter to you, and you are irritated that others link you to it? Perhaps the synagogue is alien to you, and the church seems familiar? Possibly, you fear that if you admitted the importance of Jewishness you would lose your Polish identity?

You don't have to face such problems alone!

Support groups are the natural next step for those who want to discuss the meaning of Jewish identity in contemporary Poland, and problems resulting from it, with people who have similar experiences. A few groups were organized, mostly in cooperation with an American psychologist, partly through advertisements ("The Broken Chain" project), and partly for those who called the hot line and were interested.

The Jewish Hotline has provoked sarcastic criticism. Since it is listed in some major newspapers alongside hot lines for battered wives or those infected with AIDS, our critics ask, "Is Jewishness an illness?" Well, of course not, but when it constitutes a hidden and unexplored aspect of one's personality it causes psychological problems similar to those suffered by gays or people with AIDS.

What has caused Jews to hide their identity in Poland? Briefly, World War II and communism. The war was, as mentioned above, the major cause. Among its most afflicted victims were children. Few survived. For them a very interesting and unique organization has been formed in Poland: the Association of Hidden Children of the Holocaust, consisting of individuals who were Jewish children in Poland during the war and have lived in Poland ever since. Having begun with a few individuals, they now have hundreds of members. Some of

them are university professors, others are uneducated women who married in the village in which they were hiding. Quite a few of the members are Catholic. They have, however, something very deep in common, due to their childhood experiences.

Communism

As mentioned earlier, the impact of communism on Jewish life has been very strong: anti-Communist Jews mostly emigrated, pro-Communist Jews were very active, and Jewish institutions were completely controlled by Communists. Most of the Communist Jews were far from any Jewish involvement. Not a few hid their Jewishness. The impact of communism was that Jews, from all sections of the community, learned to play down their Jewishness. To some, it was a continuation of the attitude adopted during the war. To give a simple but telling example, hardly any baby boys were circumcised in postwar Poland. In fact, it was only in the 1990s that dozens of us, middle-aged and young Polish Jews, have been finally circumcised.

World War II was a watershed for Polish Jews. It proved to them that the traditional European approaches to the Jewish problem lead to catastrophe. If democracy leads to Hitler, only radically new social solutions can be accepted. They went in two opposite directions. One was escape from Europe, either to Israel, America, or Australia. Europe, and especially Poland, was a cemetery, a devastated, hopeless, and always dangerous land. The other way was to engage in a revolutionary rebuilding of Poland or other nations. Zionists combined both solutions.

The Jews who chose to remain in Poland for ideological reasons felt that radical Jewish solutions, such as Zionism, were not for them because those proposals emphasized Jewishness against all the other elements of their identity. To them, the Communist vision of “classless” society seemed worth trying. Logically, even the deeply Jewish among the Communists did not introduce their children to Jewish traditions. For Communists there was no future for Jews. Religious and ethnic differences were doomed to disappear. This vision of the irrelevance of Judaism and of the harmfulness of any Jewish distinctiveness influenced deeply not only Communist Jews but also other non-Jewish Jews. Normal life in the new society had no place for Jewish involvement other than, perhaps, a sentimental attitude to Yiddish. It was natural for them to Polonize surnames, or to retain the Christian names adopted during the war. However, what to them was the repudiation of Judaism to others looked like concealment of their true identity. And sometimes it *was* just that.

The concealment of Jewish origins reinforced the antisemitic conviction that hidden Jews rule Poland. I believe that, independently of the need to denounce and ridicule this view, it is necessary to face the problem of the role of Jewish Communists both in Poland and in other countries.

Communist Jews

There were two categories of Jewish Communists in postwar Poland. The minority, who were acting among Jews, and the majority, who were active at the national level. The latter were very visible, the more so because Poles were not used to the idea that Jews could have equal opportunities in the state bureaucracy. Whatever the historical background and perceptions of the general population, the fact remains that Jews, admittedly non-committed Jews and often non-Jewish Jews, were numerous and influential in the Communist elite in postwar Poland.

In my view, this constitutes a moral challenge for us Jews. Of course, antisemites exaggerate and abuse the numbers to such a degree that it is hard to accept that there is a genuine problem here. Communists or even leftists never constituted a majority among Jews in general. Yet in postwar Poland, when most Jews emigrated, among the remaining ones Communists were numerous and certainly the most visible. This is a great drama of postwar Jewish Poland: from outside one saw the flow of Jewish refugees; from inside, the numerous Jews in the power elite. Those Jews participated actively in the system of oppression. I am saying this with full awareness that there were idealists among them whose acceptance of communism was initially caused by noble motives. Yet while their counterparts in the West remained ideological radicals, those in Poland or other East European countries became functionaries of the state terror. I believe that this is a reason for Jews to feel shame. Of course, I am not saying that *only* Jews should feel morally responsible.

My point is simple but rarely accepted. Communism belongs also to the history of Jews, not only to the history of Russia, Poland, etc. In the middle of our century, in the heart of Europe, Jews were not only victims but also victimizers. To some Jews, communism was a quasi-religion.¹⁶

My views can be reduced to ten positions, or theses, on Jews and communism in Poland: (1) Marxism, radical leftist ideologies, and “real socialism” constitute not only a fragment of world history, and of Polish or Hungarian histories, but also a chapter in Jewish history. (2) Antisemites have grossly exaggerated the Jewish involvement in Communism, distorted the facts, and interpreted them according to the mythical conspiracy theories. Jews were also victims of Communism. (3) Jewish Communists rarely cared about Jewish concerns and often virtually stopped being Jewish. (4) Some of those who had abandoned Jewishness later came back. The number of Jewish Communists, and their role, was so important that other Jews must not ignore it. (5) The deepest problem is posed by the quasi-religious character of the Communist involvement of some Jews. (6) There is no distinctive Jewish radicalism. There is no “Jewish Communism.” Jews became Communists because of general mechanisms. (7) It was not Judaism or Jewish traditions but the social situation that led Jews to Communist involvement. (8) Participation in evil can begin with noble and selfless intentions. (9) Moral responsibility can be indirect. Reemerging Jewish com-

munities in Eastern Europe should face the legacy of Jewish participation in Communism. However, accepting a Jewish share of moral responsibility does not make non-Jews less responsible. (10) Objective research is needed to clarify the extent and the nature of the Jewish participation in Communism. The tragic consequences of the antisemitic myth of Jewish Communism should impose no taboo.

The Need for a Normal Existence

Polish Jews in Poland are not uniform. They range from Orthodox to (more numerous) liberal to (even more numerous) anti-religious, from publicly involved to (many more) privately involved to (even more numerous) hidden Jews. There exist, however, common elements. The most obvious is fear of antisemitism. Virtually all Polish Jews feel that antisemitism is widespread and that sensitivity of Poles to Jewish concerns is low. This is despite the presence of individuals and groups who have good will, who are open to Jewish experiences and are opposed to antisemitism, and despite the fact that our relations with the government are good. In the past year or two the number of antisemitic incidents has increased. With the 1998 Auschwitz crosses controversy, which was ultimately resolved when the crosses, with the exception of the so-called papal cross, were removed by government order in May 1999, extreme antisemitism has become more visible and the voices of its leaders are being quoted in the mainstream media. Also, we have a new reason for the expression of anti-Jewish attitudes. Previously, most tensions relating to Jews concerned interpretations of history and symbols. The recent very concrete problem of restoring property to the Jewish community, property lost during the Holocaust or from Communist confiscations, has raised new emotions. Jewish claims are widely met with particular suspicion.

At the same time a positive interest in Jewish history and culture is also part of Polish reality. Much more than in the past, Jewish history is now being studied at universities, in schools, and through museums. A most notable event, attracting both affiliated and assimilated Jews, though not intended specifically for them, is the remarkable annual international festival of Jewish culture in Cracow. It includes top-quality art exhibitions, theater performances, movies, lectures, craft workshops, and especially concerts of cantors, orchestras, klezmer bands, and singers. There is more to this than just cultural interest. Several years ago it was fashionable to be Jewish in Poland. We can still feel the legacy of that fashion. This is important because in such an atmosphere it is easier for marginal Jews to admit their Jewishness.

The Role of Auschwitz

We all live in the shadow of the Shoah. At the same time most of us are angry with foreigners who want to reduce our lives to a Shoah-dominated

existence. We live normal lives, and we look to the future, not to the past. And yet I admit that Auschwitz is an essential point of reference for Polish Jews. Moreover, it is in some sense the most important site in Poland, and certainly the best known internationally. It has assumed symbolic power recognized by virtually everyone in the world. And it has a sinister power: it has been creating controversies. These include the presence of Carmelite nuns just outside the camp's barbed wire in the 1980s, and recently, in connection with the presence of religious symbols, crosses at the same place. We Polish Jews, against our intentions, live on the battlefield, attacked by Jewish radicals from abroad and by militant Catholics in Poland. This is a burden. But it is also a challenge.¹⁷

One consequence of the peculiarities of contemporary Polish Jewry is that marginal Jews are not left alone. They are forced to address such problems, and even if this means opposing Jewish activists or objecting to the chauvinistic elements in the March of the Living program, they still have to ponder what being Jewish means to them.

A Future for Polish Jews?

Despite all these peculiarities, our Jewish community is slowly becoming more and more like Western ones. This means cultural assimilation, participation in national life, and familiarity with Christianity. A process of *de-assimilation* has begun. This is a novelty in the history of Jews in Poland. While in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century more and more Jews assimilated into the majority culture, aspired to rootedness in it, and loosened their Jewish commitments, I, like many other Jews in today's Poland, have been regaining the Jewish identity and knowledge that our parents did not pass on us. Unlike our ancestors, we do not need to aspire to being Polish, because we have been raised Polish. We can be as Polish and Jewish as English Jews are English and Jewish. Indeed, I believe that we *are* as much Polish and Jewish as English Jews are English and Jewish. In this respect Poland is also on its way to joining Europe, and the situation of Polish Jews can be a good measure of the remaining distance.

Assimilation has reached its limits. We have lost so many Jews because of it. But now de-assimilation has been growing. Interestingly, this de-assimilation in most cases does *not* mean de-Polonization. With the exception of a few who have become very Orthodox and often eventually leave Poland, most Jews in Poland remain involved in Polish life. The days of a specific Jewish nation speaking its own language are gone (in no Polish family is Yiddish the language of communication). Meanwhile, we can measure our success by the rate of appearance of problems that plague Western Jewish communities. Thus one must ponder the role of religion in a predominantly secular world, the strength of assimilation, or the need to find answers to the question, "Why be Jewish?"

Being Jewish in Poland is more and more voluntary. One can stop, in practice, being Jewish and, on the other hand, one can become Jewish. Neither of the two processes is easy, but they are happening. I hope that the net result of

all the developments will be positive. I feel that if the Jewish community disappeared from Poland it would be tragic not just for me but also for Poland, for Jews everywhere, and for the world. To Polish Jews, even more than to others, one can direct the famous motto of Emil Fackenheim: if we disappeared it would be a posthumous victory for Hitler.

Notes

1. Contrary to standard approaches, I believe that, in the Polish context, Catholics of Jewish origin should not be excluded because sometimes their children choose to come back to the Jewish fold.
2. People who believe this way include some foreigners, such as Rabbi Michael Schudrich, who know Polish realities.
3. Józef Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej Ludową," in *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce*, ed. Jerzy Tomaszewski (Warsaw: Wydawn. Naukowe PWN, 1993), 398.
4. In the years 1944–1947, the Zionist network Bericha facilitated the emigration of between 70,000 to 140,000 Jews from Poland. See Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej Ludową," 413; and Alina Cała and Helena Datner, *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce 1944–1968, Teksty Źródłowe* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1997), 168.
5. Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej Ludową," 421.
6. Zofia Borzymińska and Rafał Żebrowski, *Po-lin: Kultura Żydów Polskich w XX Wieku* (Warsaw: Wydawn. Amarant, 1993), 309
7. *Ibid.*, 307.
8. Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej Ludową," 477; Cała and Datner, *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce 1944–1968*, 88, 224.
9. Borzymińska and Żebrowski, *Po-lin: Kultura Żydów Polskich w XX Wieku*, 321.
10. *Ibid.*, 322.
11. *Ibid.*, 321.
12. Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antyżydowska w Polsce 1967–1968* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2000), 213.
13. About 28% of all Jewish emigrants of that period went to Israel; see Stola, *Kampania antyżydowska w Polsce 1967–1968*, 214.
14. For example, in 1981, Krystyna Kersten's first article on the Kielce pogrom appeared, "Kielce—4 lipiec 1946 r.," *Tygodnik Solidarność* 36 (4 Dec. 1981).
15. Monika Krajewska's *Czas Kamieni* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1982) appeared in Polish, English, German, and French. A revised English version, *A Tribe of Stones*, was published in 1993 (Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers).
16. For a more comprehensive presentation of this position is contained in the following ten theses on Jews and Communism; these are more fully explained in my book, *Żydzi, Judaizm Polska* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawn. Vocatio, 1997). Also see my "Jews, Communists, and Jewish Communists," in *Jewish Studies at the Central European University*, ed. Andras Kovacs and Eszter Andor (Budapest: Central European University, 2000), 119–133.
17. Some philosophical problems connected to the symbolism of Auschwitz are considered in my book *Żydzi, Judaizm Polska* and in my "Auschwitz at the Threshold of the New Millennium," in *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocides*, ed. John K. Roth (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 322–340.

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