



Polish-Jewish STUDIES

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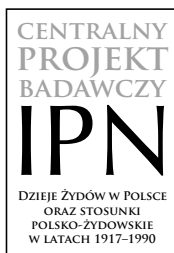
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Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction | 9 |
| Studies | 13 |
| Mateusz Pielka , Relations between Zionists and Supporters of Jewish Assimilation on the Polish Lands at the End of the Nineteenth and in the Early Twentieth Centuries: An Outline of the Issue | 15 |
| Grzegorz Berendt , 'Di ershte Daych'n'. A Picture of the German Occupation of 1915–18 in the Memories of the Polesie Jews | 41 |
| Mirosław Szumiło , Jews in the Communist Movement in the Second Polish Republic 1918–38: An Outline of the Issue | 82 |
| Marek Jedynak , Jews in Partisan Units in the Home Army's Radom-Kielce District (A Contribution to the Research) | 121 |
| Piotr Gontarczyk , The Origin and Military Activity of the 'Lions,' a Partisan Unit of the Communist People's Guard, 1942–43. A Contribution to the History of the Jews in the People's Guard and People's Army during the Second World War, and the Fate of Jewish Ghetto Fugitives in the Provincial Areas of Poland | 148 |
| Damian Sitkiewicz , Jews in the Mińsk Mazowiecki Poviát during the German Occupation, 1939–44. The State of Research, Research Postulates, Source Base ... | 179 |
| Tomasz Domański , Conversions of Jews to Catholicism in the General Government: The Example of the Diocese of Kielce | 208 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Roman Gieroń , Outline of the Issue of the Aid Provided to Jews during the German Occupation of Poland in the Files of Criminal Proceedings Initiated on the Basis of the Polish Committee of National Liberation decree of 31 August 1944 in the Post-War Cracow Voivodeship | 226 |
| Paweł Wieczorek , The War for the Stage. The Fate of the Jewish Theatre in Wrocław, 1949–68 | 258 |
| Reviews/Polemics | 303 |
| Waldemar Grabowski , Joshua D. Zimmerman, <i>Polskie Państwo Podziemne i Żydzi w czasie II wojny światowej</i> by Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN SA, Warszawa 2018 ... | 305 |
| Paweł Kornacki , Sara Bender, <i>Pogrom w Grajewie latem 1941 r.</i> and Jeffrey Kopstein, <i>Pogrom w Szczuczynie 27 czerwca 1941 r.</i> , or, How Not to Write History | 332 |
| Radosław Józwiak , Some reflections on <i>The Last Jew from Węgrów</i> , the memoirs of Shraga Feivel Bielawski, as a source for researching the history of the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations in the Poviát of Węgrów | 347 |
| Mateusz Kubicki , Witold W. Mędykowski, <i>Macht Arbeit Frei? German Economic Policy and Forced Labor of Jews in the General Gouvenment, 1939–1943</i> , Academic Studies Press, Boston 2018 | 390 |
| Marcin Urynowicz , Jeffrey S. Kopstein, Jason Wittenberg, <i>Intimate Violence. Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust</i> , Cornell University Press, Ithaca, London 2018 | 412 |
| Magdalena Semiczyszyn , Martyna Rusiniak-Karwat, <i>Nowe życie na zgłiszczach. Bund w Polsce w latach 1944–1949</i> , Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warszawa 2016 ... | 424 |
| Chronicles | 431 |
| Tomasz Domański , Report on the Conference ‘Polish-Jewish Relations in the Twentieth Century. Research, Controversies, Perspectives’. The Third Colloquium: ‘Poles and Jews in the Shadow of the German Occupation of Poland’, Kielce 2019 | 433 |
| Alicja Bartnicka , Report on the International Research Conference ‘The Beginnings of the Nazi Occupation. Continuity and Change in Polish and Jewish life 1939–41’, Warsaw, 18–19 November 2019 | 440 |
| Dorota Budzińska , Still Reading the Ashes – in the Footsteps of Dąbrowa Białostocka’s Jews | 453 |

INTRODUCTION

In the second issue of *Polish-Jewish Studies* that you are reading now, we are pleased to present further findings in the field of Polish-Jewish relations and research on Jewish issues. This volume draws upon the concept adopted in the first issue of our journal, and is divided into the following sections: ‘Studies,’ ‘Reviews/Polemics’ and ‘Chronicles.’

Our second issue opens with an article by Mateusz Pielka entitled ‘Relations between Zionists and Supporters of Jewish Assimilation on the Polish Lands at the End of the Nineteenth and in the Early Twentieth Centuries: An Outline of the Issue.’ The article deals with an issue that has recently been discussed less frequently in Poland, namely the transformations that took place on the Jewish political scene in Poland under the influence of developing Zionist ideas.

Another text by Grzegorz Berendt (*Di ershte Daych’n. A Picture of the German Occupation of 1915–18 in the Memories of the Polesie Jews*) is devoted to the German occupation during the First World War as recalled by Polesian Jews. In the interwar period, these areas became part of Polesie province. Berendt has drawn upon a source which is familiar, but at the same time little researched because of the language barriers, namely the Jewish *yizkor* memorial books. The reality of the German occupation as seen through the eyes of the local Jews is undoubtedly an important subject of research. In the anti-Semitic atmosphere of the tsarist era and the beginning of the Great War, the Jews expected their situation to change for

the better, even placing their hope in the approaching German troops. According to Berendt, however, the occupation turned out to be a great disappointment for them both politically and economically (exploitation, plunder, etc.). The author also addresses the issue of the influence of the events of the Second World War on the image of Germans from the First World War which were encoded in the collective Jewish memory.

Mirosław Szumiło, in his article 'Jews in the Communist Movement in the Second Polish Republic 1918–38: An Outline of the Issue', summarises research into the Jewish Communists in interwar Poland, complementing them with the results of his own research into the group of 46 Jews and people of Jewish origin who belonged to the elite of the Communist party in Poland.

The subsequent texts, written by Marek Jedynak ('Jews in Partisan Units in the Home Army's Radom-Kielce District [A Contribution to the Research]') and Piotr Gontarczyk ('The Origin and Military Activity of the 'Lions,' a Partisan Unit of the Communist People's Guard, 1942–43') take us into the period of the Second World War and the partisan activities of various underground organisations. While Jedynak focuses on discussing the lack of a Jewish presence in the Home Army's units, Gontarczyk describes a Jewish partisan unit which was affiliated with the People's Guard. Using the example of the activities of the 'Lions' unit, he outlines the attitudes of the members of the Polish Workers' Party and the People's Guard; he also considers the local population's perception of the People's Guard units.

The texts by Damian Sitkiewicz ('Jews in the Mińsk Mazowiecki Powiat during the German Occupation, 1939–44. The State of Research, Research Postulates, Source Base'), Tomasz Domański ('Conversions of Jews to Catholicism in the General Government: The Example of the Diocese of Kielce'), and Roman Gieroń ('Outline of the Issue of the Aid Provided to Jews during the German Occupation of Poland in the Files of Criminal Proceedings Initiated on the Basis of the Polish Committee of National Liberation decree of 31 August 1944 in the Post-War Cracow Voivodeship') are also dedicated to the reality of life under occupation. Sitkiewicz's findings confirm the thesis that many areas of the Jewish population's war history (the experience of the Holocaust, rescue, denunciation), including in the Minsk powiat, have still not been sufficiently researched and described. Domański touches upon the little-known phenomenon of the conversion of Jews during the occupation, concluding that the phenomenon was of marginal interest among Jews in the central and southern part

of the Kielce province (the diocese of Kielce). Roman Gieroń, on the other hand, pointed to the usefulness of the trials initiated under the Polish Committee of National Liberation decree of 31 August 1944 for research on aid given to Jews by the Polish population.

The section 'Studies' ends with an article by Paweł Wieczorek, 'The War for the Stage. The Fate of the Jewish Theatre in Wrocław, 1949–68'. The author shows that the theatre not only served to maintain Jewish culture, but also acted as a meeting place which both supported the Jewish community in Wrocław and, at the same time, integrated it with the majority population. This process was interrupted by the anti-Jewish campaign of 1968.

An important part of this issue is devoted to reviews. This section includes extensive critical texts. Waldemar Grabowski shares his reflections on the work of Joshua D. Zimmerman ('The Polish Underground State and the Jews during World War II'), while Paweł Kornacki analyses the descriptions of the pogroms in Grajewo and Szczuczyn during summer 1941 as described by Sara Bender and Jeffrey Kopstein. In his review, Kornacki draws attention to the existence of sources that the above-mentioned authors did not use in their texts, and which allow the events as analysed in the Polish-Jewish context to be analysed from a different perspective. Radosław Józwiak, in turn, presents 'Some reflections on *The Last Jew from Węgrów*, the memoirs of Shraga Feivel Bielawski, as a source for researching the history of the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations in the Poviát of Węgrów'. His findings may prove to be an important contribution to research into the credibility of the memories of the survivors. Next, Mateusz Kubicki presents and assesses Witold Mędykowski's book *Macht Arbeit Frei? German Economic Policy and Forced Labor of Jews in the General Gouvernement, 1939–1943*, while Marcin Urynowicz devotes his text to evaluating the publication *Intimate Violence. Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust* by Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg. In the final review, Magdalena Semczyszyn focuses on a study by Martyna Rusiniak-Karwat entitled *Nowe Życie na zgliszczach. Bund w Polsce w latach 1944–1949* [New Life in the Ashes. The Bund in Poland in 1944–49].

The volume ends with reports published in the Chronicle section, penned by Tomasz Domański, Dorota Budzińska, and Aleksandra Bartnicka.

Tomasz Domański
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STUDIES

Mateusz Pielka
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RELATIONS BETWEEN ZIONISTS AND SUPPORTERS
OF JEWISH ASSIMILATION ON THE POLISH LANDS
AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH AND IN THE EARLY
TWENTIETH CENTURIES: AN OUTLINE OF THE ISSUE

The history of Zionism in Poland and its confrontation with the idea of assimilation is a history of a radical change of forces inside the Jewish political firmament. At the end of the nineteenth century, the assimilation of Jews on the Vistula was, on the one hand, a historically grounded phenomenon; however, on the other hand, it turned out to be powerless in the face of the new challenges of reality – including modern, racist anti-Semitism, as well as the contemporary nationalist movements aimed at creating independent nation states (for the Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Ukrainians, etc.). At that time, a relatively young political movement came to the fore, gradually displacing the idea of assimilation. Just before the outbreak of the First World War, two political streams (among others) competed among the Jewish community in Poland.¹ Their struggle for influence manifested itself in a sharp polemic, one in which words were not used. In historical works and broadly understood journalism, both sides

¹ In this place, the author is thinking of Zionism and assimilation – the socio-political trends to which this article is devoted. It is well known that at the time in question, other political concepts also held sway among the Polish Jews: socialism, 'folkism', Bundism, religious groups, etc.

pointed out each other's mistakes, impure intentions and the lack of rational foundations for the programme they proclaimed.

In Europe, a polemical current had existed within the Jewish communities from the first half of the nineteenth century; at its centre was the question of whether the Jews were a nation. This was one of the issues that particularly troubled Jewish thinkers (and not only them), and these inquiries intensified after 1848, in connection with the changes brought about during the Spring of Nations.

On the territories of historical Poland, the official conflict between the supporters of assimilation and the supporters of Zionism flared up after the First World Zionist Congress, which took place in Basel on 29–31 August 1897. At that time, the programme of the Zionist movement was adopted, and the World Zionist Organisation was established.² This was tantamount to the proclamation of the modern Jewish national movement. At the end of the nineteenth century, the assimilationists criticised Zionism in harsh terms for its revolutionary nature and utopianism. In the following years, however, the Zionist movement steadily gained new supporters in the country, and the ranks of the assimilationists dwindled. On the eve of the First World War, Zionism was already one of the most important political forces among Polish Jews. The figure of the 'national Jew' was maturing – one who was proud of who he was and what kind of community he came from.

Until this time, the issue of the criticism directed by supporters of assimilation against various Jewish socio-political groups – the Orthodox, the Zionists and the socialists – has been widely discussed in Polish historiography. In this article, the author tries to present the opposite phenomenon – the Zionist critique of the idea of assimilation. The initial turning point has been taken as 1897, and 1914, i.e. the outbreak of the Great War, as the endpoint.

This narrative is based on sources from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: press, programme materials and brochures, and the whole has been supplemented

² The Basel Programme: 1) The deliberate advocacy of the colonisation of Palestine by Jewish farmers, artisans and manufacturers; 2) organising and unifying all Jewry through appropriate and general means, according to the legislation of a given country; 3) strengthening Jewish well-being and national awareness; 4) taking the preparatory steps to obtaining the government approvals needed to achieve the goal of Zionism. See J. Zineman, *Historia sjonizmu (od czasów najdawniejszych do chwili obecnej)*, Warszawa 1946, p. 129; W. Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, New York 2003, p. 106. This specific programme soon came to be described as 'all-Zionist' [*ogólnosjonistyczny*] due to the ideological divisions within the Zionist movement.

with Polish and foreign literature. Polish historiography is characterised by serious shortcomings in research on the history of the Zionist movement in Poland.³ This article is a contribution to research on the relations between the Jewish political camps before the First World War.

Theodor Herzl, the chief ideologist of Zionism, wrote about the phenomenon of Jewish assimilation as follows:⁴

Assimilation, by which I understand not only the external adjustment of dress, the exact adoption of customs and language, but also identification with a common thinking and attitude in life. With this understanding, the assimilation of the Jews could only take place anywhere on the basis of a mixed marriage. However, this mixed marriage would have to be adopted by the majority as a necessity. Merely recognising such a marriage as having been permitted by law would be insufficient.⁵

Later in his argument, Herzl made it clear that authentic assimilation would be possible after the Jews had gained an adequate economic strength and social

³ It is worth paying attention to some of the latest publications on Zionism: D. Boniecka-Stępień, *Charakterystyka i rola religii w myśli syjonistycznej. Na podstawie tekstów Achad Ha-Ama i Josefa Chaima Brennera*, Warszawa 2020; P. Kendziorek, *Żydowski ruch spółdzielczy w Polsce w pierwszej połowie XX wieku. Ideologia i praktyka społeczna*, Warszawa 2020.

⁴ For more on the assimilation of Jews in Western Europe, see *Jewish Assimilation in Modern Times*, ed. B. Vago, Westview Press 1981; M.L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867–1914. Assimilation and Identity*, State University of New York Press Albany 1983; *Assimilation and community. The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. J. Frankel, S.J. Zipperstein, Cambridge University Press 1992; D. Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans. The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin*, Yale University Press 2007; A. Morris-Reich, *The Quest for Jewish Assimilation in Modern Social Science*, New York 2008; *Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation, and Accommodation. Past Traditions, Current No.s, and Future Prospects*, ed. M. Mor, M. Philip, University Press of America 1992; R. Jakobowicz, *Jews and Gentiles. Anti-Semitism and Jewish Assimilation in German Literary Life in the Early 19th Century*, Lang 1992; T.M. Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold. Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, Princeton University Press 2015; P. Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History. The Roles and Representation of Women*, University of Washington Press 1995; J.S. Sposato, *The Price of Assimilation. Felix Mendelssohn and the Nineteenth-Century Anti-Semitic Tradition*, Oxford University Press 2006; D.C.G. Lorenz, G. Weinberger, *Insiders and Outsiders. Jewish and Gentile Culture in Germany and Austria*, Detroit–Michigan 1994; F. Malino, *The Sephardic Jews of Bordeaux. Assimilation and Emancipation in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France*, University of Alabama Press 2003; M.R. Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation. A Study of the French Jewish Community at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair*, Oxford University Press 1971; M. Samuels, *Inventing the Israelite. Jewish Fiction in Nineteenth-Century France*, Stanford University Press 2010; A. Elon, *Bez wzajemności. Żydzi–Niemcy 1743–1933*, trans. K. Bratkowska, A. Geller, Warszawa 2012.

⁵ T. Herzl, *Państwo Żydowskie. Próba nowoczesnego rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej*, trans. J. Sużyn, Kraków 2006, p. 52.

position. This transformation was partially successful for a few Jewish aristocratic families (such as the Silbersteins and the Warburgs), who gained great influence and then joined noble Christian families through mixed marriages. Most Jews, however, belonged to the group of townspeople who worked to gain financial independence from the rest of society, so that they would not be perceived as 'parasites' (this was a frequent accusation made by anti-Semites in Germany, France and Hungary, among others). Another burden for assimilation was the constantly expanding Jewish proletariat and the masses in poverty. These groups would have no chance of being assimilated, which would further arouse anti-Semitism and cause further suffering for Jews in European countries.⁶

Herzl, author of *The Jewish State* (*Der Judenstaat*, 1896), showed that the process of assimilation was internally contradictory. Not only did it fail to provide Jews with normal conditions for development but, on the contrary, it actually stimulated new waves of anti-Semitism. Herzl's conviction of the failure of assimilation was confirmed by the Dreyfus case (1894) in France, which Herzl considered to be the country with the highest level of civilisation. The accusation of an assimilated Jew of treason on behalf of Germany, and then his public humiliation, made many observers, including Herzl himself, aware that there was hidden anti-Semitism in France, and that assimilation and unification with the French people were fictions.⁷ His book *The Jewish State* was written under the influence of the events in France, and heralded a turning point in the social life of Europe's Jews.⁸ Assimilation, which had previously been considered in Jewish progressive circles as a remedy for the so-called Jewish question, was to be confronted with intellectual competition: Zionism. From the turn of the twentieth century, the assimilation movement and Zionism found themselves in opposition to each other. At this point, a long and fierce polemic began between the supporters of these opposing concepts.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 52–53. For a more detailed analysis of Herzl's views, see J. Zouplan, "State-forming Zionism" and the Precedent for Leadership – T. Herzl, V. Jabotinsky and D. Ben-Gurion', *Asian and African Studies* 2004, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 28–49.

⁷ For recent studies on the Dreyfus case, see M. Burns, *France and the Dreyfus Affair: A Brief Documentary History*, Plunkett Lake Press 2019; A. Budzanowska, T. Pietrzykowski, *Wokół procesu Dreyfusa. Jednostka, ideologia, polityka*, Kraków 2020.

⁸ While formulating the idea of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl was inspired by the views of Leo Pinsker (1821–1891). See L. Pinsker, *Samowyzwolenie. Apel do Żydów (ze słowem wstępnyim Achad-Haama)*, Warszawa 1931.

This conflict of interest between the supporters of Zionism and assimilation, which began at the end of the nineteenth century in Western Europe, soon also appeared in Poland.⁹ Along with the development of Zionist organisations on the Vistula at the turn of the century, their ideological dispute with the already well-established assimilation movement intensified. The process of assimilation in the Congress Kingdom, West Prussia, Greater Poland and Galicia had many years of development behind it, as it had its roots in the first half of the nineteenth century. Zionism was a young political movement which was only just expanding the ranks of its supporters, and the assimilationist circles were disrespectful towards it.

The general course of action for the supporters of the Jewish national movement in Poland was set by the 1st World Zionist Congress initiated by Theodor Herzl.¹⁰

⁹ On the assimilation of Polish Jews, see S. Didier, *Rola neophitów w czasach Polski*, Warszawa 1934; S. Kowalski, *Żydzi chrzczeni*, Warszawa 1935; A. Cała, *Asymilacja Żydów w Królestwie Polskim (1864–1897). Postawy, konflikty, stereotypy*, Warszawa 1989; T. Gąsowski, *Między gettem a światem. Dylematy ideowe Żydów galicyjskich na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, Kraków 1997; A. Landau-Czajka, *Syn będzie Lech... Asymilacja Żydów w Polsce międzywojennej*, Warszawa 2006; ead., *W jednym stali domu. Koncepcje rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej w publicystyce polskiej lat 1933–1939*, Warszawa 1998; J. Lichten, 'O asymilacji Żydów w Polsce od wybuchu pierwszej wojny światowej do końca drugiej wojny (1914–1945)', *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris) 1977, no. 42; id., 'Uwagi o asymilacji i akulturacji Żydów w Polsce w latach 1863–1943', *Znak* 1988, no. 5/6; J.J. Lipski, *Dwie ojczyzny – dwa patriotyzmy*, Warszawa 1984; B. Szwarzman-Czarnota, 'Od żydowskich Żydów do polskich Żydów. Wstęp do archeologii rodzinnej', in *Żydowski Polak, polski Żyd. Problem tożsamości w literaturze polsko-żydowskiej*, ed. A. Molisak, Z. Kołodzińska, Warszawa 2011; K. Sierakowska, *Rodzice, dzieci, dziadkowie... Wielkomijska rodzina inteligencka w Polsce 1918–1939*, Warszawa 2003; T.R. Weeks, 'Assimilation, nationalism, modernisation', in *Antisemitism and its opponents in modern Poland*, ed. R. Blobaum, Cornell University Press 2005; id., 'The Best of Both Worlds. Creating the Żyd-Polak', *East European Jewish Affairs* 2004, vol. 34, no. 2; Ł. Kapralska, 'Drogi z getta. Uwagi o procesach asymilacyjnych w społeczności Żydów galicyjskich', in *Ortodoksja. Emancypacja. Asymilacja. Studia z dziejów ludności żydowskiej na ziemiach polskich w okresie rozbiorów*, ed. K. Zieliński, M. Adamczyk-Grabowska, Lublin 2003; H. Kozińska-Witt, 'Żydzi. Polscy? Niemieccy? Szkic o tożsamości narodowej Żydów postępowych w latach sześćdziesiątych i siedemdziesiątych XIX w.', *Teksty Drugie* 1996, no. 6 (42), pp. 71–81; M. Soboń, *Polacy wobec Żydów w Galicji doby autonomicznej w latach 1868–1914*, Kraków 2011; E. Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics*, New York 1993; M. Wodziński, *Oświecenie żydowskie w Królestwie Polskim wobec chasydyzmu. Dzieje pewnej idei*, Warszawa 2003; A. Jagodzińska, *Pomiędzy. Akulturacja Żydów Warszawy w drugiej połowie XIX wieku*, Wrocław 2008; ead., 'Asymilacja, czyli bezradność historyka. O krytyce terminu i pojęcia', in *Wokół akulturacji i asymilacji Żydów na ziemiach polskich*, ed. K. Zieliński, Lublin 2010; M. Bułat, 'Teatr żydowski w świetle "Izraelity" w latach 1883–1905', *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 1992, no. 1–4, pp. 77–126; M. Szugiero, 'Emancypantka – Żydówka idealna? Dyskusja integracjonistów warszawskich w latach 1880–1896', in *Narody i polityka. Studia ofiarowane profesorowi Jerzemu Tomaszewskiemu*, ed. A. Grabski, A. Markowski, Warszawa 2010. There is considerable literature on the subject of assimilation and acculturation of Polish Jews, both in Poland and abroad. The literature mentioned above is the basis for the topic under discussion.

¹⁰ The main organisers of the congress were the journalist Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), the journalist Nathan Birnbaum (1864–1937) and the writer Max Simon Nordau (1849–1923).

In many speeches, made to 197 delegates from Zionist circles from Europe, the United States and Palestine (then under Turkish rule), he presented the most important issues for the Zionist movement. In addition to the issues of international relations and the related emigration of Jews to *Eretz Yisroel*, the cooperation among numerous Jewish organisations in various European countries, and the contemporary anti-Semitism which was the Jews' main problem, he also raised the issue of assimilation.

In one of his speeches in Basel, Herzl spoke of the assimilation movement among European Jews:

There must have been a note of sincere truth in our words, since we have often won sympathy even among those who had previously behaved indifferently or unkindly towards the Jews. Every honest national cause which does not conceal itself under a foreign mask, has the right to respect and tolerance on the part of other peoples, as long as it does not threaten them with anything. Let us not forget, even in the anti-Semitism which casts a pall over our times, that a nobler era preceded us, in which all the civilised nations granted us equal rights. The intentions were undoubtedly good, even though the results were insufficient. Was that our fault or that of others? There was probably blame on both sides, or rather one should blame the circumstances that arose in the old days and which neither the law nor regulations could remove. The laws were friendlier to us than the customs. And we lived to see a returning tide, an enormous surge of grief among the peoples who had just admitted us into their good graces. But from emancipation, which after all cannot be undone, and from anti-Semitism, the existence of which no one denies, we have drawn a new, important conclusion for ourselves. Emancipation could not have been aimed at stopping us from being Jews, for when we wanted to mingle with others, we were pushed away. Rather, the goal of emancipation was that we should prepare our own shelter for our liberated nation. We couldn't have done that earlier, so we will do it now, if we desire it with all our strength.¹¹

¹¹ T. Herzl, *Mowy ze zjazdów bazylejskich. Mowa inauguracyjna na drugim Kongresie Syjonistów w Bazylei*, trans. 'H.J.', Warszawa 1900, pp. 11–12. For Herzl and the First World Zionist Congress in Basel, see L.J. Epstein, *The Dream of Zion. The Story of the First Zionist Congress*, New York–London 2016; A. Shapira, *History of Israel*, trans. A.D. Kamińska, Warszawa 2018. For older publications on the Basel congress see H. Haumann, *The First Zionist Congress in 1897. Causes, Significance, Topicality*, Karger 1997; M. Berkowitz, *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry before the First World War*, Cambridge University Press 1993.

From Herzl's words it is clear what the assimilation of Jews in Christian societies was, and why it failed. First of all, in the context of the attitude of Christians towards Jews, the 'customs' shaped over the centuries were stronger than 'laws' introduced over the previous few years such as political and social equality. For Herzl, assimilation was something insincere, a form of 'hiding', and the Christian majority was convinced of the deception and illusion inherent in the essence of assimilation.

Let us now see what Max Nordau, another precursor of political Zionism and a friend of Theodor Herzl, thought about assimilation. At the First World Zionist Congress he said:

I am forced to utter the painful words: The peoples who endowed the Jews with emancipation have deluded themselves as to their own feelings. In order to be able to effectively develop activity, there should have been an emancipation from emotions before it was renounced by the legislator. However, this was not the case. Indeed, quite the opposite. [...] The emancipation of the Jews is not a consequence of the awareness that a certain tribe has been treated in a grievously guilty manner, that a terrible harm has been done them, and that the time has come to repent for a thousand years of lawlessness; it is merely the result of the geometrically straightforward thinking of the French rationalists of the eighteenth century. [...] The rest of Europe followed the example of France, again not under the pressure of emotion, but because the civilised peoples felt a sort of moral necessity to assimilate the gains of the great revolution. [...] In this way, the Jews in Western Europe were emancipated not from an internal motivation, but as an imitation of the political fashion of the time; not because the peoples decided in their souls to extend a brotherly hand to the Jews, but because their spiritual guides professed a certain ideal of European civilisation which, among other things, required that the emancipation of Jews should be included in the legal code.¹²

From Nordau's argument it can be concluded that emancipation, which was in itself flawed, could not do the Jews any good in the future. Today, from a historical

¹² M. Nordau, *Mowy ze zjazdów syonistycznych w Bazylei*, Warszawa 1900, pp. 7–9.

perspective, we can see (as the nineteenth-century Zionists also noticed) that such false emancipation also gave rise to the movement of the ‘Jewish Enlightenment’, the *Haskalah*, whose luminaries had initiated the assimilation of Polish Jews in the first half of the nineteenth century. This process was particularly visible in the Warsaw community.¹³

When speaking of ‘emancipation’ in the context of the nineteenth century, Nordau probably also meant assimilation:

About 20 years ago, anti-Semitism once again spurted from the depths of the people’s soul in the West, and revealed to the astonished Jew his real position, which he had lost sight of. He could still vote in the election of the people’s representatives, while he was expelled from Christian associations and meetings, either gently or harshly. He still had the right to move from place to place, but at every step he encountered the sign: ‘No entry to Jews.’ He has always had the opportunity to fulfil all his civic duties, but he has been ruthlessly denied the rights that go beyond the limits of universal voting, those nobler rights, earned by his talent and abilities.

This is the situation of the emancipated Jew in Western Europe today. He has rid himself of his tribal qualities, but he has not, as they say to him, acquired the qualities of the other nations. He avoids his fellow tribesmen, because anti-Semitism has made him ashamed of them; meanwhile his fellows reject him as soon as he tries to get closer to them! He has lost the homeland of the ghetto, and the country of his birth does not want to be his homeland. So he has no ground under his feet and no bond with any community he could join as a desirable, eligible member. As for his fellow Christians, neither his essence nor his activities can count on justice, let alone kindness, and he has lost all communication with his fellow Jews; he feels that the world hates him and sees no place where he might find a livelier feeling when he seeks it and longs for it.¹⁴

¹³ Of the older, classic works, see H. Nussbaum, *Szkice historyczne z życia Żydów w Warszawie od pierwszych śladów pobytu ich w tem mieście do chwili obecnej*, Warszawa 1881. Of the more recent works, the following deserve special attention: Wodziński, *Oświecenie żydowskie* and Jagodzińska, *Pomiędzy*. The topic of the *Haskalah* and the assimilation of Warsaw Jews also appeared in the collective work *Warsaw. The Jewish Metropolis. Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of Professor Antony Polonsky*, ed. G. Dynner, F. Guesnet, Leiden–Boston 2015.

¹⁴ Nordau, *Mowy ze zjazdów syjonistycznych*, pp. 12–13.

It can be concluded that Nordau's assessment of the situation of emancipated and assimilated Jews in Western European countries was accurate. As a journalist and writer, he had observed social life in Germany, France and England for many years. His insightful knowledge of relations among the communities allowed him to conclude that assimilation – preceded by emancipation – had failed. The only way to solve the 'Jewish question' was through a large-scale social and political movement – Zionism. The failure of the concept of assimilation was also evidenced by its ineffectiveness against anti-Semitism, which had not arisen as a problem arising from economic relations, but had continued uninterrupted in the cultural layer of Europe.¹⁵

Although he had been referring to the situation of the Western European diaspora, Nordau was in fact also referring to the issues of Eastern Europe and the Polish lands that are of particular interest to us in this article. The Jews who lived in Congress Poland or Galicia, and had at some point in their lives decided to be baptised, were still 'misfits', like the *marranos* in fifteenth-century Spain. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the emancipated Jews, despite completely adopting the customs of Polish Christians, were still 'foreign' to the majority of society; they functioned as the 'new Marranos.'¹⁶ The beginning of the changes was marked by the Basel Zionist Congress under Theodor Herzl.

¹⁵ Max Nordau wrote about assimilated/emancipated Jews: "This is the moral misery of the Jews, much more severe than the bodily one, because it haunts people who are more differentiated, proud and subtly sensitive. An emancipated Jew is unstable, insecure in his relations with his neighbours, fearful when dealing with strangers, distrustful of the hidden feelings of even his friends. He uses all his strength to suppress and exterminate, or at least laboriously hide, the individual features of his being, because he is afraid that this being may become known as Jewish, and he never wants to show himself as he really is, to be himself, in both every thought and feeling, as well as in the tone of the voice, the squint, and the arrangement of his fingers. Internally he becomes distorted, externally – unnatural, and in this way always comical, and for people with superior aesthetic demands – disgusting, like everything which is false". Nordau, *Mowy ze zjazdów syonistycznych*, p. 13.

¹⁶ Polish nationalist, conservative and clerical spheres quickly adopted the categories of 'ethnic Pole' and 'Catholic' as indicators of Polishness and being a member of the national community. A different position was adopted by the Polish socialists, for whom the factors of ethnicity and religion were not the main determinant of belonging to the 'Polish community'. Jerzy Holzer wrote about the Polish nationalist movement before 1914: "The movement declared the need to prepare society for the fight against the partitioning powers, but it lacked clarity as to the nature of this struggle. The Polish nation was called to oppose not only the partitioning powers, but also all its ethnically alien neighbours" (J. Holzer, *Mozaika polityczna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1974, p. 30). See also G. Krzywiec, *Polska bez Żydów. Studia z dziejów idei, wyobrażeń i praktyk antysemitycznych na ziemiach polskich początku XX wieku (1905–1914)*, Warszawa 2017.

Among the 197 delegates who attended the 1st World Zionist Congress in Basel, a large group were Zionists from centres located in the Polish lands.¹⁷ This group of political and social activists was important because they were to constitute one of the significant ‘transmission belts’ for Polish Zionism. According to the post-congress reports, the Polish territory was represented by 34 envoys. These were (according to the original list): Zygmunt Bychowski,¹⁸ doctor of medicine (Warsaw); J. Berger (Pińsk, today in Belarus); Zygmunt Bromberg¹⁹ (Tarnów); Emil Blumenfeld,²⁰ PhD and attorney-at-law (Jarosław); Israel Jasinowski,²¹ attorney-at-law (Warsaw); Adolf Korkis²² (Lwów, today Lviv in Ukraine); Józef Lourie, doctor of medicine (Warsaw); Grzegorz Lourie (Pińsk); Salomon Lourie (Pińsk); Aron Markus²³ (Cracow); M. Moses (Katowice); Noach Finkelstein²⁴ (Brześć Litewski, today Brest-Litovsk in Belarus); Jozua Farbstein²⁵ (Warsaw); B. Fernhof²⁶

¹⁷ Here I am referring to the historical lands belonging to Poland at the end of the 18th century, which were to be incorporated into the Second Polish Republic in the future.

¹⁸ Zygmunt Bychowski (Szneur Załmen) (1865–1934), doctor, neurologist, juror of the city of Warsaw (1923–34), Jewish social activist and Zionist.

¹⁹ This was most likely Zygmunt Bromberg-Bytkowski (1866–1923). Bromberg was a poet, playwright, essayist, art critic, literary historian, and above all a Zionist.

²⁰ Emil Blumenfeld (dates unknown), in 1902–06, 1906–12, and 1912–18 he was a lay judge of the municipal council of Jarosław. During his second term of office, he was the chairman of the law committee and the gas committee.

²¹ Real name Izrael (Izydor) Jasinowski (1840 or 1842–1917), a Warsaw lawyer, one of the pioneers of Zionism in Poland. For more information see [http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Jasinowski_Izrael_\(Izydor\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Jasinowski_Izrael_(Izydor)), accessed 30 October 2016.

²² Real name Adolf Abraham Korkis (1865 or 1869–1922), a Zionist activist, studied law at the University of Lwów. He quickly became one of the leading Zionist ideologues in Galicia. Co-founder and publisher of *Przyszłość* [The Future], the first Zionist periodical in Polish, (1892–1895), he was also an editor of the magazine *Wschód* [East]. For more information see [http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Korkis_Abraham_\(Adolf\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Korkis_Abraham_(Adolf)), accessed 30 October 2016.

²³ Aron Markus (1843–1916), a Hasidic scholar, writer and journalist, he became a supporter of Zionism. Raised in Hamburg, he settled in Cracow in the Podgórze district. In the years 1898–1909, he published the weekly *Krakauer Jüdische Zeitung*, in which he tried to reconcile political Zionism with the concepts for the colonisation of Palestine promoted by A.A. Sala from Tarnów. For more, see [http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Markus_\(Marcus\)_Aron](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Markus_(Marcus)_Aron), accessed 30 October 2016.

²⁴ Noe (Noach) Finkelsztajn (1871–1946), journalist, publisher, Zionist activist. In the years 1906–14 he published the weekly *Jidishes Vochtblat*. For more, see [http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Finkelstein_\(Finkelsztajn\)_Noe_\(Noach\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Finkelstein_(Finkelsztajn)_Noe_(Noach)), accessed 30 October 2016.

²⁵ Joshua (Szyja) Heszal Farbstein (Farbsztejn) (1870–1948), Zionist politician, one of the main activists of the *Mizrachi* party (*Organizacja Syjonistów Ortodoksów Mizrachi*, Mizrachi Orthodox Zionist Organisation). In the years 1916–18 he was the chairman of the Zionist Organisation in Poland, a juror on Warsaw City Council (1916–26), and a member of the Polish parliament (1919–27). For more, see [http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Farbstein_\(Farbsztejn\)_Jozua_\(Szyja\)_Heszal](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Farbstein_(Farbsztejn)_Jozua_(Szyja)_Heszal), accessed 30 October 2016.

²⁶ The Polish Judaic dictionary (*Polski słownik judaistyczny*) says that a certain Izaak Fernhof, a writer and publisher in Hebrew, lived and worked in Eastern Galicia. He worked as a teacher in Buczacz, Złoczów

(Monasterzyska; today Ukraine, until 1939 Tarnopol province, Buczacz powiat); J.L. Goldberg (Vilnius); Alexander Hausmann²⁷ (Lwów); Leon Horodisch (Brześć Litewski); Beniamin Spira (Cracow); Nachum Sokołów²⁸ (Warsaw); Beniamin Safrin²⁹ (Monasterzyska, today Ukraine); Edward Schwager³⁰ (Tarnów); Salomon Schiller³¹ (Lwów); Abraham Salz³² (Tarnów); Adolf Stand³³ (Lwów); Fr. Marie Sokołów (Warsaw);

and Stanisławów. However, there is no record of his Zionist activities. Perhaps it was another person from his family, or he himself undertaking activities have so far not been recorded (http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Fernhof_Izaak, accessed 30 October 2016).

²⁷ Alexander Hausmann (dates unknown), one of the leaders of the Zionist organisation in Lwów before 1918. During the Polish-Ukrainian conflict over Lwów, he was taken hostage by the Polish army and imprisoned in Przemyśl. J. Tennenblatt, Leon Reich and Michael Ringel were imprisoned with him. According to the Polish side, they were to serve as guarantees of the Jewish side's loyalty during the battles with the Ukrainians (<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/search.aspx?query=Alexander+Hausmann>, accessed 30 October 2016).

²⁸ Nachum Sokołów (Nahum Sokolow) (1859/61–1936), writer, journalist, Zionist leader. In the years 1896–1902, he was a collaborator and editor of the assimilationist magazine *Izraelita*, but this ceased because Sokołów was inclined towards Zionism. He devoted himself to activity in the Zionist movement, and in 1907 he became a member of the office of the World Zionist Organisation. For more, see http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Sokolow_Nachum, accessed 31 October 2016; F. Sokołów, *Nahum Sokołów. Życie i legenda*, Kraków 2006; S. Kling, *Nachum Sokolow. Servant of His People*, Whitefish, MT, 2012.

²⁹ The Polish Judaic Dictionary contains a note most probably referring the son of the above-mentioned Benjamin Safrin: Horace (Hirszt) Safrina, who was a poet, translator, actor and director; he died in Łódź in 1980 ([http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Safrin_Horacy_\(Hirszt\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Safrin_Horacy_(Hirszt)), accessed 31 October 2016).

³⁰ Edward Schwager (dates unknown) came from Tarnów, was a Zionist activist. In 1884, as a high-school student, he corresponded with senior Zionist activists in Vienna and exchanged letters with Abraham Salz. Schwager organised a reading room in Tarnów to promote Zionist literature, and also initiated the organisation of a Jewish youth circle in his hometown. Abraham Chomet, a historian and activist of Zionism in Tarnów, called Edward Schwager “a pioneer of Zionist thought in Tarnów” (<http://www.muzeum.tarnow.pl/artykul.php?id=29&typ=>, accessed 31 October 2016).

³¹ Salomon Schiller (1861–1925), a well-known Zionist activist and Hebrew-language journalist, director of a Hebrew high-school in Jerusalem. After his death, the press wrote about him: “The deceased was one of the most beautiful figures in the Zionist movement of Eastern Lesser-Poland. Born in Białystok, he came to Lwów as a pupil of the *Beth ha-Midrash*, where he devoted himself to university studies and Zionist work. Salomon Schiller of blessed memory served as creator of the ideology of the Jewish revival movement. In collaboration with Adolf Stand of blessed memory and Dr. Korkis contributed greatly to the development of the Zionist movement. In the organ of the Zionists of Lesser Poland, *Przyszłość*, he published a series of articles entitled *The National Existence of the Jews*, which then appeared in a separate pamphlet and became the canon of faith of the youth of that time. Schiller was also a pioneer of the Hebrew movement in Lesser Poland. When the Hebrew high school in Jerusalem was opened, the deceased took over as director of that institution, moving permanently to Jerusalem” (‘Błp. Salomon Schiller,’ *Nowy Dziennik*, 6 November 1925, no. 247, p. 3).

³² Abraham Salz (1864–1941), a Zionist activist from Tarnów, he propagated Zionist ideas in Galicia, and published in the Lwów Zionist newspaper *Przyszłość* (Central Zionism Archive in Jerusalem, A2/86. For more, see https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Salz, accessed 31 October 2016).

³³ Adolf Stand (1870–1919), journalist, Zionist activist, member of the Austrian State Council. For more, see <http://www.ipsb.nina.gov.pl/a/biografia/adolf-stand>, accessed 31 October 2016.

M. Uriaschsohn (Grodno, today Belarus); Józef Mohylewer³⁴ (Białystok); Dawid Malz³⁵ (Lwów); Hirsch Mordkowitz (Równe, today Ukraine); A. Neuschul (Wilno, today Vilnius in Lithuania); Samuel Poznański³⁶ (Warsaw); A. Perlis (Wilno); Saul Pinchas Rabinowicz³⁷ (Warsaw); Litman Rosenthal (Białystok).³⁸

The aforementioned delegates played a significant role in transferring the idea of political Zionism to Poland. They represented Jewish communities from the largest Polish cities: Warsaw, Cracow, Vilnius and Lwów. Their activity in the emerging modern Zionist movement in Poland shaped the attitude of the future intelligentsia and Zionist activists towards Jewish affairs, including the assimilationist tendency.

In 1899, Henryk Nusbaum³⁹ expressed the opinion towards Zionism of the group who supported assimilation:

The idea of Zionism, i.e. the striving to strengthen or awaken the sense of national identity among the Jews, that is, the principle that in every state, in every nation they constitute a nation within a nation, has been spreading in recent times with seemingly frightening force. [...] Such a reaction, however, is neither tangential nor rational, and we are convinced that this is a temporary madness, which owes its existence mainly to a handful of agitators, full of enthusiasm perhaps, but deprived of a deeper understanding and idea of what Judaism is, and of the obligations of the holiest Jews towards the countries they inhabit.

In our country, in recent years, Zionism has begun to spread very greatly among the younger (unfortunately) intelligentsia in general, and especially among the youth at university. This sad symptom seems to us to be the result of the following

³⁴ Real name Samuel Mohylewer (1824–98), rabbi, protagonist of the Zionist movement in Poland, activist of the *Chibat Syjon* organisation. For more, see [http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Mohylewer_\(Mohilewer\)_Samuel_\(Szmul_Szmuel\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Mohylewer_(Mohilewer)_Samuel_(Szmul_Szmuel)), accessed 31 October 2016.

³⁵ Dawid Malz (1862–1936), Zionist writer and journalist in Eastern Galicia, co-founder and president of the Galician Zion association based in Lwów (1895), participated in the first two World Zionist Congresses. For more, see http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Malz_Dawid, accessed 31 October 2016.

³⁶ Samuel Abraham Poznański (1864–1921), preacher, historian, biographer, Zionist activist. For more, see http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Poznanski_Samuel_Abraham, accessed 31 October 2016.

³⁷ Saul Pinchas Rabinowicz (1845–1910), historian, writer, activist of the *Chowewej Syjon* movement, propagator of Hebrew language and writing. For more, see http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Rabinowicz_Saul_Pinchas, accessed 1 November 2016.

³⁸ *Zionisten-Congress in Basel (29, 30 und 31 August 1897)*. *Officielles Protocoll*, Vienna 1898, pp. 269–75.

³⁹ The son of Hilary Nussbaum, he lived from 1849 to 1937.

circumstance: [...] At home, apart from being religious, consisting mainly in fulfilling the rites of the order with great zeal, the young have not heard about any broader ideals, least of all about a sense of patriotism. [...] Not having Polish national ideals implanted at home, young Jews, who are also considered strangers by their Christian colleagues, also try to create some moral leverage for themselves, and having learned only that they are Jews, they gather almost feverishly under the banner of Zionism, which in their understanding has created, and for them has raised, a sublime national ideal. In a word, completely alien to the Polish national feeling, thirsting for a sublime national feeling, they create an artificial Jewish national ideal. A psychologically noble, but mistaken motive.⁴⁰

Nusbaum argued that the ideals being conveyed to Jewish youth should be exclusively Polish and strictly patriotic. In his opinion, Jews should draw other conclusions from their cultural tradition than those leading to an increased sense of Jewish national identity. The 'historical threads' connecting the Jews of old and their contemporaries should lead to the abandonment of the Jewish national identity in favour of the national duty of uniting with the inhabitants of the countries where Jews lived. The Jewish intelligentsia should radiate Polish patriotism to the Orthodox Jewish community. Nusbaum's views were clearly idealistic; this promoter of assimilation assumed that over the passage of time, the Christians would remove all legal and moral restrictions in relation to the Jews. He clearly emphasised the phenomenon of 'civilisational progress' which would eliminate anti-Semitism, chauvinism and religious intolerance, popular prejudices and cultural exclusivity. The final victory of the human rights and values – which, as he pointed out, he himself professed – was inevitable. For these reasons, among others, Zionism would be unnecessary in the long term.

On the subject of Jewish nationality, Nusbaum wrote:

[...] the thought of rebuilding Zion in the name of religious ideals cannot withstand criticism; what, then, are the aspirations for this reconstruction in the name of national ideals? Are the Jews a nation today – a nation without a territory? Without a special form of political existence? Without a living tongue? Truly no! no! and no! The Jews

⁴⁰ H. Nusbaum, *Głos antysyjonisty do polskiej inteligencji żydowskiej zwrócony*, Kraków 1899, pp. 1–2.

today are not a nation in the real sense of the word, and this conviction should penetrate them to the marrow of their bones, to the deepest sinews of their spiritual sense. Two thousand years ago, the Jews ended their lives as a real nation in the most glorious and most noble way, because as spokesmen of spirit, truth and light, they succumbed to the overwhelming brutal force, error and darkness of paganism.⁴¹

For most of the assimilationists, Jews were then a cultural and religious conglomerate, not a nation. In the opinion of Nusbaum, “the domain of the Jews today is not Palestine, nor Syria, nor the shores of Lake Asphaltites [the Dead Sea] – the domain of the Jews today is the land of powerful spirituality, and this offends the notion of Judaism, which wanted to see its followers today as a nation resurrected and pressed into dwarfish forms of a real state”⁴²

Regarding the distaste or lack of recognition expressed by his Polish fellow citizens, Nusbaum recommended – despite it all – love, loyalty and respect. It seems that he was not fully aware of the state of Christian-Jewish relations either on Polish soil or in the neighbouring countries, among the Germans, Hungarians and Russians. Like the entire assimilationist movement, he displayed a theoretical, idealistic approach to Jewish issues. This was opposed by the Zionists, who perceived assimilation as a threat to Jews. National-minded Jews looked to the future, while their assimilated brothers limited themselves to ‘here and now’, without presenting any realistic concepts for solving the problems of the Jewish community.

Contrary to the representatives of the assimilationist movement, the Zionists acted dynamically, thanks to which they gained the support of crowds of youth and young Jewish intelligentsia, including in Galicia. In the 1890s, the young generations who had experienced poverty, repulsion by the Christian majority and many ills of everyday life in a modernising reality, departed from the patterns of behaviour displayed by the older generation (i.e. the assimilationists).⁴³ The press which

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 17–18.

⁴² Ibid., p. 19.

⁴³ For more, see K. Kijek, *Dzieci modernizmu. Świadomość, kultura i socjalizacja polityczna młodzieży żydowskiej w II Rzeczypospolitej*, Kraków 2020. The author described the same or similar dilemmas of young people who were critical of the customs and behaviour of their parents in the years 1918–39. In my opinion, similar intergenerational mechanisms were operating in the last two decades preceding the outbreak of the First World War.

promoted assimilation began to lose readers, and some titles even disappeared from the market (such as *Ojczyzna*). In Lwów, the Zion Society (*Towarzystwo "Syjon"*)⁴⁴ published a leaflet entitled 'What should the Jewish youth programme be?'. The main slogan of the Society's programme was "Jews of all countries, show solidarity! Down with the convenient assimilationist masquerade! Down with the obsequious musician Jankiel⁴⁵ and his admirers!" This trend was promoted, for example, by the Zionist periodicals *Przyszłość* (Future)⁴⁶ and *Hashakhar*, based in Lwów, which were addressed to Jewish youth in Galicia and the Kingdom of Poland (in Warsaw, it was sold in J. Merecki's bookstore at 49 Chmielna Street).⁴⁷

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the assimilation movement was in retreat in Galicia, as in Congress Poland, clearly losing out to Zionism. In place of newspapers promoting the model of 'the Pole of the Mosaic faith', magazines appeared promoting the separation of Jews from Poles, Jewish culture, language, religion, politics, as well as emigration to Palestine, where an independent homeland was to be established – *Eretz Yisroel*.

Many representatives of the new generation rejected the assimilationist program as offending the dignity of the Jew.

The assimilationist program included only one point, i.e. the task of Polonising the Jews. People started to feel and think in Polish, which went hand in hand with changing their unsightly-sounding names and surnames, decorating their empty heads with four-cornered caps [*konfederatki*], making patriotic speeches, etc. The Poles like incense, so they willingly accept [our] servile fawning, devoid

⁴⁴ The Syjon Society became the nucleus of the future Zionist political party; it also produced many activists who after the First World War led the Zionist Organisation of Eastern Lesser-Poland and the Zionist Organisation of Western Lesser-Poland and Silesia. For more, see J. Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia*, Cambridge University Press 2012; R. Rubin, *Voices of a People. The Story of Yiddish Folk Song*, University of Illinois Press 2000; F. Solomon, *Blicke auf das galizische Judentum. Haskala, Assimilation und Zionismus bei Nathan Samuely, Karl Emil Franzos und Saul Raphael Landau*, Vienna 2012.

⁴⁵ This refers to the figure of Jankiel the Jew from Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*.

⁴⁶ W. Feldman, *Asymilatorzy, syjoniści i Polacy. Z powodu przelomu w stosunkach żydowskich w Galicyi*, Kraków 1893, p. 16. The author of the programme was Dr. Abraham Korkis; the pamphlet was published thanks to the support of his associates, Dr. Gerszon Zipper and Dr. David Malz. See A. Korkis, 'Jakim być powinien program młodzieży żydowskiej?', in *Almanach i leksykon żydostwa polskiego*, vol. 2, ed. R. Goldberger, Lwów 1938, pp. 9–29.

⁴⁷ Vasyl Stefanyk National Scientific Library of Ukraine in Lviv, *Hashakhar* 1907, reference number Ж39133.

of any ethical and real basis. However, one advantage of this [tendency among the Poles] should be mentioned – they do pay generously for these tirades.⁴⁸

The promotion of similar practices by the assimilationist movement aroused increasing opposition among Polish Jews. This rebellion against such behaviour was supported by the progress of the secular sciences, the development of humanism, nationalism, and cultural self-awareness. It is worth noting that in the first half of the nineteenth century and later, assimilation was supported by Jews who had received a traditional religious education, which made modern trends such as nationalism alien to them. It developed at a much slower pace among Jews than among other European nations; therefore the Jewish national consciousness was formed a little later than, for example, that of the Polish people. A similar delay occurred in the case of the Lithuanian, Belarusian and Ukrainian peoples.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, there were several bases on which a separate Jewish national consciousness was able to arise, namely history, religion and culture. In the case of language the matter was more problematic, because Yiddish was not recognised by the Zionists. This language was also discriminated against by the state authorities (e.g. in Austria-Hungary), which treated it as an unofficial jargon. Meanwhile, Hebrew had yet to be disseminated through schools, literature and the press. In this perspective, at the turn of the twentieth century, Zionism became a manifestation of national identity, a sign of a nationalist current that needed to be developed and deepened.

The process of Zionism displacing the assimilationist current visible at the beginning of the twentieth century was less dynamic in Galicia than in tsarist Poland. The state anti-Semitism intensifying in the Russian Empire, stoking hatred against the Jewish population, and the numerous pogroms committed there contributed to the final discredit of the assimilationist trend in the eyes of many Jews. In the Zionists' opinion, assimilation had not been able to prevent such disasters as, for example, the Chişinău pogrom (1903) and a series of successive anti-Semitic incidents in the lands ruled by the Romanov dynasty.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Feldman, *Asymilatorzy*, pp. 22–23.

⁴⁹ S.M. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland from the Earliest Times until the Present Day*, Philadelphia 1920, pp. 40–67.

The already quoted Max Nordau voiced his opinions on assimilation, and these became an element of the ideology also professed by the Polish Zionists. Let us listen once again to his voice:

But they know [the assimilationists who argued that Jews must live in the diaspora and play the role of moral teachers – author] that it is impossible to disseminate [these ideas], because under these conditions superstition, hatred and contempt will always persecute the Jews, obstructing their development or forcing them to imitate foreign ethnic groups, making the Jews, the cities that should have served as prototypes – into mediocre or bad copies of foreign models. These Jews, therefore, direct their efforts according to a well-planned plan to prevent the Jewish people from becoming a normal nation once again, one which lives on its own soil and performs the economic, spiritual, ethical and political functions of a civilised nation.⁵⁰

The accusations made by the Zionist ideologues against the concept of assimilation testified to their negative attitude towards the assimilationists. The Zionists put forward similar or identical arguments against the option of assimilation for the successive decades until the outbreak of the Second World War. In the interwar period, when the assimilation camp no longer posed any threat to the Zionist movement, the Zionists' arguments were directed at those Jewish politicians who supported the cultural autonomy of the Jews in Poland and rejected emigration to Palestine.

Nordau accurately characterised the assimilated Jews' attitude towards Zionism (although he was speaking of Western European Jews, this model also obtained in Poland):

Many Jews have already completely broken with Jewry in their soul; they will probably do so soon and formally, and if not, their children or grandchildren will. They want to merge completely with their fellow Christians; so it bothers them very much that the other Jews, right next to them, are openly proclaiming

⁵⁰ *Syonizm d-ra Maksu Nordau'a*, transl. into Polish with notes from the author by M. Jahrblum, Łódź 1903, pp. 8–9.

their national identity. They fear that in their home country of which they are free citizens, they will henceforth be considered strangers. They fear that this situation will become even worse if a significant part of the Jews openly demand the rights of an independent nation for themselves, especially when a political and cultural centre for Jews is actually created somewhere in the world, in which millions of nationally united Jews will be centred.⁵¹

It was the sense of fear in the assimilationist environment that deepened the conflict with Zionism. For many years, the assimilated Jews had built up their position in Polish society, made careers, and worked in liberal parties;⁵² they tried to speak with the same voice as the Poles. Young Zionism, on the other hand, posed a threat, undermined the authority of assimilation, and involved it in a natural conflict of interest in the struggle for the soul of the average Jew. Moreover, those who had become assimilated feared reprisals from the Polish side, which might regard Zionism as favouring the partitioning powers and betraying Polish national interests.

An unidentified Pole – or, which seems more likely, an assimilated Jew – wrote the following about the situation in Lwów:

How this idea spreads (Zionism) is proved by the *East* itself [*Wschód*, a Zionist periodical], which is now celebrating six years of existence, coming from very small beginnings to become a serious weekly today. Its content is information, from the first to the last page, about the complete separateness of the Jewish society, about the need to return to the ghetto in the modern sense, and to mark this separateness in everything, about breaking the bond of communication existing with Polish society in any form, to such an extent that it even calls for to establish a separate Jewish ‘Sokół’ [youth sports and gymnastic organisation],

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

⁵² Assimilated Jews functioned in circles whose ideological face derived from Varsovian positivism, European liberalism and the tradition of French radicalism. Liberal formations were particularly active in the Kingdom of Poland. Until 1914, the Progressive Democratic Union (established in 1905) and the Polish Progressive Party (established in 1906) operated in the Russian partition. Of all the Polish political groups, the liberals were the least numerous. See: K. Mateuszek, ‘Polskie formacje liberalne (1905–1989)’, *Historia i Polityka* 2019, no. 27 (34), pp. 10–11.

to support Jewish trade and industry, and to establish a Jewish university. And the fruit and result of this work: in politics, the struggle to recognise the Jewish nationality and separate electoral constituencies, to try and create in schools a denominational high-school [*gymnazjum*] with German as the language of instruction, and with Hebrew and Hebrew antiquity as separate subjects.⁵³

The author of this statement was inclined to anti-Zionism, sketching a frightening picture for the reader. In his opinion, Zionism was aiming to force the assimilated Jewish youth out of the womb of their Polish schools, which would immediately result in a conflict between Poles and Jewish nationalists. Zionists were also attributed a series of negative traits, especially selfishness and national chauvinism, the victims of which would above all be those Jews associated with Polishness. For example, Zionist youth allegedly avoided having their high school graduation photos taken together with their Polish colleagues: instead of the school emblem or the white eagle, they were photographed separately with the Star of David, and did not participate in Polish patriotic ceremonies. Zionist students made special demands of their schools: they demanded, for example, the introduction of two additional hours for learning the Hebrew language.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the Zionist magazine *Moriah*, addressed to Jewish students, wrote that “assimilation is a completely outdated direction, and its representatives are outcasts and traitors of the Jewish nation, doomed to disgrace by their own, and only tolerated by the Poles.”⁵⁵

The analysis of the available printed materials shows that mature Zionist activists had a more moderate approach towards assimilation. However, the material published by students for young people was definitely more radical in content, and was intransigent, sometimes even offensive, towards assimilationists. This was due to the radicalism of views and great enthusiasm typical of young people, which compensated for the gaps in their political knowledge and life experience. Many young Zionists assumed that radicalism, tenacity and dynamism in action

⁵³ ST. K. [S. Kossowski], *Kwestya syońska w murach szkoły (uwagi na czasie)*, Lwów 1906, pp. 8–9.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–14.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

would soon implement the great idea of an independent Jewish state. The realities, however, quickly cooled their hot heads.

Students in higher education largely contributed to the mass spread of Zionism in Galicia. The first official national-Jewish student rally was held on 25 July 1899 in Lwów, and its organisers were as follows: the Academic Reading Room of the Syon Society from Lwów, the Bar Kochba Association of Galician Academics from Vienna, the Academic Club of the Ezra Izrael Society from Stanisławów, the Academic Club of the Beth Israel Society from Kolomiya, the Academic Union of the Bnej Zion Society from Jarosław, and the Hashachar Academic Society from Cracow. One hundred students participated in the event. The following spoke during the assembly: Kruhl, president of the Bar Kochba Association of Galician Academics in Vienna; Schissler from Stanisławów, Schalit and Schiffer from Cracow, Löwenherz from Lwów, Berner from Jarosław and Zillenbaum from Stanisławów. At the rally, a resolution was passed calling on all Jewish students to unite in one organisation. The authorities of the universities in Cracow and Lwów were also requested to recognise Jewish nationality in such a way that it would be reflected in the university documentation.⁵⁶

The strength of the student Zionist organisations in Galicia grew every year. The Zionists showed their potential on 27 July 1905 in Cracow, on the occasion of the first anniversary of Theodor Herzl's death; they organised a march that gathered over a thousand people supporting the ideas of Zionism.⁵⁷

Even a few years before the outbreak of the First World War, it became clear that Zionism had won the struggle against assimilation for 'Jewish souls'. The elections to the Vienna Parliament in 1907 made Jews clearly aware of which political direction the 'Jewish tomorrow' would follow. One may be tempted to say that it was from this moment that the complete collapse of the assimilationist parties in Poland began – not only in Galicia, but also in Congress Poland,

⁵⁶ Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie (National Archives in Kraków), Starostwo Grodzkie Krakowskie (Kraków County Office), 250, pp. 13–26.

⁵⁷ K. Rędziński, I. Wrona-Meryk, 'Żydowskie stowarzyszenia studenckie we Lwowie (1890–1918)', *Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie* 2013, vol. 22, pp. 551–52. Valuable recollections from this period were published in a special gazette (*Nasz Tydzień. Jednodniówka "Pierwszego Tygodnia Akademika Żydowskiego w Małopolsce Wschodniej"*), 9 February 1929). For more on the subject of Zionist sports organisations, see *Z dziejów kultury fizycznej mniejszości narodowych w Polsce w XX wieku*, ed. T. Jurek, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2007.

where Zionism pushed the assimilationists to the margins of Jewish political life.⁵⁸ It should be added here that despite the rapid development of the Zionist movement, traditionalists and Orthodox Jews still predominated among Polish Jews, especially in the Russian partition (taking their influence among the masses into account).

In Galicia, the assimilationists (under the banner of 'the Polish Jewish organisation'; after the elections they planned to join the Polish Circle [*Koło Polskie*]), the Zionist party, the independent candidate Dr. Adolf Gross in Cracow and the Social Democrats (the Jewish wing of the Austrian Social Democratic party) all stood for election. In total, the Zionists put forward 19 candidates in 21 districts, the Socialists nominated 12 candidates in 12 districts, and the 'Polish Jewish organisation' 10 candidates in 9 constituencies. Together with the independent Adolf Gross, the Jewish parties put forward candidates in 28 constituencies (19 urban and 9 rural), nominating 42 candidates for deputies.⁵⁹

The election result was unsuccessful for the assimilationists. The Zionists were supported by the Jewish masses, and in some districts even Ukrainians who did not want to vote for Poles cast their ballots for them. The Zionists received the greatest support in towns and cities, and it was only weaker in the rural districts. In total, 62,609 votes were cast for all the Jewish candidates: 24,274 for the Zionists, 18,885 for the assimilationists, and 17,581 for the independent candidates.

Observers noticed that the Jewish community's interest in the elections was greater than ever, and their political mobilisation exceeded all expectations. One commentator wrote:

The former belief that the Jewish population, who owed so much to the Polish nation, was – either because of their allegedly growing attachment to us and their understanding of our situation, or because of their economic dependence on the Polish population – a mostly loyal and benevolent element in the field

⁵⁸ At the turn of May 1903, Zionism as a political trend was banned in the Russian Empire, because the highest authorities considered it to be subversive, with the potential to destroy the social order (Archiwum Państwowe w Lublinie [State Archives in Lublin], Hrubieszowski Zarząd Powiatowy [Hrubieszów Poviata Board], 32).

⁵⁹ E. Dubanowicz, *Stanowisko ludności żydowskiej w Galicyi wobec wyborów do Parlamentu Wiedeńskiego w r. 1907*, Lwów 1907, pp. 9–12.

of national politics, can no longer be maintained. The idea of Jewish political separateness, imported from the outside and which has found more and more fertile ground in the Jewish masses; represented mainly but not exclusively by the Zionist party; an idea which pushed the Jewish masses, so far indifferent to practical domestic politics, to actively participate in the electoral struggle.⁶⁰

In Poland, assimilation suffered a devastating defeat because of its helplessness in the face of the problems faced by Jews in everyday life. Assimilated and liberal Jewish activists predicted that modernisation – political equality and the development of education that was intended to discredit anachronistic prejudices such as anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism – would lead to the Jews merging with the Polish population. The supporters of assimilation were convinced that in this way, Jews would gradually become Poles. However, the assimilation programme lacked a recipe for resolving the social problems that the Jewish liberals could not cope with. Only the wealthiest strata of the Jewish community enjoyed political and economic freedom, and the poor masses and the proletariat continued to be the object of hostility from the Christian majority.⁶¹ In such a situation, Zionism was able to provide an extremely attractive socio-political offer.

The question of the relationship between Zionism and assimilation requires further research. The subject of the rivalry of various political currents among the Polish Jews should similarly be considered, for example between socialists and Zionists, or between socialists and supporters of assimilation.

Conclusions

The relationship between the Zionists and the assimilationists in Poland showed that the nineteenth-century idea of assimilation turned out to be an anachronism. It had only been effective in narrow social circles, and for most it proved worthless. Thus, the modern political current triumphed, which – in keeping with the spirit of the times – took on a mass character. Contrary to assimilation, Zionism strongly opposed anti-Semitism and the restriction of the rights of the Jewish population. Theodor Herzl and those inspired by his idea gained considerable support among

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 37–39.

⁶¹ M.H. Horwitz, *W kwestyi żydowskiej*, Kraków 1907, pp. 6–7.

Polish Jews who, as stated above, were regaining their dignity. This support was especially clear among the young, who owed their prospects for a better tomorrow to Zionism.

Zionists often spoke in hostile terms about supporters of assimilation, not only to the Polish, but also to the Russian and German cultures. Gradually, the polemics turned into press attacks, sometimes quite violent. The supporters of Zionism turned out to be the most realistic about the socio-political situation of Jews in Europe. Contrary to the supporters of assimilation, they succeeded in meeting Jewish expectations and hopes.

It can be said that historically the assimilation movement was doomed to collapse. The realities of the twentieth century turned out to be different than the previous century. Anti-democratic and anti-liberal political movements emerged in Europe, themselves taking on a mass character and intensifying their activities in the public space. The rivalry often took place in an atmosphere of open conflict and open hostility between individual political groups.

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SUMMARY

The article deals with the poorly studied problem of the conflict between the Zionists and supporters of Jewish assimilation at the turn of the twentieth century. It attempts to describe the clash between two completely different views on the situation of Jews in Europe and two completely different visions for the future of this nation. These theoretical political and social disputes set the tone for Jewish life before the outbreak of the First World War. In this way, the author indicates the issues that developed and took new forms in the years 1918–39.

This sketch summarises the changes taking place on the Jewish political scene, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. These changes were characterised by the growing strength and popularity of Zionism – an idea outlined by Theodor Herzl at the end of the nineteenth century – together with the simultaneous weakening and subsequent marginalisation of the hitherto predominant concept of the assimilation of the Jews.

KEYWORDS

Zionism • assimilation • Zionist Congress • Theodor Herzl •
Max Nordau • Polish lands • Jewish policy • Switzerland • Russia •
Galicia • national thought

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'DI ERSHTE DAYCH'N'.
A PICTURE OF THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF 1915–18
IN THE MEMORIES OF THE POLESIE JEWS

The Jewish experience of the first German occupation of 1915–18 in those areas that had formerly been part of the Russian Empire is an issue that deserves recognition. In the title, I quoted the name of the chapter 'Di ershte Daych'n' [The First Germans] from the memoirs of Dawid German about Bereza Kartuska, one of the many towns in Polesie where Central Powers troops were stationed during the Great War.¹ After 22 years, the inhabitants of Polesie came into contact with 'other' Germans. In a way, this text is intended to answer the question of what memory of German rule was left behind by that first occupation.

This study covers accounts concerning the area that fell within the borders of the Polesie province after the reconstitution of the state of Poland in 1919. The basic source used in this study is the testimonies contained in the so-called memorial books (*yizkor*) published by organisations of former inhabitants of western Polesie. Of course, there is a risk that accounts about the First World War that were written after 1945 could have been influenced by the traumatic experiences of the Third Reich's

¹ D. German, *Pinkas fun finf kehilot: Pruzhane, Bereze, Malech, Shereshev, Selts*, ed. M.W. Bernstein, Buenos Aires 1958, p. 375.

Holocaust. However, the assessments formulated by these witnesses refer to specific facts that took place in the years 1915–18. In addition, some of the texts from which the information has been taken are reprints of memoirs published before 1 September 1939. Some of the works cited here devoted to Pińsk and Prużany were written before the Holocaust; as were the memoirs of an Imperial-Royal Austro-Hungarian army officer who served in western Polesie, among other places. When using such recollections, one should always bear in mind the risk of contaminating them with presentism. However, in the case of this article, an internal criticism of all the texts used has not shown them to convey a false image of the past, although the subjectivity of the witnesses and their individual perspective of viewing events has naturally made themselves felt in them. The authors of the accounts were not historians, although they were aware of the importance of the task they were undertaking in order to preserve the image of their own experiences for posterity.

The boundaries of the area considered in this paper are marked by the river Słucz in the East and the river Bug in the West, a line running along Wołkowysk–Słonim–Baranowicze in the North, and Włodawa–Kamień Koszyrski–Sarny in the South. In administrative terms, at the beginning of 1915 this area belonged to the Grodno and Minsk governorates of the Russian Empire.

After the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and to an even greater extent after the abolition of serfdom and the expropriation of peasants in the Russian Empire, and with the construction of railroads and transit roads and the intensification of inland trade, the population of Polesie experienced slow but steady economic development. With the scarce resources of natural fossil resources that exist in this area, the inventiveness of the entrepreneurs who used the resources available to build the foundations of various processing plants is awe-inspiring. For example, the sources mention factories for tablecloths, plywood, floorboards, matches, tanneries, potteries, brickyards, and so on.²

Jews constituted at least 12 per cent of the total local population. They mainly lived in cities, towns and communal villages, although several hundred families dwelt

² *Pinkas Byten. Der ojfikum un untergang fun a yidisher kehila*, Buenos Aires 1954, pp. 8, 18; *Kobrin Zamlbukh*, Buenos Aires 1951, p. 17; *Rishonim la-mered: Lakhva*, Jerusalem–Tel Aviv 1957, pp. 423–24, 432; *Rozhina. A yizkor bukh nokh der umgelumener rozhinoier kehila*, Tel Aviv 1957, p. 202; *Toizn yor Pinsk*, New York 1941, pp. 92–93.

in rural colonies established in the mid-nineteenth century, or intermingled among the Christian peasants.³ It was Jewish merchants and shopkeepers who organised regional and interregional trade and dominated a number of trades. Jews also worked as factory workers, and over a thousand people made a living by farming. Those who could not compete in the local labour market migrated to other regions of Russia; to the Kingdom of Poland established in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna and called Poland by the local Jews;⁴ or outside the territory under the tsar's rule altogether. Sometimes these emigrations were forced by fire, which removed most of the wooden buildings in Polesie's towns and villages from the surface of the earth. Even the largest city, Brest (Brześć nad Bugiem),⁵ was seriously damaged at the turn of the twentieth century by two great fires.⁶

It should be emphasised that an important condition for the economic development of Polesie before the First World War was its location on the route linking central Russia with the Congress Kingdom. Moreover, thanks to its inland water connections, goods from Polesie reached the Baltic and Black Seas. The links with these two seas even induced some chroniclers to use the term 'Poleska Hansa'.⁷ This can be treated as an exaggeration, but it illustrates the local merchants' pride in participating in the economic system of this part of Europe. People went to distant places in the empire in search of work. For example, the inhabitants of Łachwa looked for temporary employment in Odessa and Kiev.⁸ Undoubtedly, the local economy was influenced by its close relationship with the economic system of the tsarist state as a whole.

Although the Jews of Polesie took rational advantage of the economic situation during the period preceding the First World War, they had important reasons for dissatisfaction. First of all was the way in which they were treated by the representatives of the Russian state. They were remembered as bribe-takers

³ *Drohichyn. Finfhundert yor yiddish-lebn*, Chicago 1958, pp. 11–12.

⁴ It has not been established whether representatives of other nationalities and religions living in these areas also used the term 'Poland' to refer to the Congress Kingdom.

⁵ For clarity, the city will simply be referred to in this text as 'Brest'.

⁶ These fires broke out in 1895 and 1901; see *Entsyklopedias fun Galut-Lender: Brisk-D'Lite*, Jerusalem–Tel Aviv 1955, p. 98; W. Mondalski, *Brześć Podlaski (Brześć Litewski, Brześć nad Bugiem)*. *Zarys geograficzno-historyczny*, Turek 1929, p. 87.

⁷ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 92; *Pinkas fun finf kehillot*, pp. 328–31.

⁸ *Rishonim la-mered*, pp. 441–42.

who discriminated against the Jewish population and made their lives difficult.⁹ The law limited the options which the Jews had to develop, as individuals and collectives.¹⁰ A person of the Mosaic faith could not count on making a career in state institutions or even becoming a regular employee therein. There was no chance of becoming an officer or pursuing any professional service in the army. One example of discrimination is the composition of the Brest City Council, which had only three Jews before the First World War, even though the city's 40,000 Jewish inhabitants constituted the majority of the population. At the same time, its 17,000 Christians were represented by 29 councillors.¹¹ From 1882, Russian Jews associated the state apparatus with the pogroms aimed at them that took place from time to time in the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Poland.¹² Pogroms also occurred after the loss of the war with Japan; one such also took place in Brest on 29 May 1905.¹³ The tsarist state was openly criticised, among others by politically active people in various parties, both legal and illegal. However Russia was still their home country; that is why representatives of Jewish institutions joined the social campaigns to help the army and civilians injured after war broke out 2 August 1914.¹⁴ Jewish leaders wanted reforms that would provide them with the formal and actual civic equality enjoyed by their fellow believers in, for example, Germany or the United States.

The Russian army's officer corps was prejudiced against Jewish people; it upheld the opinion that Jews held anti-state attitudes and carried out anti-state activity. This resulted in rough treatment, and in the face of Russian military failures during the first period of the war with Germany and Austria–Hungary, this reluctance sometimes turned into threatening suspicion and open hostility. Jews were accused of spying for the Central Powers.¹⁵ Rumours spread that they had deposited their savings in Germany

⁹ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 115; *Drohichyn*, p. 13; *Gedenk-bukh fun Kamenets-Litovsk, Zastavie un di kolonies*, Tel Aviv 1967, p. 447.

¹⁰ The Jews were no exception to the discrimination. Certain restrictions were applied to Poles, for example. The native populations in Siberia also stood lower in the Russian social hierarchy.

¹¹ *Entsyklopedias fun Galut-Lender: Brisk-D'Lite*, p. 101.

¹² *Drohichyn*, p. 15.

¹³ *Entsyklopedias fun Galut-Lender: Brisk-D'Lite*, pp. 99–100.

¹⁴ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 178; *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, Pruzhany 1930, pp. 196–98.

¹⁵ S. Dubnow, *Di velt-geshikhte fun yidishn-folk*, vol. 10, New York-Buenos Aires 1938, pp. 420–21; *Telekhaner Yizkor-buch*, Los Angeles 1963, p. 17; *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 178; A. Kelletat, 'Der Krieg und die Juden in Litauen', *Annaburger Annales* 2011, no. 19, p. 209; *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, pp. 196–97.

and expressed support for that country while at the same time demonstrating disloyalty to Russia.¹⁶ In the autumn of 1914 and the spring of 1915, a wave of refugees, including Jews, began to arrive in Polesie, after being forced by the Russian authorities to leave their homes in the Kingdom of Poland and the western governorates of the empire. They brought news of the brutality carried out by their own army as it covered its retreat. The Cossacks and Circassians gained the worst reputations.¹⁷

At the same time, a positive opinion of the state regimes of the German Empire and the Imperial-Royal Austro-Hungarian Empire persisted among Russian Jews. In view of the aversion to tsarism and their current bad experiences with the tsarist army, some Jews awaited the arrival of the German and Austro-Hungarian armies with eagerness. There were discussion about when ‘reb Velvele’ and ‘reb Yossele’ would appear, codenames or pseudonyms for Emperors Wilhelm II Hohenzollern and Franz Joseph I Habsburg.¹⁸ The Germans were highly regarded as ‘bearers of civilization’ (*hoypt-treger fun tsvilizatsye*).¹⁹ In Byteń, some Jews saw Wilhelm II as a ‘messiah’ who would bring them salvation from the oppression of the tsarist regime.²⁰ In summer 1915 a local Zionist, Szymon Szteper, went along the streets of the town with a broad smile, going up to people in the streets and speaking with joy about the ‘defeat of Nikolai.’²¹ The witness notes that this is how many Jews behaved at that time, and added: “people believed in Germans, salvation was expected from them, it was deemed a certainty that they would help change life for the better.”²² A similar approach was also represented at that time by residents of Drohiczyn Poleski, among others, who perceived the Germans as ‘defenders of freedom.’ This positive attitude prompted them to stay where they were and wait for the arrival of a foreign army.²³ At the same time, though, one must not forget the thousands of Jews who were conscripted into the tsarist army and fought for Russia under its banner. In 1914 and 1915 some of them showed demonstrative loyalty to Russia

¹⁶ *Telekhaner Yizkor-buch*, p. 142.

¹⁷ Dubnow, *Di velt-geshikhte*, pp. 421–22.

¹⁸ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 116; *Pinkas fun finf kehilot*, p. 375.

¹⁹ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 115.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 116.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 116–17.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 116.

²³ *Drohichyn*, p. 66.

– an imperfect country, but still their own. A witness from Bereza Kartuska wrote about it.²⁴

In summer 1915, the Russian military command took the decision to repeat the tactics of the war with Napoleon, when the Russians gave way to the enemy, leaving scorched earth to the invaders. This time the order was not carried out in full, but what was done had a great impact on the situation of the civilians, including Jews. The symbol of the ruthlessness of the Russian army was the expulsion of tens of thousands of inhabitants of Brest from the city, condemning them to homelessness regardless of their nationality. Most of their property was destroyed and looted, because the owners were prevented from taking it away while it was still possible.²⁵

In fact, in August and September 1915, ‘their own army’ (that is the Russians) appeared to the Jews as a curse. The troops covering the retreat looted, destroyed and burned everything they could. In Byteń, the Cossacks burned down the town as they were leaving.²⁶ In Kamień Koszyrski they robbed and harassed Jewish women.²⁷ At Pińsk, several hours before the Germans entered, they robbed houses on the main streets.²⁸ The Russians set fire to the railway station, the railway workshops and adjacent buildings, and the petrol station in the vicinity. They also destroyed the distillery and water supply systems at the station.²⁹ A witness from Kobryn writes that a drunken Circassian went back on his desire to burn down a house after forcing a bribe of 100 roubles.³⁰ Cossacks raged through Telechany, beating and robbing Jews, finally setting the town on fire, reducing it to ashes. The civilians hid in the nearby forests and spent the Yom Kippur festival there.³¹ At Prużany, a citizens’ committee handed out various goods to Russian soldiers to prevent robberies and rapine. They also paid the commander of a Cossack

²⁴ *Pinkas fun fnf kehilot*, p. 375.

²⁵ In 1913, 57,068 people lived in Brest-Litovsk, including 39,152 Jews, 10,042 Russians and 7536 Poles. The evacuation of Brest was ordered on 1 August 1915 and carried out on 3–5 August. For the next three weeks, the military plundered houses, and set the city on fire on 24–25 August, just before their retreat; cf. *Entsyklopedias fun Galut-Lender: Brisk-D’Lite*, pp. 102–03; Mondalski, *Brześć Podlaski*, pp. 90–91.

²⁶ *Pinkas Byten*, pp. 45, 94.

²⁷ *Yizkor-buch fun der yidisher kehila in Kamin-Koshirski un umgegent*, Tel Aviv 1965, p. 638.

²⁸ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 181.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Kobrin Zamlbukh*, p. 202.

³¹ *Telekhaner Yizkor-buch*, pp. 53–54, 97–98, 112.

unit to refrain from burning down the main synagogue.³² The same happened in Drohiczyn Poleski and all the other towns. The civilian population hid from the Cossacks in various corners of their farmyards or in the forests.³³ A militia was set up at Pruzhany, clashing with individual Russian marauders trying to rob them while passing through the town. This was possible because several hundred men volunteered to join the group. The militia carried out the orders of an *ad hoc* Civic Committee composed of two Jews and two Christians. The disappearance of the Russian army was not a worry to some, or perhaps even most of the Jewish population. Nevertheless, upon the news of the approaching Germans, many of them fled from the Byeń *shtetl* to Kosów Poleski, Słonim and Baranowicze.

The Russian army forced several million Belarusian and Ukrainian peasants, workers from factories or state institutions to evacuate the western governorates, together with their families. They could only take a small part of their belongings on the road. The peasants' farms and the crops they had gathered, the houses and apartments abandoned in the cities, were all left unattended. Judging by the descriptions, the tsarist army in western Polesie was not interested in taking the Jewish population with it, although it plundered and burned their houses in many places. This did not happen everywhere, however. Among other places, the destruction of August and September 1915 bypassed the village of Kosów Poleski. During an exchange of fire between the opposing sides, only a few houses were destroyed there. The town also avoided plunder by the soldiers, which meant the inhabitants had more resources than the Jews from other *shtetls* in the subsequent period.³⁴

The descriptions show that the Jewish population was generally not afraid of the Germans. At Pińsk on 16 September 1915, crowds poured out into the streets, where the invading troops were watched, announcements from the authorities were read, and concerts of military orchestras were attended.³⁵ The Jews only hid in the cellars when a rumour spread about a successful Russian counterattack near Łohiszyn; before their eyes they had a vision of a new Cossack invasion and a new

³² *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhanee*, pp. 199–200.

³³ *Drohichyn*, pp. 66–67; *Gedenk-bukh fun Kamenets-Litovsk*, p. 434.

³⁴ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 133.

³⁵ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 181.

wave of violence. One chronicler described the reaction of the Jewish inhabitants to the German army's invasion of Drohiczyn Poleski in this way: "The joy was so great that some Jews kissed the marching Germans".³⁶ One exception to the majority of the reports came from Bereza Kartuska, where the occupying forces – Germans, Austrians and Hungarians – were called robbers, and great damage resulted from the fierce fighting in this area between the enemy forces.³⁷

Most of western Polesie, that is the area stretching between Brest, Pińsk and Łuninec, was captured by the German army, but Austro-Hungarian troops also appeared in some places. Such was the case in Brest, Kamieniec Litewski, Prużany and Bereza Kartuska.³⁸ The Austro-Hungarian army occupied western Polesie among other areas, but due to the concentration of their activities on the Galician front and the areas to the south of it, the Central Powers' main forces in Polesie consisted of German formations.³⁹ In the area under discussion, they formed the so-called *Heeresgruppe Woyrsch*, named after their commander Remus von Woyrsch. Moreover, the authors of Polish-Jewish memoirs write most often about German, not Austro-Hungarian soldiers.

The German-Austrian offensive soon stalled, and after a few weeks, in September, the front stabilised along a line of the river Szczara, the Ogiński canal, and the rivers Jasiołda, Styr and Stochod.⁴⁰ This front line lasted until February 1918. At that time, the warring sides expanded their fortifications, and the monotony of this eastern version of trench warfare was interrupted by scouts, artillery fire, machine gun fire or aerial bombardment.⁴¹ In February 1918, another offensive by the Central Powers' armies began, during which the emperors' troops occupied territory as far as a line stretching between the Gulf of Finland and the city of Rostov-on-Don.

³⁶ *Drohichyn*, p. 67.

³⁷ *Pinkas fun finf kehilot*, pp. 341, 362.

³⁸ *Entsyklopedias fun Galut-Lender: Brisk-D'Lite*, p. 104; *Gedenk-bukh fun Kamenets-Litovsk*, p. 430; *Pinkas fun finf kehilot*, p. 341.

³⁹ S. Czerep, *Bitwa pod Luckiem*, Białystok 2003, p. 161.

⁴⁰ *Yizkor-buch fun der yidisher kehila in Kamin-Koshirski*, p. 739; *Yizkor Kehilot Luniniets / Kozhanhorodok*, Tel Aviv 1952, p. 114; A. Kryszko, *Moje wspomnienia z Polesia*, Santok 2009, p. 7; J. Rubacha, 'Korpus Landwehry w bojach o Baranowicze latem 1916 r.', *Słupskie Studia Historyczne* 2010, no. 16, pp. 73–74.

⁴¹ Among other places, the Germans bombed the railway junction in Łuninec, see *Yizkor Kehilot Luniniets / Kozhanhorodok*, p. 114.

One of the consequences of this offensive was that the whole of Polesie now came under the control of the German occupation authorities.

Although it is not obvious, the factor which determined the new situation in the western part of Polesie was the formal equality guaranteed to Jews in the German Empire from 1871 and their good treatment in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This standard determined the generally correct behaviour of the officer class, and also influenced their subordinates. There were other very important reasons for the relatively good treatment of the Jewish population by the occupation forces. German military circles saw the anti-Semitism of the Russian state as a factor in winning over Russian Jews to fight against the tsarist regime.⁴² Shortly after crossing the borders of the Kingdom of Poland in August 1914, a leaflet was distributed on its territory in which the Germans called on the Jewish population from Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Volhynia and Podolia to fight tsarist Russia. In addition to the several million Poles on these territories, Berlin and Vienna saw the several million Jews there as potential allies who would turn against the monarchy of Tsar Nicholas II due to the grievances they had suffered.⁴³ Hence, their Jewish fellow citizens on the Spree and the Danube were given every assurance that the fate of their fellow believers in the East would be radically improved by victory for the Central Powers, and that the main manifestation of this would be both formal and real equality. Jewish organisations established in Germany to help their fellows in the East also conducted an information campaign in this spirit.⁴⁴

Orthodox Jews in Eastern Europe – both Hasidim and adherents of rabbinic Judaism – were so exotic to Germans of various denominations that it was necessary to publish brochures containing some basic information about this community.⁴⁵ In the first month of the war, the Zionists established the German Committee

⁴² The head of the intelligence of the German army during the First World War recommended recruiting Jews as a valuable group who would have information useful from a military point of view (S. Lewicki, *Canaris w Madrycie*, Warsaw 1989, p. 15).

⁴³ E. Zechlin, *Die deutsche Politik und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Göttingen 1969, p. 121; J. Nalewajko-Kulikov, 'Die jiddische Schule der Erwachsenen: Warsaw Yiddish Press and German-Jewish Contacts in 1915–18', *Acta Poloniae Historica* 2016, vol. 113, pp. 91–92.

⁴⁴ One columnist wrote in terms of the 'holy defensive war' Germany was waging against Russia as an opportunity to liberate all peoples under the tsar's yoke, including Jews. According to the author, these nationalities were looking forward to this liberation (W. Kaplun-Kogan, *Der Krieg. Eine Schicksalstunde des jüdischen Volkes*, Berlin 1915, p. 4).

⁴⁵ N. Birnbaum, *Was sind Ostjuden. Zur ersten Information*, Vienna 1916.

for the Freeing of Russian Jews (*Deutsches Komitee zur Befreiung der russischen Juden*). Those Germans of the 'Mosaic faith' who did not support the Zionists established a separate German Association for the Interests of East European Jews (*Deutsche Vereinigung für die Interessen der osteuropäischen Juden*), while the religious Orthodox founded the Free Association for the Interests of Orthodox Jewry (*Freie Vereinigung für die Interessen des orthodoxen Judentum*). In Vienna, on the other hand, the Committee for the Explanation of the East Jewish Question was established.

In the territories occupied by Germany and Austria-Hungary, efforts to win over the local Jews were made, and to provide them with charitable aid at the same time. Jewish-German activists convinced political decision-makers and the society of the Reich that the Eastern Jews, through the Yiddish language, were associated with the German language and culture, and should even be treated as spokesmen for German among the local population. The Zionists in particular called for supporting activities aimed at strengthening the Jewish community, through the consent of the government in Berlin to the functioning of its ethnic institutions.⁴⁶

Interestingly, given the German Jews' relatively strong interest in the East, their activity in that area was not reflected in the notes of Jewish diarists from Polesie.⁴⁷ In the context under discussion, however, the most important thing is that none of the mentioned initiatives concerning the so-called Eastern Jews (*Ostjuden*) would have been possible had it not been for the consent of the governments of the Central Powers, as well as the commanders of their armies.

Thirteen field rabbis were sent to the eastern front; they were to provide spiritual protection not only to German and Austro-Hungarian soldiers of the 'Mosaic faith', but also to help in establishing contact with eastern Jews.⁴⁸ It should be noted, however, that no witness mentioned meeting any such rabbis in the reports from Polesie.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 11–12.

⁴⁷ The memoirs of Lt Jakob Mestel testify to the fact that there were contacts between Jewish soldiers from the occupation forces and local Jews. Both he and his Jewish subordinates spent Passover 1916 with the local Jews (J. Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn fun a yiddishe ofitsir*, vol. 2, Warsaw 1924, pp. 204–06).

⁴⁸ In addition to the rabbis on the eastern front, about 40,000 German soldiers of Jewish origin served in the army (G. Dryer, 'Stranger Lands: Politics, Ethnicity and Occupation on the Eastern Front, 1914–1918', *Rice Historical Review*, Spring 2018, p. 17, <https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/101526/Dreyer-RHR-2018-Spring.pdf>, accessed 13 February 2022).

In some places, attempts were made to document the good relations between the army and the representatives of the Jewish community. For example, the German commandant in Drohiczyn Poleski had photos taken during the visits by representatives of the City Committee to his office, and sent them to his superiors in Berlin. These photographs were intended to serve as material illustrating the good treatment of civilians by the occupying administration.⁴⁹

Bearing in mind the policy of winning Jews over for the occupation forces, one must not forget about the sense of superiority which the German officer cadre felt over the conquered populations, including the eastern Jews.⁵⁰ Due to the subject of this work, I omit any discussion of how the officers (and people of aristocratic origin in general) referred to the peasants in Polesie, who were most often illiterate and lived in very poor conditions. The noble officers were certainly not interested in any form of fraternisation. Sometimes the arrogance of even the lower-ranking soldiers made itself felt. At Pińsk, civilians had to give way to German officers and bow to them.⁵¹ The principle of collective responsibility was applied; for example, an argument between a merchant and a soldier led to the imposition upon the entire population of a fine ('contribution') of 10,000 roubles.⁵² Cases of military lawlessness were reported, such as when German soldiers tried to force a Jewish girl to pose naked for a photo; when she refused to do so, they beat her up.⁵³ Officers and gendarmes quite often used whips and snares to make the conquered population realise who the master of the situation was. These blows also fell on the Jews. Austro-Hungarian Lieutenant Jakob Mestel points out that the Jews who fled from the area controlled by the German army appeared in his area because they believed that the regime in the territories occupied by Franz Joseph's soldiers was easier. When a German patrol confiscated seventeen head of cattle from the Jews,

⁴⁹ *Drohichyn*, p. 71.

⁵⁰ Elsewhere, at least some distance towards Jews was shown, even in relations between the allies. The Austrian army officer Jakob Mestel recalls that when his unit arrived in Brest-Litovsk in the summer of 1916, Paul von Hindenburg invited the Austro-Hungarian commander for dinner, but the Austrian colonel's adjutant, a Hungarian Jew, was not invited. The same witness highlighted the order given by the German commander of Brest that Central Commission officers should indicate their nationality and religion, which was not – as he recalled – a habit practiced in their parent units (Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, p. 228).

⁵¹ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 183.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, pp. 208–09.

they were not returned until Mestel intervened.⁵⁴ German soldiers at the border post robbed Jews of their legally purchased grain, and additionally beat them with whips until they bled.⁵⁵

One author describing the Jewish population emphasised their predominance in trade and crafts, but at the same time noted: “All their [the Jews’] enterprises are small and poor, and their life still reaches no farther than the narrow area of the ghetto.”⁵⁶ This finding does not suggest that the author placed Eastern Jews on a high level of the social hierarchy, and the final wording seems to indicate that for him they were a kind of relic left over from past centuries, when it was common for the Jewish population to function in dense clusters of ghettos. For a German who came from the Reich in 1915, this phenomenon was something entirely unknown.

Regarding the Jews, they were rumoured to indulge in illegal trading activities, smuggling or using bribes to settle their affairs.⁵⁷ These ideas were not detached from reality, but partially constituted an anti-Semitic generalisation. While some Jews used bribery and smuggling in their struggle to survive, there were also those who did not know how to use such methods, and suffered great poverty. The authors of the anti-Semitic generalisations spread among the occupiers disregarded the conditions created by the war (and therefore partly by themselves), which had forced the local people to use various tactics to fight for survival in a devastated, degraded space. In addition, the examples given below show that the local population soon learned that some soldiers were susceptible to material arguments in the form of bribes. This knowledge survived until the next war. Army Lieutenant Jakob Mestel, being responsible for an area of about 200 sq km in the vicinity of Pruzany, noted how the local population competed for military favours in order to ensure more favourable conditions to function in their difficult reality. Bribes were offered – including to him – for reasons including turning a blind eye to smuggling across the southern border of the so-called *Oberost*.⁵⁸ Mestel cited a situation when a German patrol confiscated several cattle from

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 225.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 223.

⁵⁶ B. Brandt, *Geographischer Bilderatlas des polnisch-weißrussischen Grenzgebiets*, Berlin 1918, p. 42.

⁵⁷ L. Kasmach, ‘Forgotten occupation: Germans and Belarusians in the Lands of the *Ober Ost* (1915–17)’, *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 2016, vol. 58, no. 4, p. 325.

⁵⁸ Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, pp. 218–20.

the Jews. Admittedly they were returned after an Austrian officer intervened, but just in case, the victims left the Germans a calf as a 'gift' in order not to spoil their relations with them, which the 'recipients' accepted.⁵⁹ A witness who remembered life in Bereza Kartuska at that time emphasised that the need to live forced the locals to search for ways to deal with everyday problems. Leather and textiles were brought from Pińsk, whose inhabitants were near starvation, to Drohiczyn Poleski, and food was taken from the countryside. Sometimes such transports were 'covered' by a uniformed German soldier, and a pass was issued for a bribe. In this way, Drohiczyn also received goods from Brest, Biała Podlaska and Międzyrzec Podlaski. Bribes were also paid for the smuggling of goods between the *Oberost* and Polesie. Some Jews began to act as intermediaries, because thanks to the similarity of Yiddish to German they could communicate more easily with the occupiers than the Polesie peasants. Business permits were obtained, and some wartime 'businessmen' went on business trips to Warsaw, among other places.⁶⁰ Another tactic for developing relations with the Germans and Austrians was to report to them about people who were violating the occupation bans and orders.

The occupier granted the status of 'dependent populations' to all the relevant religious and national groups in the area in question, in implementation of the tasks as defined in Berlin and Vienna. Polesie was to provide what was necessary for the war economy: accommodation and food for soldiers, draft animals and stables, as well as forage and yards for them, not to mention human labour, either without payment or for merely a symbolic remuneration. Part of the Polish population was involved in this economy, and the rest had to leave or vegetate on the spot, suffering from shortages for over three years. The policy of the occupiers – especially the Germans – can be defined in two terms: the plunder of natural resources and property, and the exploitation of human resources.⁶¹ All actions concerning

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁶⁰ *Pinkas fun fnf kehilot*, p. 341.

⁶¹ In 1919, the magistrate in Brest issued a communiqué in which we read, "After the occupation of Brest by German troops, the rest of the property left behind (both public institutions and private persons) was confiscated and transported to Prussia. Even the remaining walls of the buildings were demolished, and the bricks were taken away" (D. Zagadzki, 'Okreg Korpusu Nr 9 na Polesiu (1921–1939)', trans. E. Lickiewicz, *Echa Polesia* 2012, no. 3, p. 28). The Bavarian Prince Leopold resided in the palace in Skoki near Brest, as Commander of the German Eastern Front (from 1916). When he left his quarters, the German army plundered the property (*Echa Polesia* 2005, no. 3, p. 24).

the civilians were subordinated to the needs of the army and the German state. To meet these needs effectively, a system of communication with the conquered population was created. Local translators – Jews – were helpful in this. Attempts were made to reach the locals in other ways as well. For example, in Brest, information for the city's residents was announced by means of posters in four languages: Yiddish, German, Polish and Russian. At the railway station, there were texts of railway and station regulations, which were printed in Yiddish, among other languages.⁶²

The Germans did not want too many civilians, especially those incapable of work, to remain behind the front lines. They were seen as unnecessary consumers and as causes of various problems. Starving civilians deprived of drugs were susceptible to disease, which additionally posed an epidemiological threat to the military.⁶³

After Brest was taken, the Germans first quickly put out the fires which the Russians had started, and then quickly deported to the Congress Kingdom most of those inhabitants who the Russians were unable to displace, as well as those who had returned to the city as soon as the tsarist army left it. The civilians were scattered around various towns west of the Bug.⁶⁴ The Germans designated all of Brest for military use, and also set up a large prisoner of war camp there.⁶⁵ People returning to their hometown were only allowed to stay there after the conclusion of peace agreements with the Ukrainian People's Republic and Bolshevik Russia in February and March 1918, when the line separating the troops of the central states from the Russian ones was shifted much further west. Those who returned had to stay in a few houses of prayer or other provisionally adapted rooms, because the surviving houses were still occupied by the German army.⁶⁶ While the city had had over 57,000 inhabitants before the war, in November 1918 only around 12,000 or so were left. These certainly included Jews among them, since in the first city

⁶² The witness saw the aforementioned posters and regulations in Brest in the summer of 1916 (Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, p. 227).

⁶³ In Drohiczyn Poleski, most refugees from the Kingdom of Poland and Brest-Litovsk died of typhus (*Drohichyn*, p. 68).

⁶⁴ K. Nowik, *Di shtot Brisk*, New York 1973, p. 12.

⁶⁵ *Entsyklopedias fun Galut-Lender: Brisk-D'Lite*, p. 104. Jakob Mestel recalled that in 1916 the few houses that had survived stood empty, with no furnishings. In the town, among others, a large brothel for soldiers was set up, where several dozen prostitutes worked (Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, p. 228).

⁶⁶ Nowik, *Di shtot Brisk*, p. 12.

board appointed under Polish rule after the Germans' withdrawal on 9 February 1919, at least two members of the Jewish faith were among the six lay judges supporting the mayor.⁶⁷ One of the witnesses saw civilian workers wearing yellow signs on their clothes in Brest in 1916, which he associated with the marking of Jews in the Middle Ages; it should be remembered that this account was published in Warsaw in 1924, and not after the Second World War.⁶⁸

A clear example of the Germans using radical measures to resolve the problems arising from the presence of 'redundant' civilians is what happened at Pińsk. When the town was occupied by the Germans it had around 30,000 civilians. Food became scarce very quickly, so the Germans decided to displace as many people westward as possible. For example, no impediments were put in the way of those refugees from the Kingdom who decided to return home. The refugees who had been displaced to Prużany returned to Jedwabne and Nowy Dwór, among other places.⁶⁹ Several thousand such people left Pińsk in the early autumn of 1915. The obligation to organise the transfer of persons deemed 'unnecessary' was transferred to the Citizens' Committee headed by Dr. Aleksander Luria;⁷⁰ he appointed an Evacuation Commission (EC) divided into two sections. The Jewish section organised the departures of Jews and Russians, and the Polish section organised the Poles' journeys. When the city's military commander considered the number of people dispatched to be too low, he imposed a relatively high fine on the EC, amounting to 3000 roubles. In July 1917, the Germans announced that another 3000 people had to leave Pińsk, and either find places for themselves in the nearby villages or cross the Bug.⁷¹ The list, which was once again drawn up by the EC, included about 200 reservists, former soldiers of the Russian army.

The provision of food and accommodation in the Kingdom of Poland was also difficult, so the people arriving there, if they did not have the support of family or friends, became homeless wanderers. The reports which came from them back to Polesie significantly weakened the interest in migration. The resulting decrease

⁶⁷ These jurors were Zelman Tenenbaum and Aron Matecki (Mondalski, *Brześć Podlaski*, p. 96).

⁶⁸ Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, p. 228.

⁶⁹ *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, p. 207.

⁷⁰ From December 1915 to 16 May 1916, 9828 people of various denominations were displaced westwards from Pińsk (*Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 186).

⁷¹ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 191.

in the number of people willing to leave caused dissatisfaction in the German administration. In the face of this passive resistance, the occupier forced the Emigration Committee to name people who were to leave Pińsk. These people were then detained by patrols consisting of soldiers and members of the city militia, forcibly brought to the railway station, and sent to the Bug.⁷²

Here are some figures to illustrate the migratory movements at that time. The statistics available show the extent of the movements of the Jewish population in western Polesie, caused by the First World War and the military clashes of 1919–20.⁷³ In 1913, 39,152 Jews lived in Brest, while the census of 1921 showed only 15,630 people of this nationality resident in the city.⁷⁴ Whereas the town of Byteń had been inhabited by about 1500 Jewish people before the war, according to the post-war census only 539 remained. Some of the former inhabitants of Polesie returned after wandering for several years after the war. In the years 1921–24 alone, this inflow amounted to around 190,000 people.⁷⁵ At Prużany, in the face of the severe epidemic situation, which was caused *inter alia* by the accumulation of thousands of people whom the Russians had expelled from Brest, the Germans forced many people to leave the city, while on the other hand trying to minimise the spread of infectious diseases by organising forced delousing actions.⁷⁶ People from Telechany who had been made homeless by fire were displaced beyond the Bug, whence they were sent on to Łomża, Maków Mazowiecki and Ostrołęka. These exiles began to return to their hometown from the summer of 1917. Interestingly, at that time the Germans allowed them to return, even though they had no interest in how the returnees fared. They lived in barracks built by the Germans for lumberjacks; at first they ate what they could find in the forest, and later they bought food in the vicinity of Motło and Kosów Poleski, while at the same time they prepared for the next year by cultivating the fields abandoned by the peasants.⁷⁷ Besides, they were only doing what their neighbours had been doing for two years with the permission of the occupiers.

⁷² Ibid., p. 187.

⁷³ *Pinkas Byten*, pp. 18, 20.

⁷⁴ *Entsyklopedias fun Galut-Lender: Brisk-D'Lite*, p. 102.

⁷⁵ J. Niezbrzycki, *Polesie. Opis wojskowo-geograficzny i studium terenu*, Warszawa 1930, p. 303.

⁷⁶ *Pinkas fun der shtot Prużhane*, pp. 203, 207.

⁷⁷ *Telekhaner Yizkor-buch*, p. 54.

People coped as best they could with the lack of housing. In Antopol, those whose houses had been burned down by the Russian army seized the homes of evacuated Christians.⁷⁸ It was similar in the village of Zastawie near Kamieniec Litewski, and also in Byteń, with at least one of the local families moving into an abandoned cottage in a nearby village.⁷⁹ Some residents of Drohiczyn Poleski did the same.⁸⁰ In Telechany, some of the victims moved to the nearby town of Motol.⁸¹ In some places, those Jews whose houses had been destroyed began to demolish the peasants' buildings and used the material obtained in this way to build new habitats on their plots of land.⁸² In the context of these considerations, it is important to recall that none of these remedial actions could have been implemented without the consent of the German military administration.

Regardless of the forced migrations mentioned above, there was a need to provide supplies to those people who had remained behind in Polesie. The problem was serious, since despite these migratory movements, in mid-1917 there were still 12,000–13,000 civilians resident at Pińsk itself. To solve this problem, and to free themselves from any obligations at the same time, the military allowed the local Jewish population to cultivate the land abandoned by the peasants. This began as early as September 1915. According to one witness, the Jews in the vicinity of Pruzhany survived the winter of 1915–16 only thanks to the crops which had been left behind by the displaced peasants.⁸³ The Jews used the supplies gathered in farm buildings, and also began collecting crops from fields, gardens and orchards, and catching fish from ponds and lakes.⁸⁴ They grazed cattle and goats on the peasants' lands, thanks to which they were able to enrich their diet. The Jewish population of Bereza Kartuska stripped the peasants' fields and farms of everything that could be eaten. The first winter during the occupation was awaited with anxiety.⁸⁵ Describing the behaviour of the people in Drohiczyn Poleski, a witness pointed

⁷⁸ *Antopol. Sefer-yizkor*, Tel Aviv 1972, pp. 14, 575, 627.

⁷⁹ *Pinkas Byten*, pp. 104, 117; *Gedenk-bukh fun Kamenets-Litovsk*, p. 397.

⁸⁰ *Drohichyn*, p. 70.

⁸¹ *Telekhaner Yizkor-buch*, pp. 17–18.

⁸² This was the case in Drohiczyn Poleski (*Drohichyn*, pp. 68–70).

⁸³ Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, p. 186, 197.

⁸⁴ In Drohiczyn, the Jews not only took what was left in the granaries, but also found the supplies hidden by the peasants in the farmyards or in pits dug in the fields (*Drohichyn*, p. 68).

⁸⁵ *Pinkas fun finf kehilot*, p. 377.

out that the townspeople dug up the peasants' potatoes and vegetables *en masse*, and then moved them to their places of residence. These guaranteed their survival during autumn, winter and spring. As stated in the testimony, even the rabbi dug up potatoes and brought them home with his family. Those who did not join these grassroots activities were the first to starve.⁸⁶ In the context of Janów Poleski, the witness writes that the Germans assigned peasant fields to individual Jewish families and ordered them to be cultivated; they introduced this obligation in September 1915.⁸⁷ At Pińsk, permission for this type of gathering was issued by the town commander.⁸⁸ He was aware that he could not impose order in the face of shortages of supplies for the civilian population. The more resourceful of them even began to exchange the surpluses of the food obtained in this way for other necessary goods.⁸⁹ As a consequence, there were occasional quarrels between civilians over the right to participate in the digging. As we know, the field work was supervised by German soldiers, and the civilian population had to be satisfied with what was left after the Germans received their share. In order to harvest the crops in the following years, it was necessary to obtain a permit from the Germans to carry out field work on land belonging to 'absent natural persons' or which had been owned by the Russian state. The civilians ate practically no meat, and potatoes and other vegetables became the basis of their diet. The lack of grain resulted in a shortage of bread.⁹⁰ It should be emphasised that not all Jews had the opportunity to use the supplies left by the peasants. Single elderly people could not carry much on their backs from the fields and places where food was stored.⁹¹

In spring 1916, the inhabitants of western Polesie, including many Jews, suffered from hunger, both in the small town of Byeń and in the much larger Pińsk.⁹² In the latter, an order was issued in spring 1917 for all available spaces to be put to agricultural and horticultural use. In the following months, the population was busy planting and growing food plants. Significantly, the German authorities did

⁸⁶ *Drohichyn*, p. 69.

⁸⁷ *Yanov al-Yad Pinsk. Sefer zikharon*, Jerusalem 1968, p. 76.

⁸⁸ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 182.

⁸⁹ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 104.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 131.

not allow civilians to harvest the crops freely. The harvest was carried out under the control of the army, which kept some of the products for their own needs. At Pińsk, the occupiers took over the sale of potatoes, in order to prevent speculation. According to the chronicler, the harvest of 1916 was good and the warehouses were full of food, but civilians still went hungry because the Germans took over the distribution of the produce.⁹³ One inhabitant of Byeń remembered that they allowed the locals to collect only the ears that fell to the ground during harvesting. However, most of the food collected was sent to the Reich.⁹⁴ The Austrian army not only allowed civilians to cultivate abandoned fields, but even lent them grain to sow, potatoes to plant and horses to work on the land.⁹⁵ The Germans at Prużany and nearby towns, including Malecz and Szereszów, did not want to bear the burden of supporting the refugees, and so they ordered them to work in the field there; and in places where there were no draft animals, men and women had to act as the labour force, pulling ploughs, harrows and carts.⁹⁶

In spring 1917, the population resumed work in the fields and gardens, but when harvest time came, it turned out that the occupiers had acted even more ruthlessly than a year earlier in seizing all the agricultural products and taking full control over their distribution. This was due to the great food supply problems in the Reich, where food shortages had become the lot of millions of German families, and as a consequence, the cause of the first social unrest, including soldiers' revolts. In a situation where there were insufficient supplies for their compatriots, the Germans had little mercy for the conquered population. But they had to deliver them something. They found a solution in producing food with admixtures of substances that were not normally consumed. They added ground chestnuts, oak and beech acorns, potato peelings, and even sawdust to the flour intended for baking bread.⁹⁷ Once again, displacement was used as a tool to reduce the number of people who needed to be fed.

Members of civic committees selected from among the local population were ordered to assist in achieving the occupiers' goals and needs. In smaller towns,

⁹³ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 188.

⁹⁴ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 90.

⁹⁵ Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, pp. 214–15.

⁹⁶ *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, p. 209.

⁹⁷ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 188.

Jews constituted the majority of their members, including at Pińsk.⁹⁸ In Drohiczyn Poleski, the German commandant appointed a Jewish refugee from Łódź as mayor and another Jew as his deputy. After some time, the population began to demand a change of mayor. Although the commander did not do so, he appointed a City Committee composed of the town's most respected citizens, whose task was to supervise the work of the town's master; this committee also included Jews.⁹⁹ In the memoirs from Byeń there is a report that "Jewish militiamen" were used to gather forced labourers.¹⁰⁰ There were only four of them in Drohiczyn,¹⁰¹ while at Pińsk the Citizens' Committee had a 'town militia,' whose ranks initially numbered as many as 120 people, although the Germans quickly reduced their number to 20. This group's tasks included keeping order among the civilians, supervising the town's sanitary status, maintaining the contingents of forced labourers by the occupiers, and informing the German authorities about any forbidden behaviour, such as hiding food supplies.¹⁰² At Pruzhany, as early as September 1915, the military commander established a Citizens' Committee and a Town Council that was given a twenty-strong auxiliary police unit consisting of local men: seventeen Jews, two Poles and one Ruthenian. All the municipal institutions were managed by Jews under the dictation of successive military commanders of the town. In spring 1916 the civil administration was reconstructed, and a German soldier with the rank of sergeant was appointed mayor. In Bereza Kartuska, the Germans gave the mayoralty to one Berl Rybak, who had held public offices continuously since 1882. Due to his advanced age, he was assigned a deputy in the person of Naftali Lewinson. Also there, the magistrate had an auxiliary militia composed of local people at its disposal.¹⁰³

The example of Pińsk demonstrates the attitude which at least some German commanders held towards the members of these newly established bodies of local administration. After the destruction of Brest, Pińsk was now the largest town in the area in question. Inhabitants of Polish, Jewish and Russian nationalities

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 191–93.

⁹⁹ *Drohichyn*, p. 70.

¹⁰⁰ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 117.

¹⁰¹ *Drohichyn*, p. 69.

¹⁰² *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 184.

¹⁰³ *Pinkas fun finf kehilot*, p. 423.

joined the provisional Citizens' Committee. Initially, it was headed by a Pole, Borysewicz, but later it was led by Jews. No office space was allocated to the Citizens' Committee. Only two people were allowed to enter the building of the German headquarters: the newly appointed mayor, Dr. Aleksander Lurie, and the head of the 'city militia', known only as 'Sz. Wol.' – but only at the request of the Germans. When Lurie left for Vienna, his duties were first taken over by 'Sz. Wol.', and then by Sz[ymon] Lewin. In 1916 the Committee's members protested against various decisions taken by the local occupation authorities, and even resigned in protest, but the commandant completely ignored it. At one point mayor Lewin was arrested and imprisoned in a camp in Germany, but the chronicler did not know the reasons for this act. It is known, however, that another Jew was also appointed Lewin's successor.¹⁰⁴

At Pruzhany, the German commanders behaved differently. One of them did not accept any explanations, and demanded that his orders, such as supplying equipment to the officers' quarters, be followed to the letter; one witness described him as 'a typical German Junker'. Another professional officer who served in the imperial colonial units behaved similarly, while a third commandant, a reservist and an intellectual, was definitely less overbearing.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, the one with the colonial past stayed in the town the longest, and mistreated the members of municipal institutions, insulting them and forcing them to make payments in gold under the threat of sending residents to camps in the Reich. To enforce payment, he kept the members of the Citizens' Committee in custody, and the soldiers carried out his orders very brutally, beating the detainees with rifle butts. The activists and city officials were released only after paying a ransom of 600 roubles in gold.¹⁰⁶

After capturing Pińsk, the German commandant ordered six hostages to be taken from among the respected inhabitants of the city. Among them there were three Jews and three Poles, including Fr. Kazimierz Bukraba.¹⁰⁷ Shortly after the incident, in October, all the men who had been interrogated were summoned

¹⁰⁴ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 193.

¹⁰⁵ *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, pp. 204–05.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 205–06.

¹⁰⁷ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 180.

to the marketplace. It went on all day. Eventually, sixty people were arrested and sent to a camp in the Reich.¹⁰⁸ We do not know what charges were laid against them.

For most Germans, the Orthodox Jews of Polesie (both the Hasidim and the followers of rabbinic Judaism) were an exotic phenomenon. When a wedding took place in Byeń in accordance with the customs of the 'Mosaic religion', the local German commandant treated the ceremony as a very interesting folkloric event, and ordered a photo of the wedding guests to be taken.¹⁰⁹ The witnesses emphasise that the same officer publicly showed respect to the local rabbi, who also had an excellent command of the German language. This rabbi often acted as a spokesman for the Jewish community to the commandant. But this dialogue disappeared when the military wanted to carry out activities in the manner they deemed to be optimal. In such cases, they even allowed the desecration of prayer houses. In 1918, they decided to relocate about 800 Russian prisoners of war to the main synagogue at Pińsk, as it was easier to guard them there. The Jews' requests to at least empty the rooms of liturgical equipment fell on deaf ears. The Russians were locked in the synagogue, leading to its pollution and devastation. At Prużany, houses of prayer were turned into field hospitals for the POWs, and a labour camp was set up in one of the local *beit midrashi*.¹¹⁰

Jakob Mestel performed his duties in the town near Prużany. His superior, whom he calls the poviats commander, was another Imperial-Royal army officer. The local rabbi asked the commander to allow Jews to work on Sundays, not Saturdays, in order to prevent violations of the Sabbath. The soldier unceremoniously kicked the rabbi out of his office.¹¹¹ Moreover, the same officer resented Mestel for treating the local Jews well. The accounts show that he was an anti-Semite, who decided to provoke actions which would distress the Jews. Earlier, for example, he advised a certain peasant woman that she should sell the horses from her property to a Jewish trader before the imperial-royal army seized them. When the deal was completed, the Jew was arrested for hiding horses needed by the occupation forces. It should be emphasised, however, that the way in which the commandant dealt

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 181–82.

¹⁰⁹ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 19.

¹¹⁰ *Pinkas fun der shtot Prużhane*, p. 214.

¹¹¹ Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, p. 226.

with the rabbi led to the high command transferring him to another area. This may suggest that the brutal treatment of a person respected by the local community was considered a mistake, and as an act which ran contrary to the rules of conduct, which were designed to win over the local Jews, and not alienate them.

A curfew was introduced across the entire area. In summer, it was in force at Pińsk from 7.00 p.m. to 5 a.m., but sometimes – as a punishment – the ban on going out to the streets was in force from 6 p.m. Mentions of curfews also come from Kamieniec Litewski, among other places.¹¹² Army and gendarme patrols were constantly circulating in the area. Posts set up on the roads and town outskirts checked whether travellers had passes issued by the army.¹¹³ At Pińsk, the identity documents were all stamped during a signal day. German stamps and descriptions were placed on the photographs that each of the residents was to present in the commandant's office. After this procedure was completed, the military entered all the town's houses during a single night, and registered the men aged 18–45. Sometimes the occupiers even interfered with the towns' names; for example, they renamed the town of Byteń to Klein-Biten so that their compatriots would not confuse it with Beuthen (Bytom) in Silesia.¹¹⁴

One of the factors determining the German decisions was the distance of a given locality from the front line. At Pińsk, the population was ordered to leave the houses located by the Pina River, because the Russians still occupied some areas on the other side. For about two and a half years German soldiers owned these buildings, and civilians were forbidden to approach the streets near the fortification line. The owners re-occupied the ruined houses in the spring of 1918, after the German offensive had pushed the Russian army further east. From then on, only those buildings that served as fortified points of resistance in the event of a Russian counteroffensive remained under military control. Certain elements of the occupation regime were also relaxed, such as the curfew; civilians were now allowed to stay in public places until 9 p.m.

Zones for the local population were designated, and people who entered them without permission were punished. In Drohiczyn Poleski, people who were stopped

¹¹² *Gedenk-bukh fun Kamenets-Litovsk*, p. 448.

¹¹³ *Kobrin Zamlbukh*, pp. 116–17.

¹¹⁴ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 21.

in the forbidden area risk being tied to the bridge barrier and being left there in public view for many hours.¹¹⁵ In the same town, flats could only be illuminated with a single lamp. One day, households were inspected on a Friday evening, and when it was found that Jewish homes were lit with more lights than allowed by the ordinance, it was decided to use intimidation. The Jewish women were ordered to come to the market square the next day, where they were lined up and made to stand there for four hours. Military gendarmes, fully armed, surrounded them.¹¹⁶ Such events explain what one witness meant when he wrote: “As soon as the situation stabilised, the people felt the iron hand of Prussian rule on them”.¹¹⁷ A resident of Drohiczyn Poleski complained about “German iron discipline”; he also used the phrase “the discipline of the German military” [*dyscyplina niemieckiej soldateski*]. He himself felt like a servant, compelled to obey any order without the right of refusal.¹¹⁸ A resident of Byteń stated that the 39 months of German occupation were filled with persecution and humiliation,¹¹⁹ and yet another wrote about “the slave-like German occupation” [*niewolnicza niemiecka okupacja*].¹²⁰

In order to maintain obedience among the population, punishments were imposed in public. Near Prużany, several peasants accused of spying for Russia were shot in this way.¹²¹ The soldiers from the field gendarmerie, who were easy to recognise by their metal, semi-circular breastplates (*Ringkragen*), were remembered the worst by the Jews. They were the ones who carried out searches and confiscations, and often referred to the inhabitants of Jewish nationality arrogantly and brutally, calling them all by the pejorative term *Mosieks* (*Moishlekh*). When performing counterintelligence functions, they used agents chosen from among local civilians of various nationalities.¹²²

An Austrian Jewish officer heard complaints from a local Jew about the difficult financial situation related to the destruction of the area in 1915. In a nearby area controlled by the Germans, the situation was to be better, so the officer advised

¹¹⁵ *Drohichyn*, p. 71.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 181.

¹¹⁸ *Drohichyn*, p. 71.

¹¹⁹ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 109.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹²¹ *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, p. 212.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 213–14.

him to move there. The interlocutor's reaction to this suggestion was very telling, as the old man exclaimed: "God forbid! It's much worse with them. They put you in jail for the smallest thing".¹²³

Moreover, the Germans also behaved unceremoniously towards their allies. For example, they confiscated a transport of eggs for the Austrian officer's kitchen at Prużany, for which they paid 10,000 crowns; and after the Austrians protested, they not only failed to return the goods, but also paid them 'compensation' to the tune of... a mere 600 crowns.¹²⁴ So we may imagine how they reacted to the civilian population's complaints. When Lieutenant Mestel arrived at the railway station in Brest in autumn 1915, he noticed Jewish girls selling various products to passengers. The German conductor advised the Austrian soldiers not to pay them, because they were Jewish, and they would not be able to recover the dues after the train left the station.¹²⁵

As already mentioned, earning money and food became serious problems. The former trade ties had been cut by the front line. Contact with the huge Russian market and the customers in the *Entente* countries disappeared. Many workplaces were closed, which meant that thousands of families lost their livelihoods.¹²⁶ Most of the peasant customers disappeared, hitting the local service market. Polesie had never been self-sufficient in terms of food, so grain used to be brought there from Volhynia and eastern parts of Ukraine.¹²⁷ In addition, the handicraft branch collapsed because the stocks of materials were either stolen or exhausted, and there were no new supplies. In order to transport any goods, one had to have a permit issued by the Germans, and these – as a witness from Byteń recalls – were very rarely granted.¹²⁸

The occupiers introduced restrictions on the functioning of the economy, issuing concessions for the performance of manufacturing, commercial and other services (such as transport). Rationing of the sale of food, and of any materials and raw

¹²³ Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, p. 187.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹²⁶ For example, until August 1915 in Byteń, there was a tannery, a weaving factory, a quilt and duvet factory. These firms ceased to operate at the beginning of the occupation (G. Minkowicz, *Fun Byten biz Yerushalaim*, Havana 1955, pp. 24, 37).

¹²⁷ Niezbrzycki, *Polesie*, p. 313.

¹²⁸ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 107.

materials useful to the Germans, was commonly applied. At Prużany, they seized goods from shops and wholesalers.¹²⁹ At Pińsk, the city commander introduced a ban on trading in food products, and ordered the store-holders to present their inventories to the military authorities. Only a few shops were left at the disposal of the civilians, and long lines began to form in front of them. There were no shops at all in Drohiczyn, and the distribution of food was handled by the municipal citizens' committee appointed by the Germans.¹³⁰ A trade ban was also introduced in Telechany and nearby Motol.¹³¹ A resident of Byeń writes about a total ban on civilian trading in this town, and a radical restriction of the ability to travel. At Pińsk, the occupiers distributed 10 kg of flour per family, but it turned out that this generosity was due to the fact that the flour was spoiled and could not be used to make food. The Germans also seized kerosene supplies in the town, which plunged it into complete darkness after nightfall. The winter of 1916–17 was even more difficult here than the previous one. Hungry people besieged bakeries for days waiting for the delivery of bread. Those who ran out of money and goods for exchange resorted to begging *en masse*. Hundreds of people were reduced to lying in their houses, swollen with hunger and unable to walk.

Sometimes Germans and Austrians 'paid' for the seized goods and materials, not with money, but with a kind of voucher, which the witnesses described as worthless.¹³² There was no uniformity in this respect: roubles and German marks were still used in trade, and sometimes also Austrian crowns. As Germany withdrew roubles from circulation over time, many people who held savings in this currency suffered losses. Moreover, the population's financial resources were drained in a variety of ways. In the vicinity of Prużany, the local commander introduced a 'deposit' of 10 gold roubles for Jews leaving the area; but when the Jews returned from their journeys, the commander did not repay them in coin, but paid its equivalent in Austrian paper crowns, which the local peasants would not accept.¹³³ Such dishonest actions did not only affect the Jews. The farmers complained to an Austrian officer whom they trusted that they had performed

¹²⁹ *Pinkas fun der shtot Prużhane*, p. 204.

¹³⁰ *Drohichyn*, p. 71.

¹³¹ *Telekhaner Yizkor-buch*, p. 18.

¹³² *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 190.

¹³³ Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, p. 222.

210 hours of work in the fields administered by the Austrian-Hungarian army, but only 150 hours had been entered in the *corvée* list.

In February 1916, the occupiers issued an order to requisition items made of copper, brass and nickel. They confiscated metal lamps, candlesticks, door handles and more from the houses of prayer. After a few months, they had confiscated all the metal tools from the craftsmen, which was tantamount to depriving them of the possibility of earning any money. As soon as the transmission belts made of leather had been commandeered, the machines that were rendered nonfunctional were sent to the front. In October 1917, supplies of paper, feather and linen were commandeered and later sent to the Reich. In 1918, the Germans carried out further searches of houses, taking the last metal objects for the needs of the arms industry. As a chronicler-witness wrote: “They were robbed systematically and thoroughly – as only the Germans can”.¹³⁴

After some time at Prużany, the German occupiers issued coupons for bread, with the daily allowance being only 100 grams per person; later this was raised to 180–200 grams.¹³⁵ An inhabitant of Kamieniec Litewski writes that the German authorities introduced strict regulations, and life became extremely difficult. Some of the population even fell into starvation.¹³⁶ At the beginning of 1916, the daily food allowance at Pińsk was about 120 g of bread and 500 g of potatoes per person. Then as of mid-February that year, the allocation of potatoes was reduced to 250 g. The monthly allocation of meat per family was 0.5–1 kg. These small allowances led to the development of a black market and a steady rise in prices.¹³⁷ In Drohiczyn Poleski, as a witness noted, there were no external supplies of food, and only those who were able to get it from other sources survived.¹³⁸ However, when the Germans caught someone trafficking illegally, they charged him with speculation and imposed a fine on him.¹³⁹ In the context of Byeń, mention is made of the exceptional zeal of German gendarmes in enforcing the regulations. This account is important because the witness also mentions the nearby town of Kosów

¹³⁴ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 194.

¹³⁵ *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, p. 204.

¹³⁶ *Gedenk-bukh fun Kamenets-Litovsk*, p. 435.

¹³⁷ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 187.

¹³⁸ *Drohichyn*, p. 69.

¹³⁹ *Gedenk-bukh fun Kamenets-Litovsk*, p. 448.

Poleski as a place where life was easier, there was more freedom to travel, and the Germans permitted the legal operation of several shops.¹⁴⁰ This suggests that the occupation regime depended in part on the individual approach of the local commandant and his subordinates.

At Pińsk, the Germans' desire to keep control over local trade continued until 1918. Jews were still forbidden to trade door-to-door in rural areas. When in spring, railroad communication with areas previously occupied by Russians was relaunched, the local merchants made attempts to rebuild their former trade contacts there, but the Germans did not allow it. On 21 June 1918, a ban on individual exports and imports of goods was introduced at Pińsk. The hungry fled the city and headed east. They were punished for this, but they still took the risk of crossing the new line separating the territories controlled by the Central Powers and the Russians to find themselves in the areas managed by the Russian Provisional Government.¹⁴¹ When the Germans found out that they had left the city, they imposed penalties on the refugee's family, one of which, for example, involved confiscating their bread coupons. Jakob Mestel writes that he encountered a situation in which a civilian was punished with eight days of imprisonment and a fine of 100 crowns for arriving half an hour late to work.¹⁴²

Referring to the award of a large part of Polesie to the Ukrainian state under the peace concluded in Brest on 9 February 1918, the Germans announced that from 1 August 1918 they would no longer provide food to civilians, and that the obligation to do so now rested with the government of the Ukrainian People's Republic,¹⁴³ although they themselves continued the practice of food confiscation in this area.¹⁴⁴ Requests for help in feeding the civilians of Pińsk which the Citizens' Committee made in August to the URL authorities in Kiev were dismissed there; they responded that Germany still exercised actual control over Pińsk, and moreover, the Ukrainian side was unable to provide food or other goods.

¹⁴⁰ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 133.

¹⁴¹ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 196.

¹⁴² Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, p. 215.

¹⁴³ The Brest peace treaty of 9 February 1918 defined the northern border of the Ukrainian People's Republic in the area in question as a line running between the villages of Wysokie Litewskie, Kamieniec Litewski, Pruzana, and Lake Wygonowskie (*Monitor Polski*, 5 March 1918, no. 15; 18 March 1918, no. 26).

¹⁴⁴ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 197.

The army demanded that the local workforce be used in cleaning, construction, renovation, agricultural and reloading work. This was the case in the vicinity of Prużany and in Janów Poleski.¹⁴⁵ In the latter, Jews worked in the construction of a sawmill, in a fruit drying room and in warehouses. Forced labour was performed either overnight in private homes or away from places of residence. In Byeń, even ten-year-old children were forced to work for the Germans.¹⁴⁶ This was the experience of 11-year-old Dawid German and his peers from Bereza Kartuska, who were used to demolish the church and clean the bricks obtained at the same time.¹⁴⁷ Twelve and thirteen-year-old children were also sent to work at Pińsk.

Women were employed in cleaning work as assistants to cooks, as seamstresses and laundresses. More girls from Byeń were forced to work in a factory making marmalade from beetroot and swede.¹⁴⁸ Thousands of Jewish girls and women had to work in harvesting and hay-mowing, from where the harvest, after being dried, was immediately sent to German warehouses. Severe penalties were imposed for being one minute late to work. Among other things, miscreants were tied to a post by the commandant's office or to the telegraph poles located opposite the commandant's office. The people punished in this way had cold water poured over them by soldiers. The head of the German police, named Boderski or Boberski, was remembered as the worst of the oppressors in Byeń. He quickly identified the Jewish community and harassed its representatives, walking around the town with a steel baton.¹⁴⁹ He learned Yiddish; 'Jewish militiamen' were placed under his command, and he was responsible for pressing the civilian workers into forced labour.¹⁵⁰

Severe penalties for not showing up for work were also applied at Pińsk, among other places. Violators were ordered to pay heavy fines or imprisoned. The principle of collective responsibility for acts committed by individuals was introduced. If the designated contingent of forced labourers was not filled, street round-ups were

¹⁴⁵ Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, p. 197; *Yanov al-Yad Pinsk*, pp. 75–76.

¹⁴⁶ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 109.

¹⁴⁷ *Pinkas fun fnf kehilot*, p. 379.

¹⁴⁸ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 106.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

carried out on an *ad hoc* basis, and men were also taken out of synagogues, churches and orthodox churches. Several hundred inhabitants of Pińsk were sent to forced labour every day. In December 1916, all men aged 21–45 were summoned to appear, and after a few weeks the same summons were made to girls and childless women aged 16–25. When in February 1917 the temperature sunk to minus 30°C, the civilians refused to work. This resistance was broken by putting eighty men in prison cells in which the temperature was minus 7°C; they were given nothing to eat for the first six days. This group started to work again, but continued to be held in prison overnight.¹⁵¹

On the eve of Passover 1917, the Pińsk commandant's office announced that 460 girls and women would be sent to forced labour in the vicinity of Baranowicze. When the designated persons assembled on 30 March, they were disinfected, locked in a Jewish prayer house, and then escorted under guard to the train station. The streets along which the column travelled were closed to outsiders. In order to prevent escapes, members of the families of the deported women were held hostage in the basement of the commandant's office. On 10 April, calls for work were handed out to another 350 girls, but on the day indicated, only about fifty appeared at the assembly point. The outraged Germans organised a raid in the city and even arrested random young women who were not on the list, as the quota had to be filled. Additionally, the city commander ordered the chairman of the Citizens' Committee to do the same. As a form of repression, the curfew was extended (to start at 6 p.m.), and an order to close all bars and restaurants was issued. Despite all these measures, only 150 girls were sent out to join the work party on 21 April.¹⁵² The next group, this time of sixty young women, was dispatched on 10 July. The women were paid only 25 kopecks per working day. In May and June, contingents of 260–500 men were directed to field work, receiving slightly higher pay than the women. An inhabitant of Kamień Koszyrski recalls that the Germans sent many people from her town 'to Poland' (that is the Kingdom of Poland). They left her father and brother, as they were doing various jobs for them on the spot.¹⁵³ A resident of Antopol also mentions that young people were sent to labour camps.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 189.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁵³ *Yizkor-buch fun der yidisher kehila in Kamin-Koshirski*, p. 638.

¹⁵⁴ *Antopol*, p. 14.

The occupiers established a number of forced labour camps. These operated under very difficult conditions. If the work was carried out far from villages and towns, the workers were quartered in tents or carelessly built barracks. There was no question of an adequate supply of food or work clothes, nor of good hygienic conditions and proper medical care. As a result, after several months of hard physical work of 10–12 hours a day and without the possibility of regenerating their strength, the men and women returned home in a state of extreme physical and mental exhaustion.¹⁵⁵ A resident of Byteń lists three camps for men and one for women, in which his fellow Jews worked under duress, and states that with the help of Jewish workers, the Germans built a system of fortifications on the Shchara River which separated them from the Russian army.¹⁵⁶ The Jews worked together with Russian prisoners of war in at least several places. For example, the POWs mowed meadows from which fodder for horses and cows used by the German army was obtained, but the forcibly employed Jewish girls did the picking and harvesting.¹⁵⁷ Writing about the regime prevailing in forced labour camps, the witness indicates that if anyone came to work five minutes late, they were punished by being tied to the spokes of cartwheels and held in this way for hours.¹⁵⁸

We have the testimony of one I.L. Abramowicz, who in the winter of 1916 was sent to work in a camp located near the town of Iwacewicze in northern Polesie. He was in a group of fifty Jewish men and women, most of them under 20, who were told that they would work in a marmalade factory for several weeks. The Germans promised to provide good accommodation and food. The Jews did not believe them then, because after several months of the occupation, they knew how civilian workers were treated, being spared no humiliation, beatings or severe punishments, even for minor faults, and sometimes for nothing. As there were rumours of deportation to labour in the Reich, the young labourers feared that they would be taken there too. They were particularly frightened by the stories of how their fellows had been subjected to back-breaking work and appalling treatment

¹⁵⁵ *Drohichyn*, p. 71.

¹⁵⁶ *Pinkas Byten*, p. 110.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

in a camp in East Prussia, where (as people in the district had said) many Jews had died of exhaustion and disease.¹⁵⁹

However, Abramovich and the remaining 49 young people were brought by convoy to a military base near Iwacewicze, next to the Brest-Moscow railway line, where large supplies of food, ammunition, crude oil, coal and steel were stored. In addition, the Germans established a canned vegetable and fruit factory there, which used local products. Upon arrival, the women were separated from the men; before that, the whole group had been kept under guard in the cold. The men were then taken to a barrack made of long logs, with small openings carved with axes to serve as windows. There was a small stove and a lamp in the centre of the room. The steel chimney leaked smoke and soot. Despite this, people flocked to the stove, trying to keep warm and dry their clothes and shoes. The sleeping places were two-level bunks made of bare boards arranged along the walls. There was no wooden, stone, or brick floor, just trampled earth: it completely melted at the entrance, due to the snow and water carried by the prisoners on their shoes and clothes.

Abramowicz and the remaining Jews were placed in a barrack already occupied by a group of Russian prisoners of war who were also being exploited for forced labour.¹⁶⁰ The area was very crowded. Due to the lack of sanitary facilities, everyone was bothered by lice and cockroaches. It was forbidden to leave the room at night; bodily needs had to be dealt with in barrels placed in the middle of the room. People woke up to work at 5 a.m. The German NCO on duty hit latecomers with a stick. For morning ablutions, wiping the face with snow had to suffice. A piece of bread and a cup of chicory coffee were served for breakfast. The fact that Abramovich and another worker were ordered to unload a coal wagon in two hours says much about the working conditions. Sometimes the workers worked until two in the morning, and as early as 5 a.m. they were woken again for their next tasks.¹⁶¹ The German soldiers guarding the workers abused them.¹⁶² Military paramedics even sent sick people with fevers of 40 degrees to work. Only those who lost consciousness at the workplace was placed in the infirmary. The Germans treated the Russian

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 121–22.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 124.

prisoners a little better; they identified with their situation in a way, since they could easily find themselves in a similar one. The Jewish women in the camp had better conditions than men; they lived in a well-heated peasant hut and worked in a marmalade factory.¹⁶³

Girls from Byeń were released home from the camp for Passover 1916. Their male colleagues were not sent back with them, but their accommodation conditions improved because they were placed in empty peasants' huts, from where they went to work clearing forests. Abramowicz's father bought him out of the camp; for an amount of several hundred roubles, he was converted into a 'Christian worker'. It can be assumed that the 'convert' received appropriate compensation, and that an appropriate amount also went into the pocket of the German decision-maker.¹⁶⁴ The remaining Jewish boys were only sent home in the late summer of 1916, which means that they had spent over half a year in forced labour. Two eighteen-year-olds died of exhaustion from working in the described conditions; one of the girls developed tuberculosis, and one twenty-year-old committed suicide when he received another summons to appear for forced labour in the autumn of the same year.¹⁶⁵

It is worth noting that the famine in the towns of Polesie in spring 1916 was the reason why many people applied to work for the Germans, hoping to receive sufficient food in return. This is what five hundred girls from Pińsk did, from where they were transported to a canning factory near Iwacewicze.¹⁶⁶ The families opposed being split up, but the hunger broke their resistance. Some girls were assigned to do housework in the quarters of German officers. The Germans took advantage of this situation, which sometimes resulted in 'intimate relationships'. For the parents, these relationships were a misfortune. Romances with German and Austrian soldiers were so common that chroniclers did not find it necessary to note them down.¹⁶⁷ Due to hunger, refugees camped at Pruzhany also volunteered for work.¹⁶⁸ They worked in very poor conditions outside the city, fed and paid poorly,

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 127–29.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 138.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 131–32.

¹⁶⁷ *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, p. 210; Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, pp. 195, 213, 219.

¹⁶⁸ *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, p. 208. It has not been established whether only Jewish people applied for the work.

but for most of them there was no other way to get food. For the same reason, Jews were employed *en masse* by the Germans, in the vicinity of Bereza Kartuska and other places, felling forests on a large scale and in a predatory manner. They also worked there as lumberjacks, carters and porters.¹⁶⁹

Forced labour was continued until the end of the German occupation. Young Jews were used in the transshipment of goods obtained on the Ukrainian territory which Central Powers troops took after 18 February 1918. They were still punished if they did not show up for work. At Pińsk, the punishment was a ten-day detention in the basement of the commandant's office. In the same year, the case of several hundred girls who had previously been sent to work outside the city and were to return home afterwards became notorious. The commander did not want to allow them to return, justifying his refusal by saying there was not enough food.¹⁷⁰

In this text, many painful elements of German-Jewish coexistence under the conditions of occupation have been presented. However, at that time some changes that were viewed positively by at least some Jews also took place. This is how they were perceived by those who were in favour of raising the civilian population's status in the public space. As mentioned above, the Germans made it possible for the locals to create representative institutions, which were established to organise social assistance and appoint intermediaries between the occupiers and the general population.¹⁷¹ By adopting the principle of equal treatment of civilians, the German occupiers created an unprecedented situation in localities dominated by non-agricultural populations. As the majority of these people were Jews, they predominated in the new representative bodies, a change which the general Jewish population welcomed.

Although there were complaints about the harshness of the German administration, the new government was perceived as aiding in the protection of public order. In autumn 1915, for example, the vicinity of Kamieniec Litewski was plagued by groups of demoralised Russian soldiers who had not managed

¹⁶⁹ *Pinkas fun finf kehilot*, pp. 379–80.

¹⁷⁰ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 195.

¹⁷¹ In Byteń, the local rabbi often pleaded with the commandant to obtain food for poor children (*Pinkas Byten*, pp. 45–46).

to withdraw and remained behind. They obtained food by robbing the local people. The only forces capable of resisting them and breaking them up were the Germans and the soldiers of the Austrian-Hungarian army. Jakob Mestel writes about a similar situation in the context of events near Pruzany in the winter of 1915–16. The Russian soldiers' banditry was also ended thanks to a joint pacification action by German and Austro-Hungarian troops.¹⁷² As a consequence, the Jews treated the occupiers as defenders against common bandits, and so they sometimes left their rural farmyards, gathering together for protection in areas where the occupation garrisons were stationed.¹⁷³

An element of the German 'divide and rule' policy in the East was the consent to the development of cultural and educational institutions for the local nationalities, in order to de-Russify them. A resident of Kobryn writes about a great social revival, even of feverish activity by the local Jews under the conditions that the Germans permitted.¹⁷⁴ They agreed to the resumption of the publishing of the Jewish press, the printing of books and the performance of plays in Yiddish. This principle also included the creation of national public schools, and gave rise to the emergence of secular schools with Yiddish and modern Hebrew as languages of instruction. These institutions were financed from the budgets of municipal units where, as far as we know, Jews had a strong representation in the areas in question.¹⁷⁵ One resident of Kamieniec Litewski was pleased to describe how soon after the Germans entered the town, a school was opened in the former post office building where both German and Hebrew were taught. There were lessons in the 'Mosaic religion'; these were traditionally conducted by male teachers (*melameds*), but women were also employed there as teachers, a complete novelty. This facility functioned until the end of the German occupation. The witness called it a German school, but added that after the departure of the Germans, a secular Jewish school which used its furnishings and supplies was established.¹⁷⁶ We should mention that until August 1915, the Jewish children in this town had not attended the Russian state

¹⁷² Mestel, *Milkhome-notitzn*, pp. 188–89, 211–13.

¹⁷³ *Gedenk-bukh fun Kamenets-Litovsk*, pp. 398, 435.

¹⁷⁴ *Kobrin Zamlbukh*, pp. 37, 103, 109.

¹⁷⁵ Kasmach, 'Forgotten occupation', pp. 329–30.

¹⁷⁶ *Gedenk-bukh fun Kamenets-Litovsk*, p. 439.

primary school, and were only educated by private Jewish teachers, and generally only in the field of religion.¹⁷⁷ A Jewish school was opened at Prużany at the end of 1915,¹⁷⁸ where Jewish intellectuals taught.¹⁷⁹ Later, a kindergarten for over one hundred Jewish children aged 4–8 was established. The municipal library was allowed to function, and literary evenings and amateur theatre performances were organised.¹⁸⁰

The Germans were prompted to consent to the opening of these institutions by a desire to control the children who had previously wandered the streets and the area at large without proper care. That is why they agreed to the Jewish communities' suggestions that Jewish people's schools [*szkoly ludowe*] should be opened.¹⁸¹ Individual officers of the occupation forces fell in with this general tendency; Lieutenant Jakob Mestel allowed the religious education of Jewish children in his area. He favoured certain cultural initiatives, for example literary evenings with the participation of young people and adults.¹⁸²

The chronicler of the Jewish community in Kobryn points out that the Germans introduced compulsory schooling for all children and, as a consequence, the Jewish young were also sent to public schools.¹⁸³ Previously, only wealthy parents could afford to have secular subjects taught to their children. One can imagine the joy with which parents from poorer families accepted the possibility of free education for their children in a public school – something unprecedented before the German occupation.

The occupiers created a new communication infrastructure, expanding the network of narrow-gauge railways and roads. They organised new plants for processing the raw materials obtained locally from forests and agriculture.¹⁸⁴ In some towns, they constructed power plants as well as cinemas.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 444.

¹⁷⁸ However, the Jewish 'people's' [*ludowa*] school only operated for two months, because later it had to be used as a night shelter for people who had been displaced by the Germans from their homes, as no alternative accommodation was provided for them.

¹⁷⁹ *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, pp. 206–07.

¹⁸⁰ *Rozhina. A yizkor bukh*, p. 204.

¹⁸¹ *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, p. 215.

¹⁸² Mestel, *Milkhme-notitzn*, p. 223.

¹⁸³ *Kobrin Zamlbukh*, pp. 19, 117.

¹⁸⁴ *Pinkas fun finf kehilot*, p. 380; *Telekhaner Yizkor-buch*, p. 20.

The Germans also agreed to the distribution of funds and in-kind donations provided by the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee charity. This was only possible until April 1917, however, because at that point the United States joined the *Entente* and was at war with Germany, among others. Money was also flowing in from neutral Sweden, from the Zionist committee in Stockholm, although the Germans confiscated a significant part of the remittances for themselves, including those earmarked for the inhabitants of Prużany.¹⁸⁵ The occupiers allowed German-Jewish social organisations to carry out charity activities in Polesie. Whenever possible, they gave financial support to the Civic Committee at Pińsk, among others. In the first few years, the Germans did not oppose Zionist activity. They allowed the publishing of the Jewish press (the *Pinsker Tsaitung*) or its import from Warsaw (*Haynt, Yidish Vort, Moment* et al.).

Some changes came after the German offensive of February and March 1918. As the front moved further east and peace treaties were signed with the Ukrainians and the Bolsheviks, personal movement and regional trade intensified, which was boosted by supplies being delivered and people migrating. This was also noted in Janów Poleski and Prużany, which were located further north.¹⁸⁶

On 9 October 1918, the inhabitants of Pińsk noticed the first signs of a crisis engulfing the German army on the eastern front. On that day, there was a revolt by the crew of an armoured train which had been ordered to move to the western front. Its members did not want to fight anymore. On 20 October, German soldiers demonstrated in the streets of the city. They demanded that the high command start peace talks and bring a quick end to the war. The general staff reacted to these events by strengthening the activities of the counterintelligence services that were seeking the revolts' ringleaders. The German police and counterintelligence were not only checking German soldiers; the local civilians were also subject to increased scrutiny. The freedom to travel and provide information was restricted. In November, information about the revolution in Germany reached Polesie. Under the impression that the Germans would no longer enforce their orders, many Jewish workers did not go to work on the Sabbath. But they had miscalculated, because in response the local commandant directed reinforced

¹⁸⁵ *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, p. 213; *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 193.

¹⁸⁶ *Yanov al-Yad Pinsk*, p. 76; *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, p. 216.

military and police patrols onto the streets, which brought the workers to their workplaces by force. The soldiers only wanted one thing – to get home as soon as possible. From the civilians' point of view, the most important thing was that the change of the system of power should not be accompanied by chaos and violence. Wherever possible, efforts were made to create organisations capable of protecting order and security. The Jews predominated at Prużany, but Poles and Belarusians were also included.¹⁸⁷ The Germans did not interfere with this process. They left the city in December, only keeping control of the nearby railway station (Linowo). While they were leaving, they sold the Temporary City Committee the weapons which the temporary security guards had used. More broadly, in the face of attacks on Jews who lived scattered in the countryside, self-defence groups whose task was to combat banditry were established, mostly made up of former Russian army soldiers. This was the case, for example, at Pińsk and Kamień Koszyrski.¹⁸⁸ The Prużany unit included a group of ten cavalrymen dedicated to quick interventions. The Germans made no attempts to disarm or neutralise them.

On the day when the abdication of Emperor Wilhelm II was announced at Pińsk, the establishment of the Soldiers' Council was proclaimed. Continuous rallies were held by both military and civilians. The scared city commander issued an appeal to the population, urging them to remain calm.¹⁸⁹ The Council of Soldiers' Delegates upheld the rules of the occupation regime, except for a ban on traveling deep into Russia. One of the last gestures of German power was the call by the commandant's office on 24 November to appear for forced labour in the Wołodkowicze forest. They promised a very decent wage, but no one showed up anyway. In December, agreements were concluded to transfer civil authority under the local civic committees to representatives of the Ukrainian People's Republic. The German military guaranteed its autonomy and the right to punish those who opposed it. In January 1919, clashes between the Ukrainian national units and the Bolsheviks took place in Polesie. The first Polish troops appeared on the border between Polesie

¹⁸⁷ *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, pp. 217–22.

¹⁸⁸ *Yizkor-buch fun der yidisher kehila in Kamin-Koshirski*, pp. 428–29.

¹⁸⁹ *Toizn yor Pinsk*, p. 198.

and the Nowogródek region.¹⁹⁰ The Germans adopted the attitude of observers. On 22 January, they forced the parties to sign a ceasefire at Pińsk because the fighting threatened the safety of German soldiers.

There was no single date for the withdrawal of German troops from Polesie. They disappeared from Drohiczyn Poleski in November 1918, but only left Pińsk at the turn of February 1919. Their places were taken by Ukrainian, Bolshevik or Polish troops. The Germans themselves withdrew towards East Prussia. The evacuation of the occupation forces from the area in question was orderly. The Germans controlled the communication routes to the end so their soldiers could leave.¹⁹¹ The last German armoured train left Brest on 9 February 1919.¹⁹² There was not a single report of the departing Central Powers soldiers committing acts of violence against civilians, including Jews.

Reading the memoirs of Polesie Jews leads us to the conclusion that the Germans of the First World War were firm, strict and effective occupiers, under whose rule it was nevertheless still possible to survive. Compared to reports about the other armed formations, the Kaiser's army was described in relatively positive terms. Although it used forced labour, imposed contributions, and regulated economic activity and personal freedoms, it was not recognised as a discriminatory force treating the Jews worse than civilians of other nationalities. This was the personal experience of the first German-Jewish coexistence in the twentieth century, with which the inhabitants of Polesie entered the next German occupation less than a quarter of a century later. In 1941, some of the new regime's elements were familiar, which probably affected how the locals carried out the new German occupiers' orders and their deliberations on the possibility of survival. However, it soon turned out that the attitude of the leaders of the Third Reich towards Jews was very different from that of the representatives of imperial Germany.

¹⁹⁰ *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, p. 232.

¹⁹¹ This was the case, for example, with the Linowo railway station near Pruzhany; see *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhane*, p. 216.

¹⁹² Molandowski, *Brześć Podlaski*, p. 94.

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SUMMARY

The article concerns the experiences of the Jewish population under the occupying forces of the Central Powers in western Polesie in the period from August 1915 to the beginning of 1919. It is based on reports published both before 1939 and after 1945. According to the analysis of the source material, Jewish memories of their first contact with the German occupation forces in the twentieth century were ambiguous. Apart from the hardships, changes that were perceived as positive were also remembered.

KEYWORDS

Jews • Polesie • World War I

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JEWIS IN THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT
IN THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC 1918–38:
AN OUTLINE OF THE ISSUE

Due to the persistence of the stereotype of *Żydokomuna* (Judaeo-Communism), the problem of the Jewish participation in the Communist movement in interwar Poland still evokes a great deal of emotion. Although this topic has been discussed many times in the historical literature, no comprehensive and objective study has yet appeared on the presence of activists of Jewish nationality in the ranks of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP) and the organisations associated with it.¹

The purpose of this text is to summarise the current state of knowledge about Jewish Communists in Poland. It is based mainly on the literature on the subject, in particular the publications of Henryk Cimek, concerning the number of Jews in the Polish Communist movement,² and the pioneering work of the sociologist Jaff Schatz, who analysed the issue of these individuals' motivations and national

¹ The sociologist Paweł Śpiewak made the first attempt at a holistic view in his popular science work *Żydokomuna. Interpretacje historyczne*, Warszawa 2012; however, his book was critically assessed by reviewers as containing methodological errors and many simplifications.

² H. Cimek, *Mniejszości narodowe w ruchu rewolucyjnym w II Rzeczypospolitej*, Rzeszów 2011; id., 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym w Polsce w latach 1918–1937', *Polityka i Społeczeństwo* 2012, no. 9.

identity.³ The literature is supplemented by the results of my own research into the community of 46 Jews and people of Jewish origin who belonged to the elite of the Communist party in Poland.

This article discusses the participation of Jews in the revolutionary movement in Russia (especially in Poland) before the First World War; the social structure of the Jewish population in Poland; the path of the splinter groups who departed from the Jewish left-wing parties and moved to the Communist Workers' Party of Poland; the attitude of Jewish radicals towards the Bolshevik aggression against Poland in 1920; and the number of Jews in the Polish Communist movement, their identities, and their motives for joining the movement.

Genesis: Jews in the revolutionary movement in Russia

Jews were active in the Polish and Russian revolutionary movements from the beginning of its existence. Back when the first socialist groups and organisations started their operations within the Russian partition (the Kingdom of Poland and the so-called Taken Territories), many Poles of Jewish origin participated. This was the case with the Social and Revolutionary Union of Poles (1878–79), the so-called Great Proletariat (the 'Proletariat' International Social Revolutionary Party, 1882–85), the Second Proletariat (the 'Proletariat' Polish Social and Revolutionary Party, 1887–92) and the Union of Polish Workers (1889–92). Most of them came from Polonised middle-class and intellectual families.⁴

In 1892, as a result of the merger of several smaller socialist organisations, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) was established; it combined Marxist slogans (overthrowing the capitalist system) with the pursuit of Polish independence in its manifesto. Its founders included activists of Jewish origin, Stanisław Mendelson and Feliks Perl. A year later, the PPS Jewish Organisation was established, bringing together Jewish-speaking workers and craftsmen.⁵ In 1906, Jews constituted 25 per cent of the total number of PPS members living in the city of Warsaw, and

³ J. Schatz, *The Generation. The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Communists of Poland*, Berkeley 1991.

⁴ H. Piasecki, *Żydowska Organizacja PPS 1893–1907*, Wrocław 1978, pp. 13–14.

⁵ Ibid.; T. Weeks, *From Assimilation to Antisemitism. The 'Jewish Question' in Poland 1850–1914*, DeKalb 2006, pp. 116–19.

from 25 to 33 per cent in several other cities of the Kingdom of Poland: Pabianice, Siedlce, Płock, Kalisz, Częstochowa and Kielce.⁶

In November 1906, there was a split in the ranks of the Polish Socialist Party. Some activists rejected the plans for an anti-Russian national uprising presented by Józef Piłsudski and his companions (the so-called PPS-Revolutionary Faction), and formed the PPS-Left. This grouping was primarily focused on the victory of the revolution in Russia, ignoring the postulate of Polish independence in its programme. The PPS-Left included most of the members of the PPS Jewish Organisation,⁷ and many Jews were part of its leadership, including Feliks Kon, Feliks Sachs, Bernard Szapiro and Maksymilian Horwitz-Walecki.

In 1893, some former activists of the Union of Polish Workers and the Second Proletariat, who did not support the national demands contained in the PPS's manifesto, established the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland (known from 1900 as the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, SDKPiL). This party was hostile to aspirations to Polish independence, and tried to bring about an outbreak of an internationalist workers revolution and the introduction of proletarian rule. It favoured the formation of a Polish autonomous republic within a socialist Russian federation.⁸ It is not known how many Jews were in the SDKPiL's ranks. Jaff Schatz lists the names of ten of the group's top leaders who played a significant role in the history of Poland, the Soviet Union and the international labour movement.⁹ Among them were six Jewish intellectuals: Jakub Firstenberg (Hanecki), Leon Jogiches (Tyszka), Róża Luxemburg, Karol Sobelson (Radek), Józef Unszlicht and Adolf Warszawski (Warski).¹⁰ From 1906, the SDKPiL was an autonomous part of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Russia (RSDLP), founded in 1898; the leadership

⁶ A. Żarnowska, *Geneza rozłamu w Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej 1904–1906*, Warszawa 1965, pp. 41–42, 456, 460, 464, 509–12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁸ P. Wróbel, 'Failed Integration. Jews and the Beginning of the Communist Movement in Poland', *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 2011, no. 24, p. 195.

⁹ Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 76.

¹⁰ Schatz states there were seven Jewish intellectuals in the SDKPiL's leadership group, probably because he mistakenly included Julian Leszczyński-Leński in this group.

of the latter also included Jews. Four out of nine delegates at the First Congress of the RSDLP were Jews.¹¹

In 1897, the first revolutionary Jewish party in the Russian Empire was established: the Universal Jewish Workers' Union (*Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter Bund in Litah, Poyln un Rusland*). The Bund fought for national and cultural autonomy for Jews in a future democratic Russia. During the period of its greatest expansion, during the revolution of 1905, it had 33,000 members throughout the Russian Empire, including 16,000 on the territory of the Kingdom of Poland, the Lithuanian and Belarusian lands.¹² At the same time, the RSDLP had only 8500 members. From 1906, the Bund acted as an autonomous division.¹³

At the Bund congress in Zurich at the end of 1905, a resolution that opposed the demand for Polish independence was adopted, as it was deemed to distract workers from the primary goal of overthrowing tsarism, freeing the working class, and obtaining cultural autonomy for Jews. The idea of establishing a separate parliament for the Kingdom of Poland within Russia was also opposed.¹⁴

In 1905, the Zionist-Socialist Workers Party (*Siyonistish-Sotsialistishe Arbeter-Partai*) was established in Russia, and later the Jewish Social Democratic Workers' Union *Poalei Siyon* – the Workers of Zion (*Yidische Sotsialdemokratishe Arbeter-Partai 'Poalei Siyon'*). These parties combined Zionist slogans with a Marxist revolutionary programme. Also in 1906, the Jewish Socialist Workers' Party (the so-called *Seymists*) began its activity. Its manifesto was a synthesis of Jewish national and socialist ideas; it was not a Marxist grouping. In June 1917, the Jewish Socialist Workers' Party United (*Fareynikte Yidische Sotsialistishe Arbeter-Partai*) was formed from a merger of the Zionist-socialists and the Seymists.¹⁵

The Jewish members were very active and visible in the all-Russian and international revolutionary movement. At the 5th Congress of the RSDLP in 1907, according to the personal surveys, the 336 delegates included 119 Russians,

¹¹ A. Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews: The Red Book; The Tragedy of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the Soviet Jews*, Enigma Books 2003 (transl. into Polish by E. Kaźmierczak, W. Leder, Warszawa 2004, p. 36).

¹² Piasecki, *Żydowska Organizacja PPS*, pp. 229–30.

¹³ Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, pp. 34, 39.

¹⁴ J. Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews and the Politics of Nationality. The Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia 1892–1914*, Wisconsin 2004, p. 208.

¹⁵ Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, pp. 43–45.

98 Jews (including Bund members), 38 Poles, 31 Georgians and 30 Latvians.¹⁶ In fact, there were more activists of Jewish origin, as not all of them admitted their roots in the surveys. They were also visible in the leadership of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party (SR). According to Gerald Sorin, in 1903 half of all revolutionaries in Russia were Jews.¹⁷ Most of them had a deep sense of Jewish identity, and did not see a conflict between Judaism and radicalism.¹⁸

In the first period after the 1917 revolution, Jews played a disproportionate role in the Bolshevik party and in the Soviet government apparatus in relation to the number of Jewish citizens in Russia. There were also a disproportionate number of them among the Hungarian, German and Austrian Communists during the revolutionary upheavals of 1918–23, and in the apparatus of the Communist International.¹⁹ It is noteworthy that Yakov Sverdlov was the chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, and Lev Trotsky was the organiser of the Red Army.²⁰ In 1918, as part of the RCP(b),²¹ the so-called *Yevseksia* (Jewish section) was created, whose task was to ignite the flame of revolution in the Jewish masses.²² Most active Bund members also sympathised with the Bolsheviks. In April 1920, a split occurred at the conference in Gomel. The radical majority formed the Communist Bund (*Kombund*), which was dissolved in 1921. The former Bund activists then formed cadres of the *Yevseksia*.²³ The left wing of the *Poalei Siyon* party also actively supported the Bolsheviks. In August 1919, this party split, and as a result the Jewish Communist Party *Poalei Siyon* (the so-called *yevkapisti*) was established;²⁴ it was incorporated into the RCP(b) in 1922.

¹⁶ В.И. Ленин, *Собрание сочинений В.И. Ленина*, vol. 12: РСДРП, Москва 1947, p. 477.

¹⁷ G. Sorin, *The Prophetic Minority: American Jewish Immigrant Radicals 1820–1920*, Bloomington 1985, p. 28. On the role of Jews in the world-wide socialist movement see R. Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews from Marx to Trotsky*, London 1976, pp. 1–22.

¹⁸ N. Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917*, vol. 1, New York–London 1988, pp. 4–5.

¹⁹ R. Pipes, *Rosja bolszewików*, Warszawa 2005, p. 120.

²⁰ S. Baron, *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets*, New York 1975, p. 169.

²¹ The Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), later the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union).

²² Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union*, p. 57.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65.

²⁴ Z.Y. Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics. The Jewish Sections of the CPSU 1917–1930*, Princeton 1972, p. 216.

The fact that many Jewish Communists from Poland, such as Karol Radek and Józef Unszlicht, held high positions in the apparatus of the Bolshevik party and in the Soviet administration was of significant importance for the formation of the stereotype of *Żydokomuna* in Poland.²⁵

The KPRP and the Jewish radical-left parties after 1918

On 16 December 1918, as a result of the merger of the SDKPiL and the PPS-Left, the Communist Workers' Party of Poland (KPRP) was established in Warsaw. In 1919, it had around 10,000 members and an unspecified number of supporters. It is not known how many Jews were among them at that time. However, they must have constituted such a large group that as early as the beginning of 1919 a separate Jewish Department was organised within the party, which directed propaganda and agitation among the Jewish proletariat. Initially, its activity was concentrated mainly in the Jewish district of Muranów in Warsaw, but by May 1921 it covered 29 cities in central and eastern Poland.²⁶ The Communist Workers' Party of Poland was quickly banned due to its anti-state and subversive character.

The Union of Communist Youth [*Związek Młodzieży Komunistycznej*], established in December 1918, initially operated only in Warsaw and had only a few dozen members, mostly pupils and students. In 1919, more Communist youth circles were established in other cities, the strongest of which was the 'Young Commune' [*Młoda Komuna*] in Łódź. It was only in March 1922 that the Communist Youth Union in Poland was formed from the merger of these circles as a permanent nationwide organisation. According to various sources, it numbered between 600 and 1100 members.²⁷

At that time, under the influence of the Russian Revolution, the Jewish workers and socialist parties operating in Poland were moving more and more to the left, coming closer to full Communism. In November 1918, a group of 180 members of the left wing of *Poalei Siyon* in Warsaw left the party and joined the KPRP.²⁸

²⁵ J.B. de Weydenthal, *The Communists of Poland. An Historical Outline*, Stanford 1978, p. 5.

²⁶ Wróbel, 'Failed Integration', pp. 204–05.

²⁷ L. Krzemień, *Związek Młodzieży Komunistycznej w Polsce. Pierwsze dziesięciolecie (1918–1928)*, Warszawa 1972, pp. 16–65.

²⁸ Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records; hereinafter: AAN), Personnel Affairs Office of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (hereinafter: CK BSK PZPR), 237/XXIII-429, Personal files of Szymon Zachariasz, Personal questionnaire, 14 July 1944, p. 8.

In summer 1920, there was a split during the convention in Vienna; supporters of the party's accession to the Communist International formed the *Poalei Siyon-Left*, and their opponents the *Poalei Siyon-Right*. However, the Comintern did not consent to the accession of the *Poalei Siyon-Left* because its leadership refused to dissolve and merge its party members with the KPRP. In this situation, in the fall of 1921, the Communist faction left *Poalei Siyon-Left* and joined the KPRP. The members of the United Jewish Socialist Workers' Party, the so-called *Ferainigte* (Zionist-Socialists until 1918), went through a similar evolution. In 1919, the left-wing faction cooperating with the Communists began to crystallise, and in 1921 it merged with the KPRP.²⁹

The Bund initially supported Poland's independence, demanding cultural autonomy for the Jewish community. However, as early as December 1918, a radical left wing formed within the party, which in April 1919 gained the majority in the leadership and pushed through a resolution demanding that all power be taken over by workers' councils and that a dictatorship of the proletariat be established in Poland. At the congress in April 1920, the Bund merged with the Jewish Social-Democratic Party of Galicia. At that time, it had 9500 members; a resolution to join the Communist International was adopted at the same time. The Second Congress of the Comintern, held in July and August 1920, set 21 conditions for joining the organisation, but part of the Bund leadership questioned some of them, and so the issue of accession was postponed. The Bundists were primarily against the principle that only one party entering the International could exist on the territory of one state. They wanted to maintain their independence from the KPRP as well as the ethnic, Jewish character of their organisation. The Bund was divided internally into three factions. Ultimately, in December 1921, most of the delegates to the congress refused to join the Comintern on the basis of the 21 conditions. At that time, the pro-Communist activists organised their own grouping, that is, the *Kombund* Jewish Communist Workers' Union in Poland, which was made up of around 20 per cent of the Bund's membership (from 2000 to 3500 members, according to various estimates). In February 1923, the *Kombund* merged with the KPRP.³⁰

²⁹ Cimek, 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym', pp. 30–31.

³⁰ G. Iwański, 'Żydowski Komunistyczny Związek Robotniczy Kombund w Polsce 1921–1923', *Z Pola Walki* 1974, no. 4, pp. 43–76; Wróbel, 'Failed Integration', pp. 209–11.

The youth organisation of the Bund, the *Przyszłość* [Future] Socialist Youth Organisation (*Sotsjaldemokratysche Jugnt-Bund Tsukunft*), also underwent radicalisation. On 22 May 1920, at its 2nd Congress, *Tsukunft* made the decision to join the Communist Youth International, which the Bund opposed. This led to a split, as a result of which in February 1922 the *Komtsukunft*, numbering around 3000 people, was established; two months later it joined the Union of Communist Youth.³¹

Jewish radicals and the Bolshevik aggression in 1920

The radicalisation of the above-mentioned parties had a major impact on the attitude of some of the Jewish population towards the Bolshevik invasion of Poland in 1920, which in turn largely influenced the formation of the *Żydokomuna* stereotype.

There was a large group of Jews in the ranks of the Red Army. Meeting in Kharkov in June 1920, the Political Bureau of the Jewish Communist Party *Poalei Siyon* decided to send 10 per cent of its members to the front against the Poles. Recruitment points were opened in major cities around Ukraine for Jewish volunteers who wanted to fight against Poland.³²

On 2 August 1920, the Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Poland (TKRP) was installed in Bolshevik-captured Białystok, which was to take over administrative and political power in the occupied territories of Poland. Its inner circle included three Poles (Julian Marchlewski, Feliks Dzierżyński and Edward Próchniak) and two Jews (Feliks Kon and Józef Unszlicht). Public support for this puppet creature was negligible. At the first rally in Białystok, only 1500 people assembled, mainly Jewish workers and traders.³³ According to reports and documents, Red Army units entering Polish territory were most often greeted by young Jewish radicals wearing red cockades.³⁴

In the first half of August, political commissars at Red Army units organised revolutionary committees (*revkoms*) in poviats, cities and communes in the occupied areas of Podlasie and Mazovia, composed of representatives of the local population.

³¹ Cimek, 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym', p. 33; M. Kozłowska, *Świetlana przyszłość? Żydowski Związek Młodzieżowy Cukunft wobec wyzwań międzywojennej Polski*, Kraków–Budapeszt 2016, pp. 88–89.

³² K. Zieliński, *O Polską Republikę Rad. Działalność polskich komunistów w Rosji Radzieckiej 1918–1922*, Lublin 2013, p. 114.

³³ И. Костюшко, *Польское бюро ЦК РКП(б) 1920–1921 гг.*, Москва 2005, pp. 13–14.

³⁴ D. Magier, 'Kolaboracja z bolszewikami w regionie białkopodlaskim w sierpniu 1920 roku – skala, motywy, konsekwencje', in *Wobec komunizmu. Materiały z sesji naukowej pt. "Lubelskie i południowe Podlasie wobec komunizmu 1918–1989"*, ed. D. Magier, Radzyń Podlaski 2006, p. 22.

In rural areas, these were mainly farm workers and poor peasants, and the local Jews in cities and towns. After arriving in the former governorate town of Siedlce, Karol Radek stated that, apart from Jews, there were no candidates for work in the *revkoms*. Feliks Kon, a member of the TKRP, complained that many of the committees were staffed by “nobody but Jewish shopkeepers”.³⁵ This was the case, for example, in Suchowola and Brańsk, where the *revkoms*’ announcements were published simultaneously in Polish and Yiddish.³⁶

Many Jewish youths were drawn into becoming Soviet commissars in the ranks of the Red Army, even creating their own small units. One of them was the so-called Jewish Legion in Sokołów Podlaski. Most of its volunteers died during the retreat of the Bolshevik troops across the river Bug near Brest.³⁷ It was found that in eighteen towns east of the river Vistula alone, 1193 young Jews had volunteered to join the Red Army.³⁸ The *revkoms* also formed a people’s militia in which, apart from Polish and Jewish Communists, there were also members of the Jewish workers’ parties: the Bund, *Poalei Siyon* and *Ferainigte*.³⁹

The sources often contain information about the pro-Bolshevik involvement of radicalised members of the local *Poalei Siyon*, Bund and *Tsukunft* organisations. The provisional left-wing leadership of the *Poalei Siyon* party, led by Saul Amsterdam (Gustaw Henrykowski) and Aron Lewartowski, removed the supporters of the Zionist Congress from the party and opted for the support of the *revkoms* created on the territories occupied by the Red Army.⁴⁰ The Bund’s Central Committee acted differently; they sent a recommendation to all local organisations located in the area occupied by the Red Army to “develop their active measures, but not to participate in the ruling structures created by the Communists”.⁴¹ In practice,

³⁵ Костюшко, *Польское бюро*, pp. 17, 25; O. Budnitskii, *Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites 1917–1920*, Philadelphia 2012, pp. 389–91.

³⁶ Zieliński, *O Polską Republikę Rad*, p. 137.

³⁷ P. Borek, ‘Postawa społeczeństwa południowego Podlasia wobec kontrofensywy znad Wieprza w sierpniu 1920 roku’, *Radzyński Rocznik Humanistyczny* 2010, vol. 8, pp. 64–65.

³⁸ W.W. Hagen, *Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland 1914–1920*, Cambridge 2018, p. 379.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 414, 424, 446, 455; J. Szczepański, *Społeczeństwo Polski w walce z najazdem bolszewickim 1920 roku*, Warszawa–Pułtusk 2000, pp. 324–25, 332.

⁴⁰ L. Gamska, ‘Lewica żydowskich partii socjalistycznych wobec III Międzynarodówki i KPRP (1918–1923)’, *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 1976, no. 97, p. 63.

⁴¹ S. Bergman, ‘Bund a niepodległość Polski’, in *Bund. 100 lat historii 1897–1997*, ed. F. Tych, J. Hensel, Warszawa 2000, p. 113.

however, members of Bund local organisations took their decisions individually, and many of them joined the *revkoms*. On 8 July, Henryk Ehrlich spoke in favour of the immediate commencement of Polish-Bolshevik peace negotiations and an end to the war during a speech at the Warsaw city council. This was perceived in Polish society as a pro-Soviet position and a betrayal of Polish interests. The state authorities temporarily banned the Bund, its activists were arrested, and the party's premises were closed.⁴²

Previous research shows that in towns occupied by the Red Army the richer Jews clearly supported the Polish side, while most of the rest took a wait-and-see attitude, simply wanting to see the war out and survive. As a rule, the Bolsheviks were supported by radical Jewish youth and the uneducated. Their activity was so demonstrative and visible that the image of the 'Jew-Bolsheviks' became established in Polish society.⁴³

The number of Jews in the Polish Communist movement

With regard to Jewish participation in the Communist movement, the statistics always generate great interest and emotions, but the data on the number of Jews in the KPP only covers certain periods. According to a report by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Poland, in 1930 Jews constituted 35 per cent of all the party members in central and western Poland.⁴⁴ However, according to the preserved data from 1931–5, their per centage in the party's ranks varied from 22 to 30 per cent.⁴⁵ There is no doubt, then, that Jews were clearly overrepresented in the Communist movement in relation to the per centage of their share in the society of the Second Polish Republic. According to the census

⁴² A. Gontarek, 'Ogólnożydowski Związek Robotniczy "Bund" w Mińsku Mazowieckim w II RP – ocena stanu organizacyjnego, struktur partyjnych i wpływów', *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* 2014, no. 22, p. 41; G. Pickhan, 'Gegen den Strom'. *Der Allgemeine Jüdische Arbeiterbund 'Bund' in Polen 1918–1939*, Stuttgart 2001, trans. into Polish by A. Peszke as: *Pod prąd. Powszechny Żydowski Związek Robotniczy Bund w Polsce w latach 1918–1939*, Warszawa 2017, p. 90.

⁴³ A. Gontarek, 'Postawy żydowskich mieszkańców Mińska Mazowieckiego i Kałuszyna wobec wojny polsko-bolszewickiej 1920 roku', *Studia Żydowskie. Almanach* 2012, vol. 2, p. 70; Zieliński, *O Polską Republikę Radziecką*, p. 138.

⁴⁴ J. Auerbach, 'Niektóre zagadnienia działalności KPP w środowisku żydowskim w latach kryzysu 1929–1932', *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytut Historyczny* 1965, no. 55, p. 42.

⁴⁵ Cimek, 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym', p. 35.

of 1921, over 2,845,000 people 'of the Mosaic faith' lived in Poland (10.5 per cent of the entire population).⁴⁶

Even more fragmentary is the information on the autonomous parties operating in the eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic: the Communist Party of Western Belarus (KPZB) and the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (KPZU). We only know that in 1924 there about 75–80 per cent of the KPZB's members were Belarusians, 18–20 per cent Jews and only 2–4 per cent Poles. At that time, Ukrainians constituted 78 per cent of the KPZU, Jews 13.3 per cent, and Poles 8.7 per cent.⁴⁷

There were also large regional disproportions. In some district organisations, Jews constituted the majority. Their participation in the Lublin District Committee reached 82 per cent in 1925, although in 1928 it fell to 58 per cent. However, in the Siedlce District Committee in 1928 it was 55.5 per cent.⁴⁸ In Warsaw, in 1930, Jews made up 44 per cent of the total number of KPP members living in the city, and in 1937 as many as 65 per cent.⁴⁹ In 1930, the percentage of Jews in the party in Lublin reached 60 per cent, and in small towns it was even higher.⁵⁰

It is typical that the percentage of Jews was significantly higher among the members of the youth wing of the KPP, that is the Communist Youth Union (ZMK; from 1930 the Communist Polish Youth Union – KZMP). It also included the autonomous organisations of the Communist Youth Union of Western Belarus (KZMZB) and the Communist Youth Union of Western Ukraine (KZMZU).

In 1926, the whole of the ZMK in Poland numbered about 3700 members. It consisted of 43 per cent Jews, 27 per cent Poles, 20 per cent Belarusians and 10 per cent Ukrainians.⁵¹ In the years 1928–33, the percentage of Jewish youth in this organisation plateaued, reaching 50.7 per cent at its peak (1930), then

⁴⁶ S. Bronsztejn, *Ludność żydowska w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym. Studium statystyczne*, Wrocław 1963, p. 27.

⁴⁷ Cimek, *Mniejszości narodowe*, pp. 64–65.

⁴⁸ E. Horoch, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski w województwie lubelskim w latach 1918–1938*, Lublin 1993, pp. 83–6.

⁴⁹ J. Schatz, 'Jews and the Communist Movement in Interwar Poland', in *Dark Times, Dire Decisions: Jews and Communism*, ed. J. Frankel, Oxford 2004 (*Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 20), p. 20.

⁵⁰ AAN, Central Committee of the Communist Party of Poland (hereinafter: KC KPP), 158/VII-5, Report of the Central Committee of KPP for the period from the 4th Congress, pp. 3–4.

⁵¹ Cimek, *Mniejszości narodowe*, p. 66.

falling to 32 per cent. During most of this period, however, Jews were the most numerous ethnic group in the KZMP. The percentage of Poles ranged from 19.2 to 34.5 per cent. The rest of the members (from 28 to 35 per cent) were Ukrainians and Belarusians, with a few Germans.⁵²

It is worth noting that in the eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic (today's western Belarus and western Ukraine), where Poles made up two or three times larger percentages of the population than Jews, completely different proportions can be seen in the ranks of Communist youth organisations. In 1933, according to internal statistics, the KZMZB had 3100 members, including 2100 Belarusians, 450 Ukrainians, 450 Jews and only 100 Poles. At that time, KZMZU had 3400 members, including 2750 Ukrainians, 550 Jews and 100 Poles.⁵³

Jews dominated the International Organisation for Aid to Revolutionaries (MOPR), which in 1932 numbered 6000 members, 90 per cent of whom were Jews. In 1936, this percentage was at a similar level.⁵⁴

The stereotype of *Żydokomuna* was undoubtedly strengthened by the large number of people of Jewish origin in leadership positions in the Communist party. So far, no publication that thoroughly analyses this problem has been published.⁵⁵ My findings show that a total of 28 people passed through the top management of the KPRP/KPP (Politburo), including eleven activists of Jewish origin (39 per cent). In the broader party elite, that is, the Central Committee, the percentage was similar. There were 37 Jews among the 100 members and deputy members of the Central Committee. It is also necessary to take into account the composition of the National Secretariat of the Central Committee of the KPP, the body which managed the party's day-to-day activities. Throughout the period under discussion, it had a total of 36 people, including up to 21 Jews (58 per cent).⁵⁶ These three

⁵² Ibid., p. 150.

⁵³ AAN, Communist Polish Youth Union (hereinafter: KZMP), mf 933/11, Organisational status of the KZMP for the period from the 6th Comintern Congress, 1933, p. 132.

⁵⁴ Cimek, 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym', p. 37.

⁵⁵ Krystyna Trembicka limited herself to providing only some basic information about the members of the KPP Politburo, see K. Trembicka, *Między utopią a rzeczywistością. Myśl polityczna Komunistycznej Partii Polski (1918–1938)*, Lublin 2007, pp. 66–68.

⁵⁶ The author's findings are based on an analysis of the biographical data of members of the KPP party elite. For more on the composition of the Central Committee, the Political Bureau and the National Secretariat of the KPP, see F. Świetlikowa, 'Centralne instancje partyjne KPP', *Z Pola Walki* 1969, no. 4, pp. 140–43.

decision-making bodies comprised a total of 115 Communist activists in the years 1918–38, including 46 Jews (40 per cent).⁵⁷

The significant percentage of activists of Jewish origin in the party elite remained uninterrupted throughout the interwar period, and was even higher at middle management levels. In 1936, out of 30 members and deputy members of the Central Committee of the KPP, 15 were Poles, 12 were Jews, two were Ukrainians and one was Belarusian. According to data from the National Secretariat of the Central Committee of the KPP, the participation of Jews in the broader leadership of the entire party and KZMP in this period amounted to 54 per cent. Among the secretaries of the KPP District Committees there were 28 of them, compared to 23 Poles. An even higher percentage of Jewish activists was recorded in the KPP's publishing apparatus (75 per cent), while the 'technical apparatus' of the National Secretariat and the management of the KPP's District Committee in Warsaw were 100 per cent Jewish.⁵⁸

The reasons for the significant presence of people of Jewish origin in the leadership of the KPP can probably be found in the insufficient number of Polish Communists with appropriate education,⁵⁹ as well as in the conscious personnel policy adopted by the Comintern, who preferred Jews as being suspected less of 'Polish nationalism'.⁶⁰

It is worth noting that in the entire 115-member party elite there were only five women, four of whom were Jewish (Maria Eiger-Kamińska, Helena Grudowa [Gitla Rapaport], Zofia Unslicht-Osińska and Romana Wolf-Jeziarska), and one Polish (Maria Koszutska). In the entire KPP, the percentage of women was only 9.5 per cent; according to reports from party activists, most of these were Jewish. This indirectly confirms the established social origin of KPP members, among whom only 10 per cent were women of peasant origin, and as much as 15 per cent were petty-bourgeois in origin. The majority (59 per cent) were daughters of workers.⁶¹ Another indication is that the life partners of many Polish Communists were

⁵⁷ 21 members of the National Secretariat sat on the Central Committee; the remaining 15 did not belong to this body.

⁵⁸ Cimek, *Mniejszości narodowe*, p. 143.

⁵⁹ Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, p. 154.

⁶⁰ W. Bieńkowski, *Motory i hamulce socjalizmu*, Paris 1969, p. 46.

⁶¹ Z. Szczygielski, *Członkowie KPP 1918–1938 w świetle badań ankietowych*, Warszawa 1989, p. 28.

Jewish Communists. This resulted from the custom of entering into male-female relationships in one's own party circle. A similar phenomenon occurred in the Soviet Union, where the wives of non-Jewish party leaders were often Jewish women.⁶²

According to estimates by Jaff Schatz, the number of Jewish Communists in the ranks of the KPP and KZMP (including those in prison) ranged between 6200 and 10,000 in the 1930s.⁶³ Meanwhile, according to estimates by the Polish Interior Ministry, in 1927 the socialist Bund numbered around 10,000 members, and its youth organisation Tsukunft held around 6000.⁶⁴ In 1935, 7000 Jews belonged to the Bund,⁶⁵ while the Polish Socialist Party had around 30–33,000 activists at its peak in 1931.⁶⁶

In the parliamentary elections, the illegal Communist party issued its own electoral list three times. In 1922, the Union of the Town and Country Proletariat won 121,448 votes and two parliamentary seats. In 1928, the Workers and Peasants' Unity list gained over 297,000 votes, which gave it seven seats in the Sejm. In 1930, 232,000 people cast their votes for this list, thanks to which the Communists won four seats.⁶⁷ The estimates by Jeffrey Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg show that in 1922 only 4 per cent of the Jews in Poland voted for Communists, although in 1928 this per centage rose to 7 per cent; for Polish Catholics, the figures were 2 and 4 per cent respectively. The Communists enjoyed by far the greatest support among Ukrainian and Belarusian peasants.⁶⁸

From the above findings it can be concluded that the Communists were supported by twice as many Jewish voters as Poles, but their group still constituted a small minority of this community. Most of the Jewish population, as well as the Polish population, was naturally averse to Communism. This also resulted

⁶² A. Vaksberg, *Stalin against the Jews*, New York 1994, p. 64.

⁶³ Schatz, 'Jews and the Communist Movement', p. 20.

⁶⁴ AAN, Ministry of the Interior (hereinafter: MSW), 1062, Jewish political groups in Poland, 1 May 1927, pp. 15–16. Published in *Żydowska mozaika polityczna w Polsce 1917–1927. Wybór dokumentów*, selected and ed. by C. Brzoza, Kraków 2003, pp. 122–24.

⁶⁵ A. Polonsky, 'The Bund in Polish Political Life 1935–1939', in *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left*, ed. E. Mendelsohn, New York–London 1997, p. 175.

⁶⁶ J. Żarnowski, *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna w latach 1935–1939*, Warszawa 1965, pp. 367–68.

⁶⁷ Z. Zaporowski, *Między Sejmem a wiecem. Działalność Komunistycznej Frakcji Poselskiej w latach 1921–1935*, Lublin 1997, pp. 20–23.

⁶⁸ J.S. Kopstein, J. Wittenberg, 'Who Voted Communists? Reconsidering the Social Bases of Radicalism in Interwar Poland', *Slavic Review* 2003, vol. 62, no. 1, pp. 98, 102.

from the sense of threat, deeply embedded in the psyche of East European Jews, posed by any revolution or social disturbances, as these were usually accompanied by looting and pogroms.⁶⁹ However, the pro-Communist minority caught the eyes of Polish public opinion. The local press frequently reported arrests and trials of Communists bearing Jewish names, which also perpetuated the stereotype of *Żydokomuna*.

The identity of the Jewish Communists

It is commonly expressed in the literature that when Communists of Jewish origin became Communists, they automatically ceased to be Jews and completely lost their national identity, turning into internationalists, or possibly Poles;⁷⁰ as such they were allegedly characterised by a desire to abandon their Jewishness, and focused on acculturation and assimilation.⁷¹ According to Julia Brun-Zejmis, “the denial of national identity played a much more important role in their entrustment to the Communist movement than their hatred of social injustice”.⁷²

Communism was thus one of the available forms of assimilation into the non-Jewish world, especially for ‘refugees from the Jewish caste’ who faced double disapproval. These people had already been rejected by their former milieu, yet were still considered strangers by non-Jewish society. Supposedly, the best solution for them was ‘red assimilation’, that is, joining the Communist movement.⁷³ The situation of Jewish Bolsheviks was presented in a similar way by Nora Levin: “Bolshevism attracted Jews pushed out of the brackets, suspended between two worlds – Jewish and Christian [...]. Having renounced their own identity and roots, but not finding themselves fully a part of Russian life (outside the party), the Jewish Bolsheviks found their ideological home in the universal revolutionary doctrine”.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ A. Kainer, ‘Żydzi a komunizm’, *Krytyka* 1983, no. 15, pp. 225–26.

⁷⁰ Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 127; Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, pp. 167–68; J.T. Gross, *Upiorna dekada. Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i komunistów 1939–1948*, Kraków 1998, pp. 93–94.

⁷¹ M. Mishkinsky, ‘The Communist Party of Poland and the Jews’, in *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, ed. Y. Gutman et al., Hanover–London 1989, p. 64.

⁷² J. Brun-Zejmis, ‘National Self-Denial and Marxist Ideology: The Origin of the Communist Movement in Poland and the Jewish Question 1918–1923’, *Nationalities Papers* 1994, vol. 22, no. 1, p. 29.

⁷³ Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 228; S. Krajewski, ‘Żydowscy komuniści – problem dla nas?’, in *Żydzi i komunizm*, ed. M. Bilewicz, B. Pawlisz, Warszawa 2000, p. 152.

⁷⁴ Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union*, p. 49; Pipes, *Rosja bolszewików*, p. 109.

Such examples of 'red assimilation' are well known, but they mainly concern the party elites. However, one must not generalise the experience. On the basis of his sociological research, Schatz stated that the empirical facts contradict the hypothesis that Jewish people joined the Communist movement after completely rejecting their ethnic roots and cultural heritage. Despite the fact that accession to Communism was usually associated with a rebellion against the traditions and values of their parents, they did generally retain their Jewish identity.⁷⁵ This opinion is also confirmed by the results of research by Polish historians, which indicate the peculiar separatism displayed by the Jewish Communists.

On the basis of the aforementioned research by Schatz, the community of interest to us should be divided into two basic groups: 1) the majority, i.e. Communists raised in traditional Jewish families, living in Yiddish-language culture, and active on the so-called 'Jewish street'; and 2) the minority, activists who had often been assimilated for generations, relatively well-educated, speakers of good Polish, active in the party elite and in Polish circles. Naturally, there were exceptions to this division, but the vast majority of Jewish Communists fell within the above groups.

Most Jewish Communist activists came from traditional, mostly poor petty-bourgeois families. They spoke Yiddish on a daily basis and spoke little Polish.⁷⁶ They grew up and mixed in Jewish neighbourhoods, among Jewish colleagues, and in Jewish social and political organisations. When they became Communists, they romanced and married in their own milieu.⁷⁷ They maintained their Jewish identity, "idolised Jewish culture and dreamed of a society in which Jews would be equal to others as Jews". They tried in various ways to reconcile Marxism with a Jewish national identity.⁷⁸

The above findings are all the more comprehensible if we consider the cultural and linguistic face of the Jewish community in Poland. According to the 1931 census, 2,487,000 persons (79.9 per cent) declared their native language to be Yiddish, and 243,000 stated it to be Hebrew, which accounted for 8.6 per cent of the entire population. The Polish language was declared by 372,000 people

⁷⁵ Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 48.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

'of the Mosaic faith' (11.9 per cent).⁷⁹ Thus, the vast majority of Jews (according to the denominational criterion) retained a sense of their own national identity and used their own language on a daily basis. Although they had broken with her family environment, they were subconsciously steeped in certain elements of their heritage. Schatz wrote on this subject:

The basic cultural heritage was passed on to these people through religious instruction, religious practices, holiday rituals, legends and songs, stories from their parents and grandparents, listening to elders' discussions. [...] All this formed the deep core of their identity, values, norms and attitudes with which they entered their subversive youth and adulthood. This core was sometimes so profoundly transformed by acculturation, secularisation and political radicalisation that it was simply denied. Yet all their later perceptions were filtered through these deep layers.⁸⁰

Before joining the Communist movement, most representatives of the Jewish community in Poland belonged to Jewish political parties and youth organisations with a left-wing tone, such as the *Poalei Siyon*-Left, the All-Jewish Workers' Union Bund, *ha-Shomer ha-Tzair* (a leftist Zionist scouting organisation), the *Jugend* Jewish Socialist Workers' Youth, the *Tsukunft* Union of Jewish Socialist Youth (the Bund's youth organisation), the *Shtern* sports clubs and Jewish left-wing trade unions. Whether a given person ended up in Bund, *Poalei Siyon* or KPP was often determined by coincidence.⁸¹ These organisations were infiltrated by Communists, and under the influence of their agitation, entire member groups were gradually radicalised and joined the KPP or the KZMP.

Research by Polish historians also shows that unassimilated Jews from small towns played a key role in the field of party activity. Emil Horoch established that in the years 1931–38, members of the district and district committees of the Communist Party of Poland in the Lublin and Siedlce districts came mainly from the poor petty

⁷⁹ 'Drugi powszechny spis ludności z dn. 9 XII 1931 r. Mieszkania i gospodarstwa domowe, ludność. Stosunki zawodowe. Polska (dane skrócone)', *Statystyka Polski*, Series C, no. 62, p. 31; *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950 roku)*, ed. J. Tomaszewski, Warszawa 1993, p. 159.

⁸⁰ Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 37–38.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54–57, 61.

bourgeoisie. Among 171 people there were only 14 farmers, 7 white-collar workers and 8 students. Most of them were small craftsmen and traders. It was easier for Jews in these professions to move around in the field without arousing suspicion by the police. Moreover, they had a certain minimum amount of education.⁸²

In materials prepared for the Comintern in 1929, we read: "Jewish comrades in cities usually account for over 50 per cent of the organisation [...]. There are towns where the organisation is purely Jewish".⁸³ Such a national and professional composition of party organisations made it difficult for the Communist party to gain access to Polish peasants and workers. "Jewish activists were often treated as 'the other' or 'strangers.' They themselves were reluctant to work among the peasants, justifying themselves in terms of the Polish people's anti-Semitism. As a result, the influence of the KPP was limited to semi-proletarian circles, from the border of towns and villages, and to the unemployed."⁸⁴

Another, separate group were the left-wing Jewish writers and journalists who spoke Yiddish ('the citizens of *Yiddishland*'). This group, preserving its Jewish identity, were centred around the magazine *Literarische Tribune* and included Dawid Sfarad, Bernard Mark, Izaak Deutscher and Michał Mirski.⁸⁵

Numerous documents indicate that a significant number of Jewish Communists (and also Ukrainian Communists), despite officially adhering to the slogan of proletarian internationalism, were characterised by strong separatist tendencies. Initially, these were manifested in efforts to create a separate Jewish Communist party in Poland (the *Kombund* case described above). When this proved impossible, they strove to maintain autonomy within the KPP, which was served by the activities of the Central Jewish Bureau.⁸⁶

This office operated on the so-called 'Jewish street', coordinating the work of Jewish party units in larger and smaller towns. It exercised supervision of the Muranów District Committee (KD Muranów) in Warsaw, which was purely

⁸² E. Horoch, 'Grupy kierownicze KPP w województwie lubelskim w latach 1930–1938', in *Między Wschodem a Zachodem. Studia z dziejów polskiego ruchu i myśli socjalistycznej*, ed. A.F. Grabski, P. Samuś, Łódź 1995, pp. 205–06.

⁸³ Horoch, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski*, p. 88.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 117; Cimek, 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym', pp. 35–36.

⁸⁵ J. Nalewajko-Kulikow, *Obywatel Jidyszlandu. Rzecz o żydowskich komunistach w Polsce*, Warszawa 2009, p. 77.

⁸⁶ Cimek, 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym', p. 39.

Jewish in character. The KPP's Warsaw Committee repeatedly drew attention to the separatism exhibited by the Muranów branch. In 1926, the local KD was reorganised to include party cells made up of Poles. However, the tendency towards separatism turned out even stronger, because by 1933 all of the committee's 315 members were of Jewish origin.⁸⁷ It should be added that Muranów was by far the strongest district, which led the way for the Warsaw Committee of the KPP.⁸⁸

A similar situation prevailed in the Warsaw party's youth group. The KZMP's organisation in Warsaw consisted of separate Polish and Jewish professional units. The latter was made up of textiles, shoemakers, tailors, bakers, traders, and so on. In 1934, there were 1100 KZMP members in ten Warsaw districts, including as many as 900 Jews. Two districts were completely Jewish: Muranów (386 members) and Śródmieście (290 members).⁸⁹ As reported by the KZMP's directorate, small-town Jewish organisations in the area "were separated from the countryside by a Chinese wall".⁹⁰

In the milieu of Jewish Communists in Warsaw, there was opposition to the leadership of the KPP, which was associated with Trotskyism. A splinter group of ex-combatants, headed by Hersz Mendel Stockfisz and Pinkus Minc, was removed from the party. In 1932, they created the KPP-Opposition, which numbered around three hundred people in Warsaw and had structures in seven other cities. A second Trotskyist group was created in the same period by a faction of the Central Committee of the KPP led by Abe Pflug (the so-called 'Abists'), and was also excluded from the party. After 1934, its members returned to the ranks of the KPP on an individual basis.⁹¹

The Comintern activist Wincas Mickiewicz-Kapsukas stated at the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in July 1930: "Those comrades who spoke about a kind of two parties, Polish and

⁸⁷ E. Kowalczyk, 'Struktura Komitetu Warszawskiego KPRP/KPP', in *Komuniści w międzywojennej Warszawie*, ed. E. Kowalczyk, Warszawa 2014, p. 88.

⁸⁸ Z. Szczygielski, 'Warszawska organizacja KPP. Problemy organizacyjne', in *Warszawa II Rzeczypospolitej*, vol. 1, ed. M. Drozdowski, Warszawa 1968, p. 185.

⁸⁹ 'Komunistyczny Związek Młodzieży w międzywojennej Warszawie', in *Komuniści w międzywojennej Warszawie*, ed. E. Kowalczyk, Warszawa 2014, pp. 101–04.

⁹⁰ AAN, KZMP, 159/II/80, Information on the work of the KZMP, 14 July 1932, p. 7.

⁹¹ A. Grabski, 'Nurt trockistowski w polskim ruchu komunistycznym w latach trzydziestych XX w.', in *Komuniści w II Rzeczypospolitej. Ludzie – struktury – działalność*, ed. M. Bukała, M. Krzysztofiński, Rzeszów 2015, pp. 347–49; J. Jacobs, 'Communist Questions, Jewish Answers: Polish Jewish Dissident Communists of the Inter-War Era', *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 2005, no. 18, pp. 369–64.

Jewish, they were right”⁹² While this statement was undoubtedly an exaggeration, it nevertheless drew attention to a real problem within the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union as well, many of the Jewish Communists operating in the *Yevseksia* strove to maintain their ethnic identity.⁹³ The *Yevseksia*, fighting brutally with the Jewish faith and Hebrew culture, shaped a secular model of life based on Yiddish as a recognised vernacular. It provided conditions for the national survival of Jews in the 1920s, and then in the 1930s it slowed down the processes of assimilation.⁹⁴

Interestingly, in a Soviet state proclaiming the principles of internationalism, people were attributed their ethnic nationality from above. This particularly struck the assimilated Jews, who felt they were Russians. A researcher into the question, Arno Lustiger, noted: “Every Jew – whether he wished it or not – had his national identity (*yevrej*) entered in his documents (when internal passports were introduced in 1932)”⁹⁵ Arkady Vaksberg stated that “from the point of view of the Kremlin and the Lubyanka, it was not religion, but blood that decided who was a Jew”⁹⁶

Another minority group within the Jewish Communists were the assimilated intellectuals, most often from the wealthier intellectual, petty-bourgeois or bourgeois houses. Their parents usually spoke Polish on a daily basis. Some knew Yiddish but referred to it as ‘jargon’. They supported the Zionist parties, or the Polish left and the centre. They limited Jewish traditions to keeping *kosher* and celebrating the most important holidays. They rejected traditional clothing and considered themselves Poles or ‘Poles of the Mosaic faith’. Communists from such houses were better educated, and as a rule held higher positions in the Communist movement. The level of assimilation was also geographically conditioned – it was much higher in Galicia than in the Eastern Borderlands, where Yiddish was cultivated.⁹⁷ In relation to these people, the category of ‘non-Jewish Jew’ used by some researchers can be useful here.⁹⁸

⁹² AAN, Communist Party of Western Belarus (hereinafter: KPZB), 163/III-34, IV Plenum of the Central Committee of KPZB, July 1930, p. 69.

⁹³ Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union*, p. 280.

⁹⁴ B. Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: A History of a National Minority*, Cambridge 1988, p. 62.

⁹⁵ Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, p. 94.

⁹⁶ A. Vaksberg, *Stalin against the Jews*, New York 1994, p. 64.

⁹⁷ Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 55–56.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13; Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 218.

Roman Zambrowski (an assimilated Jewish Communist), describing his Jewish prison comrades from the 1920s, stated that “they were mostly intellectuals brought up in Polish culture; in terms of their mentality and manner of being, they did not differ from Poles, and they felt they were Poles”. In their dealings with the authorities, at the investigative office, or during a court hearing, when asked about their nationality, they most often answered ‘Jew’ – in this way they sympathised with the discriminated minority.⁹⁹ Among the assimilated Jewish Communists, there was often a common belief in the superiority of their own group over gentiles, as well as an attitude of superiority and alienation towards traditional Polish culture.¹⁰⁰

One interesting source for determining the national identity of the Communist parties’ members are the party questionnaires completed by the participants in KPP congresses and the activists employed by the Comintern. These surveys included a column headed ‘nationality’. An analysis of the questionnaires completed by 36 members of the party elite of Jewish origin¹⁰¹ brings the following results: 17 indicated their nationality as Jewish, 12 indicated it as Polish, and the remaining 7 could be included in the intermediate group (4 of them declared themselves Poles of Jewish origin, 2 entered ‘Jew-Pole’ [*Żyd-Polak*]). Tadeusz Daniszewski declared Jewish origin, but gave Polish as his mother tongue.

The results of the survey confirm the opinion of Abel Kainer (Stanisław Krajewski) that the Jews constituted a highly heterogeneous group in terms of their ‘degree of Jewishness’. He wrote about intermediate categories of national identity, such as ‘Pole of Jewish origin’ [*Polak żydowskiego pochodzenia*] and ‘Pole-Jew’ [*Polak-Żyd*] (a double self-determination).¹⁰² The questionnaires reflect the varying degrees of assimilation. In the party elite, for example, Maria Eiger-Kamińska could be considered a fully assimilated person, who grew up in an atmosphere filled with Polish patriotism, while at the same time being almost completely non-religious.¹⁰³ At the other extreme was Szymon Zachariasz, who was continuously active in the ‘Jewish section’, and knew

⁹⁹ R. Zambrowski, *Wspomnienia*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1976 (typescript available in the author’s collection), p. 69.

¹⁰⁰ Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 119.

¹⁰¹ I did not find the questionnaires of the remaining ten members of the elite.

¹⁰² Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 216.

¹⁰³ M. Kamińska, *Ścieżkami wspomnień*, Warszawa 1960, pp. 183–85.

the Polish language only poorly.¹⁰⁴ Saul Amsterdam (Gustaw Henrykowski), a member of the Political Bureau of the KPP's Central Committee, also consistently declared Jewish origin. As a Communist, in 1923 he undertook a Jewish religious wedding 'under a canopy'.¹⁰⁵ Between these attitudes there are various intermediate degrees of linguistic and cultural-civilisational assimilation.

Thus, it can be seen that even within the party elite, which usually included well-educated activists from better-off families (see below), half of them declared themselves to be Jews. Therefore, it can be assumed that they constituted the majority at lower management levels. There is also no doubt that most of the rank and file of Jewish members of the KPP and KZMP retained their Jewish identity.

Motives for joining the Communist movement

The most frequently cited reason for some Jews' fascination with Communism was their difficult social situation: poverty, limited opportunities for employment, and a sense of injustice. According to this interpretation, ethnic discrimination and anti-Semitism in the Second Polish Republic resulted in a feeling of rejection and alienation in society, and a serious limitation of the victims' opportunities for scientific and professional development. The revolution was treated as an opportunity for liberation and equality. It offered an alternative to Zionism.¹⁰⁶

In the tsarist empire, large numbers of Jews, Latvians, Poles, Georgians, and so on, joined the Bolsheviks. The Communist movements in Poland (the KPP, and including the KPZU and KPZB) was mostly composed of representatives of national minorities. In interwar Central and Eastern Europe, Communism was the carrier of the unfulfilled national aspirations of various ethnic groups that were subjugated to other nations. This was true of, for example, the Hungarians and Ruthenians (Ukrainians) in Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁷

The unstable socio-political and economic situation in the first years of the Second Polish Republic worsened the material situation of the broad masses of society, which resulted in ubiquitous poverty. After a period of economic

¹⁰⁴ AAN, BSK KC PZPR, 237/XXIII-429, Personal files of Szymon Zachariasz.

¹⁰⁵ AAN, Collection of personal files of workers' activists, 101, Autobiography of S. Amsterdam, 1936, p. 24; G. Berendt, 'Polscy Żydzi wobec komunizmu przed Zagładą', *Biuletyn IPN* 2010, no. 11, p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ Mishkinsky, 'The Communist Party of Poland', pp. 100–01; Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, pp. 159–60.

¹⁰⁷ P. Lendvai, *Antysemityzm bez Żydów*, part 2, Warszawa 1987, pp. 54–55.

recovery in the second half of the 1920s, the great economic crisis of the first half of the 1930s broke out. The themes of poverty, the inability to continue education and the lack of life prospects appear in almost all the autobiographies and memoirs of Polish Communists coming from working-class and peasant circles, and from the poorer class of the petty bourgeoisie (children of craftsmen). This also applied to a large proportion of the Jews who lived in poverty.¹⁰⁸

As already mentioned, the leadership of the KPP and KZMP was mostly made up of relatively well-educated Jews, coming from the better-off social strata. As calculated by Schatz, of all the Jewish Communists described in the two volumes of the *Słownik biograficzny działaczy polskiego ruchu robotniczego* [Biographical dictionary of the activists of the Polish labour movement],¹⁰⁹ up to 40 per cent came from bourgeois and petty-bourgeois families, and 23 per cent were from intellectual families.¹¹⁰ Among the Jews in the party elite (according to questionnaires), only 8 of them were from the working class; 13 were petty-bourgeois, 11 bourgeois and 6 intellectuals. The remaining five people stated that they were of intellectual-bourgeois or intellectual-petty-bourgeois origin.¹¹¹

The Jewish petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia were also hugely affected by the economic crisis. In 1930, 35 per cent of Jewish enterprises (shops, workshops) went bankrupt, and unemployment among white-collar workers reached as much as 20–25 per cent during the crisis years.¹¹² Apart from pauperisation and unemployment, young intellectuals faced various forms of discrimination consisting in restrictions on access to studies and work in offices or state institutions. As a result of the barriers artificially applied (*numerus clausus* and *numerus nullus*), the number of Jewish students fell from 24.6 per cent in the academic year 1921/22 to 8.2 per cent in 1938/39.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Schatz, 'Jews and the Communist Movement', p. 14.

¹⁰⁹ See *Słownik biograficzny działaczy polskiego ruchu robotniczego*, ed. F. Tych, vol. 1, Warszawa 1978; vol. 2, Warszawa 1987.

¹¹⁰ Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 350.

¹¹¹ The author's findings were based on an analysis of the questionnaires of 43 Jewish members of the KPP elite. The questionnaires of a further three people were not found.

¹¹² J. Żarnowski, *Spółczesność Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1973, p. 204.

¹¹³ E. Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1982, trans. into Polish by A. Tomaszewska as: *Żydzi Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w okresie międzywojennym*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 70–71.

Bearing in mind the above, it should also be noted that not all Jewish Communist intellectuals were deprived of life prospects and career options in the Second Polish Republic. A good example is that of Jakub Berman, a future member of the PZPR's leadership; he was a graduate of law studies, writing his doctorate under the supervision of a well-known sociologist, Prof. Ludwik Krzywicki. In Berman's biography, Anna Sobór-Świdorska stated that "he could have successfully done something else, become a scientist, lawyer, influential journalist".¹¹⁴ His colleague, the economist Hilary Minc (also a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party) worked at the Central Statistical Office in the 1930s. The famous torturer of the Communist security apparatus, Colonel Józef Różański (Goldberg), ran his own legal practice before 1939. Thus, the assimilated intellectuals were not always pushed into Communism by problems with their academic and professional careers.

According to memorials from surviving Communists, the political and social radicalism of young, sensitive people from wealthy intellectual, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois families most often germinated under the influence of their observations of the reality which surrounded them. Being privileged, compared to others, and seeing their parents' world as saturated with hypocrisy and injustice, they experienced guilt and a thirst for justice.¹¹⁵ Maria Eiger-Kamińska, the daughter of a great industrialist, was shocked when she saw the terrible conditions of the workers while visiting the factories owned by her father Bolesław Eiger and her uncle Maurycy Poznański.¹¹⁶

Schatz aptly noted that "ascribing Jewish radicalism solely or mainly to the fact of the plight of the Jews (oppression, anti-Semitism, poverty) as an explanation is not enough in itself". Material factors cannot alone explain, for example, the disproportionately large share of Jews in the New Left in the United States.¹¹⁷ It is also difficult to explain the example of Hungary, which before 1918 could have been considered a tolerant country towards its Jewish minority. Despite the lack of pogroms and open discrimination, it was the Jewish Communists who created

¹¹⁴ A. Sobór-Świdorska, *Jakub Berman. Biografia komunisty*, Warszawa 2009, p. 32.

¹¹⁵ Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 57.

¹¹⁶ Kamińska, *Ścieżkami wspomnień*, pp. 46–49.

¹¹⁷ J. Schatz, 'Zagadka pokolenia żydowskich komunistów', in *Żydzi i komunizm*, ed. M. Bilewicz, B. Pawlisz, Warszawa 2000 (special edition of the journal *Jidele*), pp. 15–16.

the Hungarian Soviet Republic headed by Bela Kun in 1919. Of the 26 ministers and deputy ministers in Kuna's government, 20 were of Jewish origin.¹¹⁸

A frequently quoted motive for the accession of Jews to the Communist movement was the pursuit of the aforementioned 'red assimilation', that is, leaving the Jewish ghetto and merging with Polish society through Communism. According to the supporters of this thesis, the KPP was the only Polish political group open to emigrants from the ghetto.¹¹⁹ The Communist organisation satisfied their troubling need to feel rooted. The path of assimilation, however, turned out to be the source of a long-term disease of consciousness, an identity crisis. This was felt particularly strongly by the intelligentsia. For them, joining the Communist movement was a way to overcome their alienation and find a new community that would replace their lost ties and offer them a new set of moral values – a 'new faith'.¹²⁰

As Paweł Śpiewak aptly noted, Jews joining the KPP essentially replaced their former ghetto (*shtetl*) with another ghetto, the Communist one.¹²¹ After all, as members of an illegal party, they functioned in isolation from society. The large share of people of Jewish origin in the leadership of the KPP and KZMP additionally contributed to the party's alienation from Polish society; the fact of their predominance created another barrier to be exploited by anti-Communist propaganda.¹²²

One such chance to leave the ghetto came from joining the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), which demanded equal rights for the national minorities. It strongly opposed anti-Semitism and all forms of discrimination against the Jewish population. The party often collaborated with the Bund, especially in the second half of the 1930s.¹²³ No statistics on nationality were kept in the PPS, but on the basis

¹¹⁸ Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, pp. 146–47; Mendelsohn, *The Jews*, p. 137.

¹¹⁹ Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 228; A. Landau-Czajka, *Syn będzie Lech... Asymilacja Żydów w Polsce międzywojennej*, Warszawa 2006, p. 394.

¹²⁰ Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 15, 58, 66; Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, pp. 227–28.

¹²¹ Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, p. 163.

¹²² Bieńkowski, *Motory i hamulce socjalizmu*, pp. 43–46.

¹²³ J. Holzer, 'Relations between Polish and Jewish left wing groups in interwar Poland', in *The Jews in Poland*, ed. Ch. Abramski, M. Jachimczyk, A. Polonsky, Oxford 1986, pp. 144–45; J. Holzer, 'Polska i żydowska lewica polityczna w II Rzeczypospolitej. Polacy wobec Żydów i kwestii żydowskiej; Żydzi wobec Polski i Polaków', in *Narody: jak powstawały i jak wybijały się na niepodległość? Profesorowi Tadeuszowi Łepkowskiemu w sześćdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin i czterdziestolecie pracy przyjaciele, koledzy, uczniowie*, ed. M. Kula, Warszawa 1989, p. 439.

of reports it can be concluded that there was a fairly large group of Polish Jews in its ranks; its directorate included Herman Diamand, Herman Lieberman and Feliks Perl. Thus, this party offered an alternative to pro-assimilation leftist individuals.¹²⁴ Some Jewish youth, however, probably chose the KPP because the PPS was not radical enough for them; it did not meet the need for a 'new faith' or a new brotherhood. In addition, the Socialist Party had a clear anti-Soviet attitude, which could not please those young Jews who were fascinated by 'the successes of the USSR'.

It seems that another factor that attracted people to Communism to a greater extent than 'red assimilation' was its internationalism, which was especially attractive to those 'refugees from the Jewish caste' who did not want to clearly declare their nationality. They often felt that they were neither Jews nor Poles, but cosmopolitans.¹²⁵ Kainer states that these cosmopolitan leanings were "perhaps the most striking convergence of Communism with the attitude of the Jews". In his opinion, they resulted mainly from the fact that the Jews were the only significant national minority without their own ethnic territory.¹²⁶ The attractiveness of internationalist slogans was mentioned, among others, by Bronisław Anlen, a member of the KPP from 1928: "In the PPS they did not complain about the Jews, but the PPS was national. For us in the 1920s, the USSR was a miracle, a model of socialism. We did not feel like traitors to Poland's affairs – but the internationalist attitude and the idea of 'the whole world' were the most important things. This line attracted people to the KPP".¹²⁷

At the same time, this internationalism and the glorification of the Soviet Union as the 'homeland of the world proletariat' were the main factors which pushed ethnic Poles away from Communism. The Communists' condemnation of all manifestations of 'nationalism' made it impossible for them to penetrate into the deeper layers of Polish society, creating a psychological barrier that was difficult to cross; so the Polish intelligentsia who joined the party had a great deal of resistance to overcome. These obstacles did not play such a big role for the Jewish community, which was inherently less sensitive to problems of national sovereignty.

¹²⁴ See statements by Stefan Arski and Żanna Kormanowa in R. Pragier, *Żydzi czy Polacy*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 56, 98–99.

¹²⁵ Landau-Czajka, *Syn będzie Lech*, p. 396.

¹²⁶ Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 227.

¹²⁷ Pragier, *Jews or Poles*, p. 79.

In the 1920s, perhaps the most important factor attracting Polish Jews to Communism was precisely the perception of the Soviet Union as a country where the Bolshevik revolution had freed society from anti-Semitism and poverty, and provided Jews with equal rights. Such a program was most attractive to most of the Jewish Communists who wished to preserve their identity. The promise of Soviet society seemed to them more concrete, quicker and realistic than the Zionist dreams and the Bund's program. It also opened up opportunities for promotion and a career.¹²⁸

The KPP also programmatically fought anti-Semitism and stood up for the linguistic and cultural rights of the national minorities.¹²⁹ In the resolution of the Second Congress of the KPRP in 1923, we read:

The Polish proletariat must demand the lifting of all restrictions on Jews in the fields of administration, education and the judiciary. For the Jewish popular masses, it demands complete freedom of cultural development, the destruction of the government-supported ghetto, the abolition of religious *kheders*, the introduction of state and city schools with the Jewish language of instruction, unrestricted access to general schools for Jews, the right to use the mother tongue in administration and the judiciary.¹³⁰

Indeed, in the 1920s, over 2.5 million Jews living in the USSR could benefit from the flourishing of Yiddish education, literature and culture. The language could be used in schools, offices and public institutions. About 20 per cent of the entire Jewish population in the Soviet Union belonged to the class of the intelligentsia and white-collar workers. The Jewish Communist workers' party, *Poalei Siyon*, operated legally until 1928.¹³¹ One confirmation of equality was the relatively large number of Jews in important party and state positions. In the first years after the revolution,

¹²⁸ Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 60; Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, pp. 162, 164.

¹²⁹ H. Cimek, *Komuniści a Polska (1918–1938)*, Warszawa 1989, p. 228; Mishkinsky, 'The Communist Party of Poland', p. 65.

¹³⁰ L. Gamska, 'KPP wobec problemów kulturalno-oświatowych ludności żydowskiej w okresie od I zjazdu do IV konferencji (1925 r.)', *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 1977, no. 103, p. 44.

¹³¹ Г. Костырченко, *Сталин против "космополитов". Власть и еврейская интеллигенция в СССР*, Москва 2010, pp. 38–42; Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, pp. 82–86; S. Baron, *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets*, New York 1975, pp. 216–17, 226–29.

35 per cent of the inner elite of the RCP(b) were Jews.¹³² In the years 1922–25, three Jews were among the seven members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee: Grigory Zinoviev (Radomyslski), Lev Kamenev (Rozenfeld), and Leon Trotsky (Bronstein).¹³³ In 1922, Jews constituted 5.2 per cent of the total number of party members, three times more than their share of the population of the Soviet Union. They held 13 per cent of the positions in the People's Commissariat of Trade, and a similar per centage in the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, and made up 11.8 per cent of the full-time government officials employed in Moscow.¹³⁴ A radical change in their position took place in the mid-1930s, when, on a par with other national groups, they found themselves subjected to Stalinist terror.¹³⁵ Interestingly, however, in 1934 they constituted 38.5 per cent of the entire leadership of the NKVD and managed seven of the ten key departments.¹³⁶

Perhaps the factor which historians underestimated most in assessing susceptibility to Communist agitation was youthful idealism. One of the Polish Jewish Communists, Roman Zambrowski, recalling the reasons why he joined the Communist movement, mentioned three factors: 1) his own life experiences, 2) literature, 3) 'youth – its strength, imagination, faith, uncompromising attitude'.¹³⁷ On the basis of KPP members' questionnaires, Zbigniew Szczygielski calculated that 43 per cent. of them had started their social and political activity at the age of 14 to 20, i.e. often before reaching the age of majority. In the narrower group of party officials, this per centage was 62.6 per cent.¹³⁸ The above-mentioned per centage of Jews in the KZMP (up to 50 per cent) clearly shows that Jewish youth was particularly susceptible to Communist agitation. A characteristic feature of the generation of 'Jewish-Polish Communists' was early and intense involvement in politics. Sisters, brothers and cousins of future KPP members also searched for

¹³² E. Mawdsley, S. White, *The Soviet Elite from Lenin to Gorbachev. The Central Committee and its Members 1917–1991*, Oxford 2000, p. 40.

¹³³ К. Залесский, *Империя Сталина. Биографический энциклопедический словарь*, Москва 2000, p. 527.

¹³⁴ Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union*, p. 47; L. Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, London 1960, pp. 349–50.

¹³⁵ Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, pp. 94–99.

¹³⁶ A. Polonsky, 'Jews and the Communism in Soviet Union and Poland', in *Jews and Leftist Politics. Judaism, Israel, Antisemitism, and Gender*, ed. J. Jacobs, Cambridge 2017, pp. 154–55.

¹³⁷ Zambrowski, *Wspomnienia*, p. 28.

¹³⁸ Szczygielski, *Członkowie KPP 1918–1938*, pp. 95–103.

ideology as a response to their difficult economic and social situations. Often, one family contained supporters of several groups who were in conflict with each other: Bundists, Zionists, Communists. Overall, the ideological climate was radical.¹³⁹ As Ezra Mendelsohn wrote: “Interwar Poland was certainly not a paradise for Jews, but it was a paradise for their contemporary politics.”¹⁴⁰

The radical organisations also made it possible to free oneself from the existing ties and social hierarchies. Jewish youth from conservative homes sought an escape from the influence of their parents, whose traditional educational ideals and views were relics of a bygone era for the young. The emancipation of some Jews from the domination of Orthodoxy continued throughout the interwar period, which was related to the popularity of both Zionism and left-wing movements. In the autobiographies of many young Jews and Jewish women, an overwhelming will to act, be active and ‘break away’ from the tutelage of their parents and the conservative milieu is repeated.¹⁴¹

In practical terms, the road to Communist organisations led through reading, and most of all, through other people. Communists sought to infiltrate legal organisations such as scout troops, sports clubs, and trade unions, and agitated among their members. In high schools [*gymnazja*], they reached out to pre-selected individuals and gradually drew them into their movement. They became mentors for younger colleagues.¹⁴² As Tadeusz Zabłudowski recalled, numerous Marxist circles were created, for example, among students of the Merchants’ Association High School [*Gimnazjum Zgromadzenia Kupców*] in Warsaw, which was attended by young people from petty-bourgeois and intellectual families.¹⁴³

It should also be remembered that many of the Communists convicted of anti-state activities were in prison, where they continued their agitation and recruitment activities.

¹³⁹ Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 56.

¹⁴⁰ Mendelsohn, *Jews of Central and Eastern Europe*, p. 64.

¹⁴¹ K. Zieliński, ‘Uwiedzeni, zmanipulowani, zdesperowani? Młodzież komunistyczna w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej’, in *Procesy socjalizacji w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1914–1939. Zbiór studiów*, ed. A. Landau-Czajka, K. Sierakowska, Warszawa 2013, p. 91.

¹⁴² Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 62–63. Artur Kowalski vividly describes this method of agitation in his memoirs: id., *Kochałem ją nad życie. Wspomnienia b. komunisty*, Rosenheim 1986, pp. 107–12.

¹⁴³ AAN, Collection of personal files of workers’ activists, Z 5733, Files of Tadeusz Zabłudowski, Biography, 22 March 1950, p. 5.

Prisons were a particular breeding ground for Communist cadres. A researcher of Jewish criminal circles has stated: "Political prisoners organised in communes helped (they provided food, tobacco, newspapers) to anyone who decided to adopt their worldview. Jewish prisoners, often torn from the homogeneous environment of the closed Jewish community and crammed into the cogs of the Polish prison machine, easily succumbed to the influence of Communists, both Poles and Jews"¹⁴⁴

When looking for an answer to the question of why Jewish youth flocked to Communism, one should also consider the theories and observations explaining Jewish radicalism in terms of the cultural heritage of this nation. They show certain 'structural' convergences and elements common to Communism (Marxism) and Jewish spirituality (Judaism). This mainly concerns such traditional values as messianic longings, intellectualism and love of knowledge.¹⁴⁵ Most of the Jews who joined left-wing movements were brought up in traditional schools. Gerald Sorin, analysing Jewish radicalism in America in the early twentieth century, argued that Jewish revolutionaries (most often emigrants from Central Europe) formed a prophetic minority that was inspired by the spirit of Biblical principles of justice, reinterpreted for the modern world.¹⁴⁶

While joining Communism meant a rebellion against religion and traditional Jewish values, the young people still remained a product of the old world. The heritage of the *shtetl* in the form of historically shaped values and attitudes was embedded in them subconsciously.¹⁴⁷ Cultural traditions can be transmitted in an indirect, elusive and barely discernible way, and even by direct contradiction.¹⁴⁸

The Communists were atheists, but Communism was in fact a form of pseudo-religion. For the Communists, Marxism-Leninism was a theory explaining everything, a global interpretation of the universe. Formally, it was based on rationalism and hard scientific laws, while at the same time it promised to fulfil the eternal human dreams of a paradise on earth; for these reasons, it was repeatedly compared to a 'secular religion'. According to Raymond Aron, it fulfilled the basic functions that sociology attributes

¹⁴⁴ M. Rodak, 'Izolacja więzienna jako czynnik sprzyjający akulturacji. Z badań nad przestępczością żydowską w województwie lubelskim w okresie międzywojennym', in *Wokół akulturacji i asymilacji Żydów na ziemiach polskich*, ed. K. Zieliński, Lublin 2010, p. 147.

¹⁴⁵ Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 222; Schatz, 'Zagadka pokolenia żydowskich komunistów', pp. 12–14.

¹⁴⁶ Sorin, *The Prophetic Minority*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 37–38.

¹⁴⁸ G. Sholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, New York 1971, p. 1.

to religion. Apart from interpreting history, it established a hierarchy of values and moral principles. The messianism it proclaimed evoked feelings similar to religious ones.¹⁴⁹

Joining the Communist movement was usually preceded by a departure from the religion of one's ancestors, typical of adolescence. Rebellion against authority and age-old religious and social principles often led to a 'nihilistic moral void'. There was then a natural desire for a 'simple catechism', i.e. for a new system of values to replace the one which had been rejected.¹⁵⁰ Communism could fill such a void in the soul. Father Józef Maria Bocheński wrote: "Man is shaped in such a way that he needs a worldview, a constant faith, which must be able to explain to him the meaning of his thinking and acting. And that is what Marxism-Leninism does"¹⁵¹

One of the main elements of Marxism as a 'new faith' was the messianic idea it contained – the myth of salvation. It was a secular application of the religious concept that history is heading towards the fulfilment of the ultimate goal of Paradise on earth. The role of the Messiah was played by the proletariat, as it becomes "the new Israel, the people chosen by God, the deliverer and creator of the future kingdom of heaven on earth"¹⁵²

Bocheński derived Communist messianism from Christian sources;¹⁵³ however, according to Schatz, it had more in common with Jewish messianism, one which was clearly oriented towards the temporal world. While Christian messianism saw salvation as an event in the realm of "the spiritual and invisible, the reflective soul, within the private world of each individual", Jewish messianism concerned this world, and treated the act of redemption "as an event that takes place in public, on the stage of history and among the community of mankind". Salvation was understood as "peace, justice, harmony and perfection, both for the individual and for society as a whole"¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ R. Aron, *L'Opium des intellectuels* (Paris, Calmann-Lévy 1955), trans. into Polish by C. Miłosz as *Opium intelektualistów*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 295–99.

¹⁵⁰ A. Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony*, part 1, Warszawa 1990, p. 79; Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 66.

¹⁵¹ J.M. Bocheński, *Marksizm-leninizm. Nauka czy wiara?*, Komorów 2006, pp. 136–37.

¹⁵² Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 221; N. Berdyaev, *The Russian Revolution*, Ann Arbor 1961, pp. 69–70.

¹⁵³ In his view the proletariat, in the role of the Messiah, evoked associations with Christ, as he was free from 'original sin' (i.e. private ownership of the means of production) and suffered for the sins of others (Bocheński, *Marksizm-leninizm*, pp. 27–28).

¹⁵⁴ Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 38–39.

Messianic longings have had a long tradition in Jewish history. They exploded several times in the form of dynamic social movements, the most famous of which was the Sabbatai Zvi movement in the mid-seventeenth century. The Jewish messianic idea was multidimensional, holding both a national and a universal aspect. It induced some emancipating Jews to join revolutionary movements. Marxist's secularised messianism gave them a sense of mission and the certainty of victory. One of Schatz's interlocutors stated: "I believed in Stalin and the party just as my father believed in the Messiah".¹⁵⁵

Messianism also had its own kind of popular dimension, characterised by apocalyptic thinking, especially in times of poverty and persecution. The final salvation was to be preceded by wars, catastrophes and catastrophes called 'the birth pangs of the Messiah'. In periods of heightened messianic expectations, messianic activism grew: that is, the belief that the course of history should be accelerated. 'Hastenors of the End Times' emerged, condemned by Jewish religious and secular leaders.¹⁵⁶

As in traditional Judaism, Jewish Communists often had great respect for science and education. They were characterised by a pious attitude towards the works of Marx and other 'classics', and the belief that they contained the deepest truths, which could be reached through patient exegesis.¹⁵⁷ The discussions were based on the methods used in traditional Talmudic studies, i.e. memorising long parts of the text and then interpreting them in the manner of the traditional *pilpul*. The sense of this method lay in the search for common thought within seemingly contradictory statements. The Communists themselves called it a 'Talmudic art'.¹⁵⁸

Conclusions

The stereotype of *Żydokomuna* present in Polish society during the Second Polish Republic mainly resulted from observations of real events. Jews played a large role in the Polish and Russian revolutionary movements, and they were then very visible in the structures of Communist power after 1917 in Soviet Russia and on the Polish territories temporarily occupied by the Red Army in 1920. Their participation in the Polish Communist movement increased even more after they

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 40–41, 140.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 41–42.

¹⁵⁷ Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 224.

¹⁵⁸ Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, pp. 157–58.

joined the ranks of the KPP, together with the splinter factions from the Bund and the *Poalei Siyon-Left*, and was several times higher than the share of the Jewish population in the society of the Second Polish Republic. Jewish people made up about 30 per cent of all KPP members, and in the party youth group (KMZP) the figure reached as high as 50 per cent. In the party elite, activists of Jewish origin constituted around 40 per cent, and predominated in the leadership's mid-level cadres.

Of course, the vast majority of Polish Jews rejected the Communist ideology and methods. They were supported by a maximum 7 per cent of Jewish voters. However, this Communist minority played such an important role in the entire movement that it caught the eye of Polish public opinion. The local press frequently reported arrests and trials of Communists with Jewish surnames, which perfectly perpetuated the stereotype of *Żydokomuna*.

The results of Schatz's sociological analysis and the research of Polish historians contradict the common and widespread thesis that Communists of Jewish origin automatically ceased to be Jews when they became Communists. Such 'red assimilation' concerned primarily intelligentsia and party elites. On the other hand, the majority of Jews joining the Communist movement retained their Jewish identity, although they rebelled against the traditions and values of their parents. Half of those belonging to the party elite also claimed to be Jewish. The social structure of this group reflected the overrepresentation of this group in some social layers: the petty bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie.

The reasons for the significant participation of Jews in the Communist movement cannot be explained (as is often done) solely in terms of their difficult social situation and discrimination. Rather, it was a combination of many factors of various natures, both universal and specifically Jewish. The general causes common to all nationalities were poverty, the idealism of youth and the search for a 'new faith'. In the 1920s, the Jews were fascinated by the equality of national minorities in the Soviet Union and the participation of their fellows in the local power structures. On the other hand, the specifically Jewish features were the inclination towards internationalism (cosmopolitanism) and certain elements common to Marxism and Jewish spirituality, above all messianism. Among some Jews, their aversion to Catholicism and Poland as a migrant country probably also played a role.

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SUMMARY

The article describes the participation of Jews in the revolutionary movement in Russia (especially in Poland) before World War I; the social structure of the Jewish population in Poland; the path of the splinter groups from Jewish left-wing parties to the Communist Workers' Party of Poland (KPP); the attitude of Jewish radicals towards the Bolshevik aggression against Poland in 1920; the number of Jews in the Polish Communist movement, their identity, and their motives for joining the Communist movement.

The share of Jews in the Polish Communist movement was several times higher than the share of the Jewish population in the society of the Second Polish Republic. Jews made up about 30 per cent of all KPP members, and in the party youth group the figure reached as high as 50 per cent. Activists of Jewish origin made up about 40 per cent of the party elite, and they even came to predominate in the middle ranks.

The reasons for the significant participation of Jews in the Communist movement cannot be explained (which is often done) solely by their difficult social situation and discrimination. Rather, it was a combination of many factors of a different nature, both universal and specifically Jewish.

KEYWORDS

Jews • Communism • Second Polish Republic •
Communist Party of Poland

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JEWIS IN PARTISAN UNITS IN THE HOME ARMY'S
RADOM-KIELCE DISTRICT
(A CONTRIBUTION TO THE RESEARCH)

The service of Jews in Polish army formations during the Second World War has been discussed many times in the scientific discourse.¹ This topic was also the subject of a scientific conference entitled 'Jews and the Polish Army in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', organised in 2016 by the Institute of National Remembrance's Sub-Branch in Kielce and the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce.²

At this point, it is necessary first of all to mention the studies – in Polish and English – conducted by Capt Benjamin Majerczak [Meirtchak], who documented the Jewish members of the Polish armed formations who fell in defence of their country. He devoted most of his work to the soldiers of the Polish Army formed in the USSR (the author himself served in the 1st Infantry Division of the 1st Polish Army) and the soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in the West [*Polskie Siły Zbrojne*

¹ C. Henschel, 'Juden im Militär. Erfahrung und Erinnerung im 19. and 20. Jahrhundert', *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 2013, no. 12; J.D. Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews 1939–1945*, Cambridge 2015; id., *Polskie Państwo Podziemne i Żydzi w czasie II wojny światowej*, transl. M. Macińska, Warszawa 2018 (the Polish edition differs from the English one); *Żydzi w Polsce w służbie Rzeczypospolitej 1939–1945. Wybór źródeł*, ed. A.K. Kunert, Warszawa 2002.

² *Żydzi i wojsko polskie w XIX i XX wieku*, ed. T. Domański, E. Majcher-Ociesa, Warszawa 2020.

na Zachodzie], presenting the scale of the phenomenon in Poland itself to only a small extent. In this area, he first compiled the names of those killed during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943 and the Warsaw Rising in 1944. He also included members of the People's Army and soldiers of the Peasants' Battalions [*Bataliony Chłopskie*, BCh] from the Lublin region in his research. On the other hand, he described the Jewish soldiers of the Home Army to only a very limited extent.³

Another example is the work of Joshua D. Zimmerman; this author presented the Home Army in a negative light, attempting to prove that the Armed Forces within Poland prohibited the admission of people of Jewish nationality.⁴ In turn, Christopher R. Browning, while describing the fate of the German forced labour camp in Starachowice, showed people serving in the Home Army as having deterred and driven away those Jews who managed to escape German captivity.⁵

Nor was he the only researcher who failed to study the fate of the Jewish soldiers in the Home Army's ranks. This topic is omitted in most works on the military endeavours by the people of the Mosaic faith; historians dealing with the history of the Polish Underground State and the Home Army devote little space to it. Information on this subject can primarily be found in the memoirs of veterans describing their comrades-in-arms (these works are cited in the footnotes later in the article).

Perversely, one may also conclude that it is precisely because of this modest source base that no one has so far undertaken to elaborate on this issue. There are also few materials about the Jews in the Home Army in the Archives of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Neither have the testimonies of Bernard Marek⁶ or Szymon Datner⁷ yielded much fruit in this respect.

³ B. Meirtchak, *Jews-Officers in the Polish Armed Forces 1939–1945*, Tel Aviv 2001; id., *Żydzi – żołnierze wojsk polskich polegli na frontach II wojny światowej*, transl. Z. Rosiński, Warszawa 2001.

⁴ Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground*.

⁵ Ch.R. Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp*, New York 2011.

⁶ Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; hereinafter: AŻIH), The testimony of Bernard Marek, S/333/83, Stanisław Olczyk, Józef Garas, On Jewish partisans in the Kielce region, copies of letters from 1947; *ibid.*, S/333/112, List of Jewish partisan (based on press reports); *ibid.*, S/333/169, Jews in the resistance and the underground, notes; *ibid.*, S/333/170, Jews in the resistance and the underground, notes.

⁷ AŻIH, The testimony of Szymon Datner, S/340. Grzegorz Berendt criticised Datner's research in his article 'Żydzi zbiegli z gett i obozów śmierci', in *Zagłada Żydów na polskiej prowincji*, ed. A. Sitarek, M. Trębacz, E. Wiatr, Łódź 2012, pp. 121–24.

On the other hand, the information gathered by the Association of Jews, Former Participants in the Armed Struggle with Fascism [*Związek Żydów Byłych Uczestników Walki Zbrojnej z Faszyzmem*, ZŻBUWZzF], which also includes documents from the Association of Jewish Partisans in Poland [*Związek Partyzantów Żydów w Polsce*, ZPŻP] which merged with it,⁸ confirms the image of the community of Jewish veterans that predominates in the general consciousness. For obvious reasons, these materials cannot be the sole source for research, as they only contain information about the fate of those Jews who remained in Poland after the Second World War, or who became involved in veterans' activities.

An analysis of the personal files and petitions for decorations which have been preserved allows us to characterise this community in greater detail. Among the members of the ZŻBUWZzF, soldiers from the front units of the Red Army and the Polish Army formed in the USSR from 1941 clearly predominate.⁹ However, this group is not directly related to the present study.

Therefore, when considering the group of Jewish partisans mentioned in the title, one should refer to the information (dating probably from mid-1945) when the ZPŻP numbered 727 veterans (532 men and 195 women), including 41 officers,¹⁰ 106 NCOs and 580 rank-and-file soldiers. In terms

⁸ The Union of Jewish Partisans in Poland was established on 19 November 1944 in Lublin. It was made up of members of partisan units and participants in battles in ghettos and camps. In mid-1945, it had 727 members, and in August 875 (it never exceeded 1000 members). From September 1945, it was a member of the Organising Committee of Participants in the Armed Struggle with Germany [*Komitet Organizacyjny Uczestników Walki Zbrojnej z Niemcami*]. The ZPŻP, whose leading activists belonged to the Polish Workers' Party, declared their subordination to the Communist authorities and hostility towards any other form of opposition (including the AK and the Polish government in London). At their initiative, on 20 April 1947, the Association of Jews, Former Participants in the Armed Struggle with Fascism, was established, and the ZPŻP became part of this new organisation (AŻIH, Association of Jews, Former Participants in the Armed Struggle with Fascism [hereinafter: ZŻBUWZzF], 318/20, Personal files – statistical data, Letter from the chairman of the ZPŻP to the National Organising Committee of the Congress of Participants in the Armed Struggle with Germany, Warsaw, 27 August 1945, p. 2; A. Grabski, *Żydowski ruch kombatancki w Polsce w latach 1944–1949*, Warszawa 2002; website of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, [http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Zwiazek_Partyzantow_Zydow_\(ZPZ\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Zwiazek_Partyzantow_Zydow_(ZPZ)), accessed 22 February 2018.

⁹ AŻIH, ZŻBUWZzF, 318/22, Personal files of veterans.

¹⁰ It is worth recalling the names of the Jewish officers: 1 lieutenant colonel (Gustaw Alef-Bolkowiak 'Bolek'), 3 majors (Tomczyn, Margulis, Jaworek), 6 captains (Grynszpan, Leo, Gruber, Doroszewicz, Bednarczyk, Trokki) and 31 lieutenants and second lieutenants (in the list without surnames, only Lt Josef Ozik could be identified).

of the formations in which they operated during the war, the numbers were as follows: 218 people belonged to Jewish organisations, 52 people to Polish groups, 222 people to Soviet groups and 235 people to mixed units. The members included 145 wounded and 30 war invalids. While preparing the list, the ZPŻP secretariat also emphasised that 101 members had received military distinctions, including 5 who had received the Grunwald Cross [*Krzyż Grunwaldu*] and 4 the Cross of Valour [*Krzyż Walecznych*].¹¹ With regard to party affiliations, 72 members belonged to the Polish Workers' Party, 2 to the Polish Socialist Party, 2 to the *Bund* All-Jewish Workers' Union, 12 to Zionist organisations, while 639 members were not members of any party.¹²

An analysis of the personal material shows that during the Second World War the ZPŻP's members were primarily active in Soviet partisan units operating in the eastern provinces of the Second Polish Republic, and partially also in the areas incorporated by the German occupiers into the General Government. The armed groups in which the Jews operated were mostly formed and commanded by Soviet paratroopers, and from 1944 they were indirectly trained and directed by two decision-making centres: the Belarusian Partisan Staff, and the Polish Partisan Staff based in Moscow.

The second group of Jewish partisans were members of the People's Guard and People's Army units who served in all the Communist guerrilla structures; the third were soldiers from the Jewish Fighting Organisation [*Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa*], including a small group of survivors of the ghetto uprisings in Warsaw and Białystok (the collection also includes posthumous petitions for participation in the war). Finally, there are those who acted in unrelated formations, created from below for the purposes of survival and self-defence.

The small group of 52 Jews serving in Polish formations in whom we are interested included soldiers of the Polish Army [*Wojsko Polskie*],¹³ the Polish

¹¹ The following were awarded the Grunwald Cross: Gustaw Alef-Bolkowiak, codename 'Bolek'; Tomczyn, Margulis, Jaworek, Grynspan; while the Cross of Valour was awarded to: Róża Durman, Dora Lask, Zelman Erenberg, Chaim Feferkorn.

¹² AŻIH, ZŻBUWZZF, 318/20, Personal files – statistical data, Statistical material on members of the ZPŻP, [Warsaw], [1945], p. 1.

¹³ Before the outbreak of the Second World War, Jews served in the Polish Army. As Polish citizens, they were subject to the obligation of universal military service, and also held positions as professional soldiers and officers in permanent service. Like all those subject to mobilisation, Jews also

Armed Forces in the West,¹⁴ the National Armed Forces [*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne*]¹⁵ and the Union of Armed Struggle – the Home Army [*Związek Walki Zbrojnej – Armia Krajowa*], among others. Among the surviving personal questionnaires of members of the ZPŻP, only two declared membership of the Home Army's partisan units (Julian Aleksandrowicz and Izrael Czyżyk, mentioned below).

So what motivated the small, even nugatory number of Jews in the ranks of the Home Army? We will probably never know their reasons, if only because there are so few surviving accounts. On the national scale, there were probably several hundred Jews serving in the Home Army. In many cases, their pre-war political views determined whether they chose to join particular formations or establish their own armed groups. However, Polish Jews often had no choice in which structures they would serve; they were ready to join whichever organisation which could protect them against extermination by the Germans at a given moment. As Grzegorz Berendt wrote, “their contacts and cooperation resulted from the general conditions in a given area and the attitudes of individual commanders of a given formation”¹⁶.

The situation of the Jews was worsened by the experiences of Polish society in the eastern borderlands of the Second Polish Republic. After the USSR's attack on Poland on 17 September 1939, some people of Jewish nationality demonstrated their joy *en masse* at the Red Army's occupation of Polish

took part in the fighting during the defensive war of 1939, such as Ajzyk Bloch, who volunteered to join the army as a reservist and fought in the 21st ‘Children of Warsaw’ Infantry Regiment in defence of the capital. On the other hand, 2nd Lt Dr. Julian Aleksandrowicz was mobilised to the 74th Upper Silesian Infantry Regiment in Lubliniec, with which he went to the front as the head of a battalion dressing point (AŻIH, ZŻBUWZzF, 318/36, Ajzyk Blocha award petition, Wrocław, 12 February 1948, pp. 42–3; *ibid.*, Petition for the decoration of Julian Aleksandrowicz, [Kraków], [1947], p. 9).

¹⁴ Chaim Wadunhauser (aka Czesław Czabański) was one of those who transferred from the Polish Army in the USSR to the 2nd Polish Corps. He followed the corps' entire combat route up to the battles for Monte Cassino and Bologna (*ibid.*, 318/23, Declarations of requests, Chaim Wadunhauser's declaration, Warsaw, n.d., p. 51).

¹⁵ Jankiel Klajman (aka Jan Kowalski), codename ‘Jaś’, declared his service in the NSZ branch in the Lublin region. In 1942, he escaped from a transit camp in Radogoszcz in Łódź (or from a transport to the Majdanek concentration camp). For some time he hid in the forests of the Lublin region. He joined the partisan unit he encountered there: the NSZ unit under the command of NN ‘Jacek’. Due to his young age (born 1928), he was the orderly commander (*ibid.*, 318/23, Personal files, Combatants, G–O questionnaires, Jankiel Klajman's questionnaire, [Warsaw], [1945], p. 91).

¹⁶ G. Berendt, review of ‘*Żydowski ruch kombatancki w Polsce w latach 1944–1949*, August Grabski, Warszawa 2002’, *Dzieje Najnowsze* 2004, vol. 36, no. 3, p. 250.

territory. Moreover, they actively participated in the activities of the Soviet occupation administration, acting against the Polish people as they did so. As Marek Wierzbicki emphasised, after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, in the Borderlands in 1941:

[...] hostility was shown to everyone associated with Soviet power, and sometimes there was even retaliation against sympathisers with Soviet power, regardless of their nationality, i.e. Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles, Russians, and especially the Jews, for their cooperation – whether real or only imaginary – with the Soviet authorities or for showing pro-Soviet sympathies in 1939–1941.¹⁷

The news of the cooperation between Jews and Soviets spread throughout the territory of occupied Poland, and did not inspire people in other parts of the country to show any confidence in working together at all, let alone in any resistance activity. The stereotypes rooted in Polish society could also have played a role: the Jew as the enemy of the Polish nation. Jewish activity during the Soviet occupation had further consequences: Poles came to consider the entire Jewish community as hostile to the Polish state.¹⁸

In wartime conditions, it was not only those collaborating openly with the occupiers who were most feared. Attention was also paid to the people who conducted espionage and intelligence activities, who provided the German security services with information about pro-independence activities. The Home Army counterintelligence also warned “against Jewish agents who conceal themselves or mostly work legally on either side (Commies [*komuna*] or Gestapo)”¹⁹ In some situations, the fear of leaks turned into greater suspicions, or even open psychosis, towards anyone encountered by chance, for example at places where partisan units were stationed.

¹⁷ M. Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Żydzi w zaborze sowieckim. Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II RP pod okupacją sowiecką 1939–1941*, Warszawa 2007, p. 265.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

¹⁹ Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe Wojskowego Biura Historycznego (Central Military Archives of the Military History Office), IX.3.34.8., Home Army, Kraków District, Letter from Lt Bronisław Waclawski, codename ‘Domian’, to Department II (Intelligence) of the Home Army’s Nowy Targ District Command, n.p., 15 December 1943, unpaginated.

This fear applied not only to people of Jewish nationality, but also to representatives of other ethnic minorities or foreigners resident in Poland during the war. This sometimes resulted in the fact that, for security reasons – as a preventive measure – some Home Army commanders issued orders warning against accepting non-Poles into the partisan units subordinate to them. One example may be the guidelines issued by Brig. Brunon Olbrycht, codename ‘Olza’, commander of the Home Army’s *Śląsk Cieszyński* Operational Group. In a letter of 13 October 1944, he forbade his commanders from accepting foreigners (Czechs, Slovaks, Ukrainians, Germans and Russians) into the ranks of the Home Army, although he did not mention Jews in this document.²⁰

Fear of foreigners appeared more often. For example, a letter from the commander of the Home Army’s Iłża District of 2 September 1944 concerned the suspicious activities of Gestapo units which from mid-August 1944 were believed to be organising espionage networks with the aim of identifying the Home Army’s commands and partisan units. In this light, the commandant ordered caution in accepting new candidates for units; however, he did not categorically forbid any groups from serving in the ranks of the AK partisan units.²¹

Dariusz Libionka, on the other hand, has drawn attention to just such a top-down ban on accepting Jews into the ranks of the Home Army. To confirm this idea, he offered a very narrow interpretation of the instructions to Home Army commanders entitled ‘Guidelines for partisans’ issued on 13 March 1943. At this point, it should be noted that the guerrilla units included in the Polish Armed Forces after the creation of the Sabotage Division ([*Kierownictwo Dywersji*], ‘Kedyw’, whose tasks were directly referred to in the instructions cited) were initially organised and recruited based on local communities; their soldiers, after completing their tasks, were supposed to blend back in with everyday life

²⁰ Ibid., Letter from Brig Brunon Olbrycht, codename ‘Olza’ (commander of the Home Army’s *Śląsk Cieszyński* Operational Group) to Maj Adam Stabrawa, codename ‘Borowy’, inspector of the Home Army in Nowy Sącz, n.p., October 23, 1944, unpagged.

²¹ Muzeum Jacka Malczewskiego w Radomiu (Jacek Malczewski Museum in Radom), DH/3334, Letter from the commander of the Iłża Home Army District regarding the functioning of the Gestapo, n.p., 2 September 1944, unpagged.

under occupation.²² The instructions were to “basically organise small, efficient and elusive troops not exceeding a platoon [in size]. For special operations and under favourable conditions, they can be combined into a larger unit”.²³ This then rules out the hypothesis put forward by Libionka.

He also stated that after the collapse of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the fighters of the Jewish Combat Organisation who had evacuated from the ghetto were not included in the partisan units of the Home Army; as evidence of this, he quoted the opinion of Icchak Cukierman, codename ‘Antek’:

As fighters – from the point of view of the Home Army – we were redundant everywhere on Polish soil. This does not mean that there were no people among them for whom the humanitarian aspect was important. But their organisation wasn’t geared to that. The Home Army was not an aid organisation, it was a military organisation. And as such, it did not need us, either in the fighting ghetto or in the Aryan part of Warsaw. We were also unnecessary for them in the partisan fight – as Jews, we were redundant everywhere²⁴

²² Underground partisan units were by their nature quite hermetic bodies. These observations result from many years of studies of soldiers’ biographies, as individuals and in fighting units. The structures of the underground, and then of the sabotage divisions, were made up of trusted people, most often relatives and colleagues who had often known each other from the pre-war period. The reliance on only familiar persons ensured the highest level of discretion. The networks of such connections meant that successive soldiers admitted into the unit had received recommendations from people who were already part of the Home Army structures, which ensured counterintelligence security and prevented the admission of suspicious or unchecked people. One example of a family network is the Stefanowski family, in 1943 serving in the 3rd platoon of the 1st Home Army’s ‘Ponury’ Partisan Group: Lt Jerzy Oskar Stefanowski, codename ‘Habdank’ (platoon commander), his brother cadet sergeant Władysław Stefanowski, codename ‘Jawa’ (non-commissioned officer); and their sister Ludmiła Stefanowska, codename ‘Zjawa’ (liaison officer). Other soldiers from this platoon were related to each other: rifleman Jerzy Bartnik, codename ‘Magik’; rifleman Wojciech Olbrycht, codename ‘Kosa’; and nurse Krystyna Witecka *née* Olbrycht, codename ‘Przekora’. There are many more examples of units based on friendships. This is clearly visible, for example, in the 1st platoon of the Home Army’s 1st ‘Ponury’ Partisan Group, whose soldiers came almost entirely from Bodzentyn, a small town where everyone knew each other (M. Jedynak, ‘Mieszkańcy gminy Bodzentyn w oddziałach partyzanckich Armii Krajowej “Ponurego” i “Nurta”’, in *Z dziejów Bodzentyna w okresie II wojny światowej. W 70. rocznicę pacyfikacji 1943–2013*, ed. L. Michalska-Bracha, M. Przeniosło, M. Jedynak, Kielce 2013).

²³ ‘Appendix no. 1 to order no. 252/Kdw by the Home Army commander regarding guidelines for organising and conducting partisan warfare], Warsaw, 13 March 1943, in *Dokumenty do dziejów Zgrupowań Partyzanckich AK “Ponury”*, ed. M. Jedynak, Kielce–Kraków 2014, pp. 75–78.

²⁴ After D. Libionka, ‘ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu RP wobec eksterminacji Żydów polskich’, in *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945. Studia i materiały*, vol. 24, ed. A. Żbikowski, Warszawa 2006, p. 93.

One must agree with the opinion that there was no room for Jews in the Home Army. Indeed, it was not an aid organisation, but an integral part of the Polish Armed Forces, and had other fundamental goals. The fighters evacuated from the Warsaw ghetto were not directed to partisan units outside of Warsaw, as in mid-May 1943 these units were largely still being formed. As part of the Home Army's 'Kedyw' Sabotage Division, which was being reorganised in January that year, the sabotage groups operated in an irregular manner, based on 'small warfare' tactics (i.e. fighting on their own territory). Meanwhile, newcomers were to be provided with housing and all the other conditions necessary to live in the new area.²⁵ In the Home Army's Radom-Kielce District, the first formation that could successfully conceal a larger number of Jews was the Home Army's 'Ponury' Partisan Groups, organised in mid-June 1943 under the command of 'Silent Unseen' [*Cichociemny*]²⁶ Lieutenant Jan Piwnik, codename 'Ponury'.

In connection with the conditions under the German occupation presented above (including mutual fears among the communities), it can be stated that the circumstances for the Jews joining the Home Army units sometimes represented a compromise between their personal views and the situation in a given area. This in turn meant that some of the Jews who served in the Home Army during the war did not disclose their origin. It is impossible to establish today what the main reason for this discretion was. It could have resulted from fear of possible anti-Semitic behaviour among their Polish comrades-in-arms; however, it might also have been an unconditional reflex related to the general principle of looking after one's own safety. This specific form of Jewish underground activity, even among 'their own people', resulted from over three years of everyday war experiences. It protected both those in hiding and those who helped them from being exposed. In addition, hiding one's identity was facilitated by the principle of using organisational codenames within the underground. None of the comrades in arms were to ask for their true personal data. Strict secrecy was the rule in this regard, covering both the soldiers and their families.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 96.

²⁶ *Cichociemni*, a.k.a. *Cichociemni Spadochroniarze Armii Krajowej*, the 'Silent Unseen', were elite special-operations paratroopers of the Polish Army in exile, created in Great Britain during the Second World War to operate in occupied Poland.

Of the individual cases presented later in the article, around 30 per cent of them admitted being of Jewish origin (however, this dozen or so soldiers cannot constitute a representative sample to draw any far-reaching conclusions).²⁷

Meanwhile, after many years, these habits of discretion and concealing origins mean there is little broader knowledge about the citizens of Jewish nationality within the ranks of the Home Army. Not much information has been preserved in their wake. Often, apart from stating the fact that they did indeed serve in Home Army units, it is impossible to outline their wartime fates in greater detail. This does not allow us to make detailed analyses of individual cases, or to get to know the broader context of their life choices. We only know that Jews served in the Home Army from scattered and partial analyses of the phenomenon.

This thesis is confirmed by the queries and research carried out after the Second World War by Bernard Marek – historian, journalist, and from 1949 to 1966 director of the Jewish Historical Institute. In his testimony, located in the Institute's archives, we can find numerous notes devoted to Jewish resistance fighters in the Home Army. These include a note on a group of ten Jews who served in the Home Army's 'Bartkiewicz'²⁸ and 'Krybar' Groups²⁹ before the outbreak of the Warsaw Rising. After 20 September 1944, both these units were merged into the 36th Infantry Regiment of the Home Army's Academic Legion.³⁰ After the collapse of the uprising, on 5 October 1944, the soldiers of the 36th Home Army Regiment

²⁷ M. Melchior, 'Uciekinierzy z gett po "stronie aryjskiej" na prowincji dystryktu warszawskiego – sposoby przetrwania', in *Prowincja noc. Życie i zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim*, ed. B. Engelking, J. Leociak, D. Libionka, Warszawa 2007, pp. 350–55.

²⁸ The Home Army's 'Bartkiewicz' Group: a Home Army unit under the command of Maj Włodzimierz Zawadzki, codename 'Bartkiewicz', who fought from 5 August to 3 October 1944 in the Warsaw Uprising in Śródmieście. After 20 September, the Group was transformed into the 2nd and 3rd battalions of the 36th Home Army Infantry Regiment; for more see M. Kledzik, *Zgrupowanie AK majora Bartkiewicza*, Warszawa 2002.

²⁹ The Home Army's 'Krybar' Group (Combat Group 'Krybar', from 3 September 1944 the Home Army's 'Powiśle' Group): a Home Army unit under the command of Capt Cyprian Odorkiewicz, codename 'Krybar', from 3 September 1944 under Maj Stanisław Błaszczak, codename 'Róg'; this unit fought in the Warsaw Rising until 6 September 1944 in Powiśle District. After 20 September, the soldiers of 'Krybar' joined the 36th Home Army Infantry Regiment; for more see W. Rosłoniec *Grupa "Krybar". Powiśle 1944*, Warszawa 1989.

³⁰ The 36th Infantry Regiment of the Home Army's Academic Legion: a unit of the Home Army under the command of Lt Stanisław Błaszczak, codename 'Róg', part of the Home Army's Stefan Okrzeja 28th Infantry Division. It was established after 20 September 1944 from the merger of three Home Army Groups: 'Bartkiewicz', 'Róg' and 'Krybar'; for more, see Kledzik, *Zgrupowanie AK*.

marched into German captivity; unfortunately, there is no detailed information about the fate of its Jewish soldiers.³¹

At least a dozen people of Jewish origin also served in the Home Army's 'Gustaw' Battalion, whose roots lay in the National Military Organisation [*Narodowa Organizacja Wojskowa*],³² and in the Home Army's 'Harnaś' Battalion formed on its basis.³³ Among the Jewish soldiers who took an active part in the Warsaw Rising were Józef Levi (Lewi), codename 'Zdzisław', a doctor from the sanitary unit of the Home Army's 'Harnaś' Battalion, who worked during the battle at the infirmary on 4 Mazowiecka Street in the Northern Śródmieście district.³⁴

However, according to the findings of Edward Kossoy, at least 1150 Jews took part in the Warsaw Rising itself (the total of all the formations taking part in the fighting). These included fighters who had survived the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Jews liberated from the *KL Warschau* in Gęsiówka in the first days of the Warsaw Rising, and those who were already hiding in the city. Most of them did not reveal their true origins, which makes more detailed calculations difficult.³⁵

On the other hand it is known from individual reports that, for example, Second Lieutenant Josef Ozik (aka Julian Dubrovnik), codename 'Nili' or 'Wili', served in the Home Army's Warsaw District. Until 1939 he had been a non-commissioned officer of the Polish Army, and after the defensive war in 1939 he was in *Stalag IA Stablack*, in today's Stabławki, from which he was either released or escaped. In March 1943, he joined the organisation – as he himself explained – “out of a desire

³¹ AŻIH, The testimony of Bernard Marek, S/333/170, Note 'Partyzantka w Polsce', n.p., n.d., p. 363.

³² The Home Army's 'Gustaw' Battalion: a Home Army unit under the command of Maj Ludwik Gawrych, codename 'Gustaw', who fought in the Warsaw Rising in the Old Town and in the city centre; for more see R. Bielecki, "Gustaw" – "Harnaś". *Dwa powstańcze bataliony*, Warszawa 1989.

³³ The Home Army's 'Harnaś' Battalion: a division of the Home Army established on 6 August 1944 on the basis of two companies of the Home Army's 'Gustaw' Battalion. It was commanded by 2nd Lt Marian Krawczyk, codename 'Harnaś'. During the Warsaw Rising, the unit fought in the Nowy Świat district. After 3 September 1944, it was reunited with the Home Army's 'Gustaw' Battalion, for more see *ibid.*

³⁴ K. Kosiński, "Ekonomia krwi". *Konspiracja narodowa w walczącej Warszawie: 1939–1944–1990*, Warszawa 2020, p. 543.

³⁵ E. Kossoy, 'Żydzi w Powstaniu Warszawskim', *Zeszyty Historyczne* 2004, no. 147, pp. 43–78. For more named examples of Jews participating in the Uprising's battles, see *Żydzi w powstańczej Warszawie*, Warszawa 2009; K. Bielawski, 'Żydzi w Powstaniu Warszawskim', on the *Virtual Shtetl* website, <https://shtetl.org.pl/pl/zydzy-w-powstaniu-warszawskim>, accessed 8 February 2021.

to fight Germany [*sic*] and take revenge for the tragedy of the Jewish nation”. Reaching the rank of sergeant, he was a company commander in the ‘Wampira’ unit; He ended the war in the ranks of the Home Army as a second lieutenant.³⁶

In turn, in the Home Army’s Piotrków Trybunalski sub-district, two or three unknown Jews joined the Home Army’s ‘Mściciel’ Partisan Unit in autumn 1942 under the command of Tadeusz Bartosiak, codename ‘Tadeusz’. They may have been the brothers Szymon and Szmul (Samuel) Cytrynowicz, who were known to have possessed firearms. However, it is impossible to unequivocally establish the nature of their association with the Home Army unit. As Wojciech Zawadzki emphasises, according to Zdzisław Ignacy Kiełbasiński, codename ‘Dąbał’ (deputy commander of the above-mentioned unit), these Jews may have been German informers and perpetrators of an ambush near Albertów on 3 January 1943. As a result of an investigation carried out by the Home Army command, they were sentenced to death for treason.³⁷

The figures obtained as a result of a query in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute correlate with the information published by the Home Army during the war. In August 1944, in the ‘Information Bulletin’ [*Biuletyn Informacyjny*], the main press organ of the Polish Underground State, there was a short message about foreigners and representatives of national minorities serving in the Polish Armed Forces: “Jews are also fighting in the ranks of the Home Army. Their number is, of course, relatively small in view of the almost total extermination of Polish Jews by the Germans. For example, in one division there are just three Jews. The commander of the Jewish Combat Organisation has called on all Jewish fighters to participate in the Home Army’s fight”.³⁸ It should be emphasised that this announcement was published in the official press organ of the Polish Underground

³⁶ AŻIH, ŻŻBUWZzF, 318/23, Personal files of veterans, Josef Ozik’s questionnaire, Warsaw, 11 July 1945, p. 146; *ibid.*, Opinion of the commander of the Special Political and Propaganda Group of the Capital City of Warsaw on Josef Ozik, Warszawa-Praga, 6 October 1944, p. 146.

³⁷ For unknown reasons, the sentence was carried out not only on two or three Jews from the Home Army’s ‘Mściciel’ Partisan Unit, but also on a group of a dozen or so Jews hiding in the nearby Czółno forest near Lubochnia, in the area where the unit operated; for more, see W. Zawadzki *Tajemnice Diablej Góry. Historia wyklętej miłości*, Końskie 2017, pp. 67–78.

³⁸ Studium Polski Podziemnej (The Polish Underground Movement Study Trust in London; hereinafter: SPP), Sources, 20, ‘Foreigners in the Home Army’, ‘Słowacy, Francuzi, Żydzi w szeregach AK’, *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, Warsaw, 18 August 1944, vol. 6, no. 55 (263), p. 2.

State. Similar materials from the era could probably include data on the service of the minorities in the Home Army, as referred to in the *Information Bulletin*.

In fact, some Jews did also find a place for themselves in the Home Army. They shared the plight and misery of guerrilla life together with their comrades-in-arms. They fought together against the German occupiers; they enjoyed victories and suffered defeats together. So far, little has been written in Polish historiography about the positive events related to the service of Jews in the Home Army. This study presents the fates of those representatives of the Jewish minority who, thanks to their active participation in the structures of Fighting Poland in the Kielce region, survived the Second World War,³⁹ the German occupation and the Holocaust.⁴⁰

At the end of 1942, during Aktion Reinhardt (part of the so-called final solution to the Jewish question), most of the ghettos in the Radom district were liquidated. The surviving Jews who had managed to avoid deportation to the death camps or forced labour camps remained in hiding. One way to survive in this situation was to join the partisan units, so the Jewish survivors sought opportunities to join the Home Army formations that had been active in the area since spring 1943.⁴¹

³⁹ The author is aware that some Home Army soldiers also murdered their comrades-in-arms of Jewish origin. The analysis of these cases is beyond the scope of this article. For the sake of order, however, at least two such tragic events should be mentioned: Rifleman Roman Olizarowski, codename 'Pomsta', a fugitive from the Warsaw ghetto. In 1943, a soldier of the long-range radio security unit, Lt Jan Kosiński, codename 'Inspektor Jacek', transferred in November to the Military Sabotage Division of the Home Army's 'Chosen Ones' [*Wybraniec*] unit. He was killed by soldiers after disclosing information about his origin (C. Chlebowski, *Pozdrowcie Góry Świętokrzyskie*, Warszawa 2017, p. 317; A. Ropelewski, *Wspomnienia z AK*, Warszawa 1957, pp. 46–48; A. Skibińska, J. Tokarska-Bakir, "Barabas" i Żydzi. Z historii oddziału AK "Wybraniec", *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2011, no. 7, pp. 78–82). Codename 'Miś', name unknown: a doctor in the Home Army's 'Barwy Białe' Partisan Unit. Suspected of spying on behalf of the Germans. Killed in spring 1944 on the order of unit commander Lt Kazimierz Olchowik, codename 'Zawisza' (J. Mazurek, A. Skibińska, "Barwy Białe" w drodze na pomoc walczącej Warszawie. Zbrodnia AK na Żydach', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2011, no. 7, p. 428).

⁴⁰ The activity of Jews in the Kielce region has so far only been studied in relation to the Communist formations (S. [Shmuel] Krakowski, "Żydzi w oddziałach partyzanckich Gwardii Ludowej i Armii Ludowej na Kielecczyźnie", *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 1968, no. 65–66, pp. 51–71).

⁴¹ A separate issue (which has been impossible to specify, due to the large number of persons whose data one would have to study within the Home Army's Radom-Kielce District) involves tracing the fate of the Poles of Jewish origin. For example Zdzisław Witebski, codename 'Poraj' and his sister Krystyna Rachtan *née* Witebska, codename 'Justyna', siblings serving in the 2nd Infantry Regiment of the Home Army Legions, came from an assimilated and secular Jewish family (Piotr Rachtan, 'Krystyna Maria Rachtan, dr nauk ekonomicznych [11 XI 1921 – 22 VI 2007]', Warsaw, 16 December 2017, typescript, p. 2 [author's private collection]).

One of these survivors was Henryk Kuperszmidt, codenames 'Bratek' & 'Kwiatek', from Grzybowa Góra near Skarżysko Kościelne, who, due to his Jewish origin, had been in hiding since autumn 1942. In June or July of the following year he joined the Home Army's 'Ponury' Partisan Groups under the command of 'Silent Unseen' Lieutenant Jan Piwnik, codename 'Ponury', and was assigned to the 1st Group under 'Silent Unseen' Lieutenant Eugeniusz Kaszyński, codename 'Nurt'. Throughout the 1943 campaign, he fought directly in the ranks of the 1st Platoon under the command of Second Lieutenant Euzebiusz Domoradzki, codename 'Grot'.⁴²

While he himself was safe in the ranks of the Home Army, on 7 July 1943, as a result of a denunciation, German policemen from the *Stützpunkt* at Mirzec carried out a raid in Skarżysko Kościelne and Grzybowa Góra. The punitive expedition was intended to find Kuperszmidt and Stefan Siczka from Skarżysko Kościelne, who were hiding from the Germans. "From Skarżysko Kościelne, the policemen kidnapped Helena (aged 37), Henryk (aged 13), Barbara (aged 1) Siczek, and Zbigniew (4) and Balbina (5) Łyżwa. Next, they abducted [Henryk's wife] Anna Kuperszmidt, 24 years old, and her daughter Leokadia, 1½ years old, from Grzybowa Góra. [...] All of them were then shot between Grzybowa Góra and Gadka".⁴³ They were buried in the forest at the place where they were executed, but their families later exhumed their relatives' bodies and buried them in the cemetery in Skarżysko Kościelne.⁴⁴

Now alone, Henryk Kuperszmidt remained until the end of the war in the Home Army's partisan units, which in summer 1944 were transformed into the

⁴² Chlebowski, *Pozdrowcie Góry*, p. 496.

⁴³ T. Domański, 'Działalność Stützpunktu w Mircu w latach 1942–1944', in *Historia Ziemi Starachowickiej*, vol. 2: *Polityka okupacyjnych władz niemieckich wobec ludności polskiej w powiecie starachowickim w latach 1939–1945*, ed. P. Rozwadowski, Starachowice 2010, p. 95; T. Domański, A. Jankowski, *Represje niemieckie na wsi kieleckiej 1939–1945*, Kielce 2011, pp. 203–04.

⁴⁴ Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records) in Warsaw, Files of Józef Rell, 7, Lists of platoon soldiers, districts, Letter from the head of the Skarżysko Kościelne commune to the Board of the District Association of Participants in the Armed Struggle for Independence and Democracy in Skarżysko-Kamienna, Skarżysko Kościelne, 24 February 1948, p. 4; Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Kielcach (Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Kielce; hereinafter: AIPN Ki), District Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation – Institute of National Remembrance in Kielce, 53/301, Photocopies of municipal court surveys regarding executions and mass graves, questionnaire no. 107 on mass executions and mass graves concerning Grzybowa Góra, Starachowice–Wierzbnik, 29 September 1945, pp. 9–10.

1st battalion of the 2nd Infantry Regiment of the Home Army Legions. During Operation Tempest [*Burza*], he served in the 2nd company under Second Lieutenant Marian Świdorski, codename 'Dzik'. In the period from 6 to 23 September 1944, he was temporarily assigned to the sanitary patrol of the 1st battalion of the 2nd Infantry Regiment of the Home Army Legions.⁴⁵ He ended the war as a senior rifleman [*starszy strzelec*, roughly equivalent to a private first class]. In 1945 he changed his name to Kwieciński.⁴⁶

It is worth adding that Kuperszmidt's sister Antońka was also in hiding at that time. She was a liaison officer of the Peasants' Battalions partisan unit under the command of Cpl Władysław Janiec, codename 'Rinaldi'.⁴⁷

Halina Kon (by her first marriage Zawadzka) also found shelter in the same unit as Kuperszmidt. In autumn 1942 she escaped from the Końskie ghetto shortly before its liquidation. On 3 and 7 November 1942, the Germans took the local Jews to the Treblinka II extermination camp in two transports (6000 and 3000 people). The last Jews from Łódź were transported to Szydłowiec on 6 and 7 January 1943, and from there they were sent to Treblinka II on 13 January 1943.⁴⁸

After escaping from Końskie, Halina Kon reached Warsaw, where she tried to hide, but she was forced to leave the capital after losing her forged Aryan papers. She reached Starachowice via Koluszki and Skarżysko-Kamienna. From October 1942 to spring 1943 she took shelter with a Polish family, the Słowiks, in Starachowice. This family had been collaborating with the Home Army's Starachowice Sub-District. Kon concealed herself with them, adopting a Polish

⁴⁵ Muzeum im. Orła Białego w Skarżysku-Kamiennej (White Eagle Museum in Skarżysko-Kamienna), The 'Nurt' Archives, Order from the commander of the 1st battalion of 2nd IR Leg HA no. 32/44, n.p., 6 September 1944, unpagged; *ibid.*, Order from the commander of the 1st battalion of 2nd IR Leg HA no. 36/44, n.p., 23 September 1944, unpagged.

⁴⁶ AIPN Ki, Provincial Office of Internal Affairs in Kielce (hereinafter: WUSW Kielce), 014/1025, The operational investigation of operation 'Szantaż', memo from a meeting with a secret collaborator, ps. 'Tadek', on 19 April 1968, pp. 119–19v.

⁴⁷ E. Kołomańska, 'Polskie podziemie niepodległościowe w ratowaniu Żydów na Kielecczyźnie w latach 1939–1945', in *Żydzi i wojsko polskie*, p. 240.

⁴⁸ H. Zawadzka, *Ucieczka z getta*, Warszawa 2001; 'Końskie', in *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life. Before and during the Holocaust*, vol. 2: *K-Sered*, ed. S. Spector, New York–Jerusalem 2001, p. 654; 'Końskie', in *The Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos during the Holocaust*, vol. 1: *A-M*, ed. G. Miron, Jerusalem 2009, pp. 340–41.

surname. At their request, she worked (in July 1943?) as a liaison officer during the unsuccessful action against the collector for the *Reichswerke Hermann Göring* company stores in Starachowice. After the arrest of the ringleaders, for security reasons the Home Army Sub-District Headquarters in Starachowice sent her to the nearest partisan unit; this was the aforementioned 1st Platoon of the 1st Group of the Home Army's 'Ponury' Partisan Groups, then commanded by Second Lieutenant Euzebiusz Domoradzki, codename 'Grot'.⁴⁹

In the forest, Halina took the pseudonym 'Malina' and was assigned to the sanitary service. The field hospital was managed by Second Lieutenant Dr Kazimierz Łotkowski, codename 'Zan'.⁵⁰ According to unconfirmed reports, the wife of Dr Łotkowski "had been a baptised Jew before the war. One of the neighbours reported this to the Germans and the woman was arrested. Kazik [Kazimierz Łotkowski] managed to escape and hide in the forest, while the fate of his wife is still unknown to this day".⁵¹

Halina Kon, codename 'Malina', stayed in the Home Army unit in Wykus in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains until autumn 1943. She was trained in the use of weapons and in first aid. As a nurse, she took part in the combat actions undertaken by the Home Army's 'Ponury' Partisan Groups. She shared the fate of all the other soldiers too, which she recalled as follows:

I took part in actions several times, sometimes in remote places. [...] I didn't know the names of the places we were sent to, or the people who we visited at night. I knew that most often these were people cooperating with the partisans. Sometimes, however, they were collaborators with the Germans, and our unexpected visits were a threat or even a punishment. Despite all the difficulties and the constant danger in which I lived in the camp and during the field trips, I felt safer here than in Starachowice. The little pistol I always had with me made me feel better. In the forest, I no longer reacted to the word 'Jew' as I had in Starachowice.⁵²

⁴⁹ Zawadzka, *Ucieczka z getta*, pp. 119–21.

⁵⁰ Chlebowski, *Pozdróćcie Góry*, pp. 192, 493.

⁵¹ Zawadzka, *Ucieczka z getta*, p. 122.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

However, in the 1st platoon under cadet corporal Władysław Wasilewski, codename 'Oseta', one Second Lieutenant Israel Czyżyk, codename 'Adam' (aka 'Adam Jemioła' or 'Stefan Salwowski') served in the 3rd Group, commanded by Second Lieutenant Stanisław Pałac, codename 'Marianki'. After the start of the war Czyżyk, a Warsaw tailor and a member of the Bund, managed to reach the eastern territories of Poland. In 1939–41 he lived in Lwów (today Lviv in Ukraine) under the Soviet occupation and continued to work as a tailor. After the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, he left the city for fear of being arrested by the Germans.⁵³

He reached the Kielce region, where he joined the People's Guard [*Gwardia Ludowa*⁵⁴]. From 3 March 1943, he served in the 1st squad of the platoon led by cadet corporal Władysław Wasilewski, codename 'Oset', in the GL branch of Kielce Region, under the command of Second Lieutenant Ignacy Robb (Rosenfarb), codename 'Narbutt' (who was also Jewish). After the GL troops had been broken up by the Germans near Zalezianka on 15 May 1943, he and the 'Oseta' platoon merged with the 'Ponury' Partisan Groups, and followed them through the entire duration of their combat. He survived the winter with a reduced unit in the Opatów region.⁵⁵

During Operation Tempest in spring 1944, Izrael Czyżyk was commander of the heavy machine gun section in the 4th heavy weapons platoon of the 1st company of the 1st battalion of the 2nd Infantry Regiment of the Home Army Legions. His section used a CKM wz. 30, a Polish-made clone of the American Browning M1917 heavy machine gun. He ended the war as a platoon member in the ranks of the Home Army.⁵⁶

⁵³ AŻIH, ZŻBUWZzF, 318/22, Personal files of veterans, Izrael Czyżyk's questionnaire, [Warsaw], n.d., p. 90.

⁵⁴ *Gwardia Ludowa* (the People's Guard, GL) was a Communist underground armed organisation created in early 1942 by the Communist Polish Workers' Party in German-occupied Poland, with sponsorship from the Soviet Union.

⁵⁵ AIPN Ki, Archives of the Association of Remembrance of the Home Army's 'Ponury'-'Nurt' Partisan Groups in the Świętokrzyskie Region (hereinafter: ASP), 212/393, Personal file of Stanisław Pałac, Statement by Izrael Czyżyk, Warsaw, 17 August 1945, sheet 4; AŻIH, ZŻBUWZzF, 318/22, Personal files of combatants, Izrael Czyżyk's questionnaire, [Warsaw], n.d., p. 90; Chlebowski, *Pozdrówcie Góry*, p. 512; M. Jedynak, *Władysław Wasilewski "Oset", "Odrowąż" (1921–1943). Harcerski instruktor i partyzancki dowódca*, Kielce 2016, p. 46; List of soldiers of the Home Army's 'Ponury' Partisan Groups, n.p., December 1943, in *Dokumenty do dziejów Zgrupowań Partyzanckich AK "Ponury"*, ed. M. Jedynak, Kielce–Kraków 2014, p. 273.

⁵⁶ AIPN Ki, ASP, 212/393, Personal file of Stanisław Pałac, Statement by Izrael Czyżyk, Warsaw, 17 August 1945, p. 4.

Another member of the same regiment (but in the ranks of the 2nd squad of the 3rd platoon of the 2nd company of the 1st battalion) from the end of July 1944 was Rifleman Józef (Zvi) Halperin, codename 'Ziuk', who officially registered as Józef Malczewski, the name he had adopted in 1942; he served as a section officer. He hid in the area of Baranowicze until spring 1944, from where he reached the Kielce region via Warsaw. Reporting to a partisan detachment of the Home Army, he said to the liaison officer:

'I would like to join a unit that is not anti-Semitic, as my beloved cousin, she married a Jew', He replied that there were also Jews in the Home Army, although only a few of them; that many of those who had escaped had joined the People's Army [the Soviet-backed Polish force]; that both organisations were helping the ghetto insurgents; and expressed his regret that the aid was so limited and that the heroic uprising had been so brutally suppressed. He praised the unit led by Captain 'Nurt' to which he intended to send me.⁵⁷

'Ziuk' reached the detachment with a group of eight Polish foresters; he persuaded them to come from Baranowicze to Suchedniów especially for this purpose, and they deserted there with their weapons. He went through the entire campaign of 1944 with this detachment, taking part in the attack in Dziebałtów (on the night of 26–27 August 1944) and in the battles near Lipno and Chotów (29–30 October 1944), among others. He ended the war as a senior rifleman.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, Rifleman Jerzy Bette, codename 'Papcio', served in the 4th company 'Jędrusie' of the 2nd battalion of the 2nd Home Army Legions. He joined the unit in 1943, when the group was operating independently of the Home Army as the 'Jędrusie' Partisan Unit. As his comrade-in-arms Włodzimierz Gruszczyński, codename 'Jach', recalled,

[...] he seemed happy to have someone to protect him and... that he didn't have to go to the fighting; it was safer for both sides. Bette joined the group in the summer

⁵⁷ J. Halperin, *Ludzie są wszędzie*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 240–41.

⁵⁸ Record sheet of Józef Halperin, [Warsaw], 27 July 1989 (from the collection of Zdzisław Rachtan, codename 'Halny'); Halperin, *Ludzie*, pp. 243–94.

of 1943 with two Bergman submachine guns (which at that time only the German police forces used). [Marcin Kozłowski] 'Łysy' met him walking, obviously unarmed, on the road from Klimontów to Sulisławice. Realising he was a stranger, he demanded identification at gunpoint. Bette did not hide his religion. He guessed the armed man was with the underground. He offered his services as an educated man. He was accepted. He claimed to have escaped from the prison in Sandomierz.

In August 1944, Jerzy Bette deserted from the unit. He probably moved to a branch of the BCh, and then to the People's Army.⁵⁹

On the other hand, in the ranks of the 9th company of Lieutenant Tadeusz Kolatorowicz, codename 'Kruk', in the 3rd battalion under Capt Stefan Kępa, codename 'Pochmurny', the 2nd Regiment of the Home Army Legions included one 'Kukułka'; only his surname, Gitman, is recorded. Tadeusz Jandula, codename 'Nowy', wrote about him in his memoirs: "I was friends with a Jew from Staszów, Gitman, 'Kukułka', who, unable to sleep at night due to his frostbitten feet, made my night watches pleasant with his Jewish jokes and stories".⁶⁰ Unfortunately, no detailed information about this man has survived.

People with Jewish roots also served in other partisan units of the Home Army. In 1944 during the restoration of the Armed Forces in Poland, the above-mentioned Dr Julian Aleksandrowicz, codename 'Twardy', an escapee from the Cracow ghetto, was appointed doctor to the 1st battalion of the Home Army's 172nd Infantry Regiment, which was formed on the territory of the Home Army's Kozienice Region in the Radom Inspectorate. On 27 August 1944 this unit, which had not yet been fully mobilised, became part of the 3rd Infantry Regiment of the Home Army Legions as the 3rd battalion. Second Lieutenant Aleksandrowicz performed his functions in this division until the second half of August 1944; he was then transferred to the position of deputy head of the sanitary service of the 2nd Infantry Division of the Home Army Legions, where he remained until the end of October 1944.⁶¹

⁵⁹ W. Gruszczyński, *Odwet i Jędrusie. Monografia*, Zagnańsk 2011, p. 152.

⁶⁰ T. Jandula, 'Nowy', *Ocalić od zapomnienia*, vol. 3, Końskie 1998, p. 947.

⁶¹ J. Aleksandrowicz, *Kartki z dziennika doktora Twardego*, Kraków 2001, pp. 132–71; J. Aleksandrowicz, E. Stawowy, *Tyle wart człowiek...*, Lublin 1992, pp. 86–109; M. Rice, 'A Doctor's War Testimony. The Four Incarnations of "Dr. Twardy"', in *Jewish Medicine and Healthcare in Central Eastern Europe. Shared Identities, Entangled Histories*, ed. M. Moskalewicz, U. Caumanns, F. Dross, Cham 2019, pp. 199–217.

Another doctor of Jewish origin also served with the 4th Infantry Regiment of the Home Army Legions: Lieutenant Doctor Adam Browar-Paszkowski, codename 'Lepszy'. He was assigned to the regimental sanitary unit from 27 August to 19 September 1944.⁶²

It has also been possible to find traces of Jewish soldiers in the units formed in the second wave, during the reconstruction of the Armed Forces in Poland. Two Jews from Szydłowiec served in the Home Army's Iłżecki Infantry Regiment, which had been decimated after the battle in Piotrowe Pole (1–2 October 1944). They managed to leave the battlefield together with other soldiers. They came under the orders of Second Lieutenant Seweryn Maczuga, aka Andrzej Bielański, codename 'Wrzos'; and stayed with his company for some time in the area of Parszów and Suchedniów until the turn of December 1944. Unfortunately, their names and surnames were not recorded.⁶³

Home Army soldiers helped representatives of the Jewish minority not only in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, and not just by accepting them into their ranks. One noteworthy example is the activity of the 'Kedyw' partisan unit of the Home Army's Częstochowa District under the command of Second Lieutenant Jerzy Kurpiński, codename 'Ponury'. In 1943, when his men were operating in the area of Żłoty Potok and Włoszczowa, "they were constantly feeding a dozen or so Jews from Żarki and Włoszczowa. They also provided them with medicines, clothing and underwear, 'to the best of the unit's abilities'".⁶⁴ A similar aid campaign was also carried out by other entities of Fighting Poland, including the BCh Special Unit under the command of cadet corporal Eugeniusz Fąfara, codename 'Nawrot', in the region of Opatów; as did the field structures subordinate to Second Lieutenant Jan Pszczoła, codename 'Wojnar', commander of the BCh District in Pińczów.⁶⁵

⁶² Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw, the Capital City's Office of Internal Affairs in Warsaw, 0423/2943, Operational case of Codename 'Connector' about Adam Browar-Paszkowski; W. Borzobohaty, *"Jodla". Okręg Radomsko-Kielecki ZWZ-AK 1939-1945*, Warszawa 1988, p. 387.

⁶³ R. Trzmiel, 'O oddziale partyzanckim AK Seweryna Maczugi (Andrzeja Bielańskiego) "Wrzosa"', *Nowe Pismo Starachowice* 1991, part 1, no. 4; part 2, no. 5, p. 6; L. Żmijewski, *Parszów i okolice. Z dziejów powiatu starachowickiego*, Starachowice 2000, pp. 36–37.

⁶⁴ J. Hera, *Polacy ratujący Żydów. Słownik*, Warszawa 2014, p. 491. In this work, the author also discusses the aid rendered by Home Army and BCh soldiers, as well as members of the NSZ, to Jews in other parts of occupied Poland (*ibid.*, pp. 488–92).

⁶⁵ *Bataliony Chłopskie w walce o narodowe i społeczne wyzwolenie*, ed. K. Przybyś, Warszawa 1975, pp. 305–06; E. Kołomańska, 'Polskie podziemie niepodległościowe w ratowaniu Żydów na Kielecczyźnie w latach 1939–1945', in *Żydzi i wojsko polskie*, pp. 244–45.

The participation of Jews in the Home Army units' armed effort did not differ much from how the other soldiers. Poles and Jews faced the same conditions and treatment in the forest, as did the Austrians, British, French and Germans. After the war Józef Halperin, codename 'Ziuk', recalled those times as follows:

In the forest I was a man who had the right to live; during this period, I felt that I was no longer alone, that there were people around me who – for better and for worse – were sharing my fate. And this feeling made me hope that after the long night that surrounded us all, daylight would come. This feeling was largely due to the specific atmosphere in the unit led by [*Cichociemny* Captain Eugeniusz Kaszyński] 'Nurt', who gave people a sense of security, that they would not be surprised by the enemy, that they would not be unnecessarily exposed to danger, that they would be treated humanely, and that their basic needs would be provided for. Order, camaraderie, and self-discipline were the rule in this battalion, without military rigour.⁶⁶

Sgt Izrael Czyżyk, codename 'Adam', made a similar statement; after the Second World War he was an active member of the Jewish Committee in Warsaw and the Warsaw Committee of the Bund. After serving for a year and a half in the ranks of the Home Army, in August 1945 he wrote the following statement:

From June 1943 to the end of November 1944, I was in the partisan unit of the Home Army under the command of Capt [Stanisław Pałac] 'Mariański'. Under the command of Capt 'Mariański' we fought numerous battles and victorious fights against the Germans. In his behaviour towards the soldiers, Cpt. 'Mariański' was a fair and kind commander, who made no distinctions on the basis of nationality.⁶⁷

One more testament to his service in the ranks of the 1st battalion of the 172nd Home Army Infantry Regiment and the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment

⁶⁶ Halperin, *Ludzie*, pp. 289–90.

⁶⁷ AIPN Ki, ASP, 212/393, Personal file of Stanisław Pałac, Statement by Izrael Czyżyk, Warsaw, 17 August 1945, p. 4.

of the Home Army's Legion, given independently of others, and certainly fully conscious of his words, was left behind by Lieutenant Julian Aleksandrowicz, codename 'Twardy', who recalled his assignment to the Home Army's partisan units:

One great feeling never left me, the most beautiful and the most human: the feeling of freedom. I was aware that my life was now in my own hands, that I held it myself – not the enemy. That I could only die in battle, and not like a defenceless creature at the mercy of fate. The feeling of having regained my human dignity on the path I had won, with the help of Real People [*sic*], was a compensation for yesterday's humiliation. I am a soldier again, but with such an expanded awareness of my service, of my social role – so much more than in September 1939.⁶⁸

The profiles of the soldiers presented above and their testimonies confirm the fact that Jews could and did serve in the structures of the Polish Armed Forces. Even if many of them decided not to disclose their origin, they felt secure in the partisan units operating in the Radom-Kielce AK District. Such unknown episodes in the recent history of the Polish and Jewish nations should be disseminated more widely. They should serve as evidence for future generations that different religions can coexist in a single place and time, even in such a difficult period as war.

The subject of the Jewish soldiers' activity in the Home Army has been only fragmentarily researched and still little is known. I realise that this article is only a contribution to the research on their service in the ranks of the Polish Underground State; yet, I hope that it will open up a broader discussion of the problem and act as an incentive to understanding this important aspect of the history of the Second World War.

⁶⁸ Aleksandrowicz, *Kartki z dziennika*, p. 74.

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SUMMARY

During the Second World War, a few of the Jews who survived extermination found refuge in the ranks of the Home Army. The article presents the fate of those Jews who served in partisan units organised and operating in the Radom–Kielce AK District in the years 1943–44. Due to the modest source base, their motivations, the circumstances in which they joined the ranks of the Polish Armed Forces, the course of their service, and sometimes their further fates have been presented from a peripheral perspective. The profiles of the soldiers and their testimonies confirm the fact that the Jews could and did serve in the structures of the Home Army.

KEYWORDS

Home Army • Jews • World War II
• partisans • Kielce region

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THE ORIGIN AND MILITARY ACTIVITY OF THE 'LIONS,'
A PARTISAN UNIT OF THE COMMUNIST PEOPLE'S GUARD,
1942–43. A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS
IN THE PEOPLE'S GUARD AND PEOPLE'S ARMY DURING
THE SECOND WORLD WAR, AND THE FATE OF JEWISH GHETTO
FUGITIVES IN THE PROVINCIAL AREAS OF POLAND

The 'Lions' [*Lwy*], a partisan unit of the People's Guard [*Gwardia Ludowa*, GL], is generally considered one of the most renowned military groups supporting the Communist cause in Poland. The main reason it is so widely known abroad is its ethnic composition, which has been regularly highlighted in all kinds of academic publications¹ and calendars² published in Israel, as well as in the United States.³ It also made its mark in Polish history itself because in the historiography of the People's Republic of Poland, the date of its disbandment, 22 July 1943, was officially recognised as the first day of the military conflict between

¹ S. Krakowski, 'Żydzi w oddziałach partyzanckich Gwardii Ludowej i Armii Ludowej na Kielecczyźnie', *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 1968, no. 65/66.

² S. Datner, 'Żydzi partyzanci w czasie II wojny światowej', *Kalendarz Żydowski 1985/1986*, 1985, p. 157.

³ During the mass deportations in October 1942, many Jews escaped and organised partisan units while hiding in the forest. The best known of these was the 'Lions', under the command of Izrael Ajzenman (Julian Kaniewski), which carried out several successful operations against the Nazi forces along the railway lines between Końskie and Opoczno. See N. Goldman, 'Opoczno', in *Opoczno Memorial Book*, n.p. 1989, p. 1, fn. 30; S. Krakowski, *The War of the Doomed: Jewish Armed Resistance in Poland 1942–1944*, New York 1984, pp. 103–07; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem 1971, pp. 13, 77.

Poland's underground movements, namely those who sought full independence for their country and those whose sympathies unequivocally lay with the Communists.⁴ The complicated and multifaceted history of this group, as well as the story of its commander, reveal important information concerning the Communists' attitude towards the Jews during the Holocaust and the problems this caused for both sides. The history of this unit is also worth remembering when studying the activity of the Jewish partisan groups and their relations with local people.

The genesis of the 'Lions' is to be found in the tactics of the immediate active combat undertaken by the authorities of the Polish Workers' Party [*Polska Partia Robotnicza*, PPR] on instructions from Moscow.⁵ This was expected to result in the outbreak of partisan fighting and possibly a large-scale armed uprising, the main aim of which would be to disrupt or at least disorganise the German supply lines to the eastern front.⁶ In Poland, however, the Communists enjoyed very little support. Indeed, their underground activity did not begin until the third year of the occupation, with the majority of patriotic Poles already active in the ranks of the Polish pro-independence underground.⁷ Hence, there was an acute shortage of volunteers to fight in the Communist partisan units, as well as a great dearth of weapons and trained personnel in their ranks. The earliest attempts to instil Communist partisan ideology in Poland by sending groups of agitators from Warsaw also turned out to be a failure. Somewhat more successful were the locally organised units. In the Radom region, for instance, the structures of the Communist underground were founded by Ludwik

⁴ *Historia Polski 1864–1945: Materiały do nauczania w klasie XI*, Warszawa 1953, pp. 472–73; J.B. Garas, *Oddziały Gwardii Ludowej i Armii Ludowej 1942–1945*, Warszawa 1971, pp. 268–69.

⁵ In late 1941, a group of Communists were parachuted into Poland from the Soviet Union. Under the banner of the Polish Workers' Party, they began to build the structures of the Communist underground in Poland. Its military arm was the People's Guard, renamed the People's Army on 1 January 1944 (*Armia Ludowa*, AL).

⁶ For more information concerning the idea behind the activity of the PPR, see P. Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia Robotnicza. Droga do władzy 1941–1944*, Warszawa 2006, p. 73–78.

⁷ The structures of the Polish Underground State (including the Home Army [*Armia Krajowa*, AK], which had not yet been organised into partisan units) were strong in the poviat of Opoczno, where the 'Lions' later operated. On the one hand, they did not want to provoke the usual brutal reprisals by the Germans against the local Poles; on the other, they were busy preparing for a nationwide uprising, which was postponed until a more favourable military and political opportunity arose before the end of the Second World War. In the same area, there was also a network of national underground organisations whose structure originated in the pre-war National Party [*Stronnictwo Narodowe*, SN]. Only one of them, the National Military Organisation [*Narodowa Organizacja Wojskowa*, NOW], merged with the Home Army, while the rest operated separately under the banner of the National Armed Forces [*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne*, NSZ].

Krasiński, *nom de guerre* 'Roman'. In August 1942, he came from Radom to Warsaw, where the first organisational meeting of the PPR was to be held. The organisation of the People's Guard was the responsibility of Antoni Grabowski, also known as 'Czarny Antek', a delegate from Warsaw and a veteran of the 13th International Brigade that had fought in the Spanish Civil War. However, he appeared there only occasionally. Among the most important tasks that the Communists were faced with was the organisation of the partisan units. One of the first groups of partisans was commanded by two local Communists, the brothers Czesław and Zygmunt Banasiak, both of whom found themselves hiding out in the woods for rather unusual reasons. According to a local Communist activist, Czesław Nowakowski,

While working as drivers at the arms factory in Radom, Czesław Banasiak and his brother Zygmunt would steal petrol for their own private use until they were caught red-handed by the Germans. Interrogated by the Gestapo, they said – even without being asked – that, if released, they would be able to offer the Germans some materials that would incriminate our organisation. [...] [Once released,] they both immediately informed the party committee in Radom about what had happened. They were then instantly ordered to leave the area.⁸

It was probably in September 1942 that the partisan unit formed under Czesław Banasiak's leadership was first put into action. According to Nowakowski, "it was a so-called combined unit, 70 per cent of which were Jewish ghetto fugitives. Its commander was comrade Zygmunt Banasiak and the deputy commander, comrade Chytry"⁹ The latter was none other than Izrael Ajzenman (also known as Julian Kaniewski), the future commander of the 'Lions', at that time using the *noms de guerre* 'Julek' and 'Lew' (he would not start using 'Chytry' until 1944–45). He was usually portrayed in the historiography of the Polish People's Republic as a Communist activist from Radom who had been sentenced to four years in prison, allegedly for his subversive political activities.¹⁰ In reality, though, Ajzenman had

⁸ Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records; hereinafter: AAN), Personal files no. 4228, Account of Czesław Nowakowski, n.d., p. 45.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁰ K. Arciuch, 'Kaniewski (Ajzenman) Julian', in *Słownik biograficzny działaczy polskiego ruchu robotniczego* vol. 3, Warszawa 1992, pp. 83–84.

been imprisoned in Radom for entirely different reasons. During the period 1936–37, he was sentenced up to four times for ordinary crimes such as theft and burglary. Moreover, on one occasion, he and two companions were charged with armed robbery: “On 15 May 1936, at night, in the village of Wolanów, in the poviát of Radom, they used firearms, shooting at a pursuer, Antoni Jakubowski, in order to evade the chase that followed the act of theft they had committed in the shop that belonged to Antoni Śláz”.¹¹ Generally speaking, Ajzenman’s reputation in prison was bad, and he was additionally penalised for the physical abuse of a fellow inmate, among other things. In reply to his application for conditional release the warden, superintendent Wojciech Łączyński, wrote: “Because of that,¹² and owing to the fact that the prisoner has a bad record with the police, as well as his general lack of financial means after he has served his sentence (not to mention that Ajzenman has two other sentences to serve), I do not accede to the request”.¹³

At this point one may begin to wonder how it was ever possible that a man with such a criminal record could not only join the resistance movement, but also become the deputy commander of a military unit of the People’s Guard. First of all, it cannot be ruled out that, before the war, Ajzenman was already in contact with the Communists and personally knew some of the Polish Workers’ Party’s future activists. It seems more likely, though, that the local Communists, many of whom also had criminal records of their own, simply knew him either from their earlier illicit activities or directly from prison. Nevertheless, they somehow came to the decision that such a man would prove to be useful. It is worth noting here that, at least in this case, the Communists were not necessarily interested in saving any of the more prominent representatives of the Jewish community, possibly on account of the fact that they might actually be of little use in guerrilla warfare. For them, enterprising, pushy young people, sometimes even common criminals, would certainly be more useful.¹⁴

¹¹ Archiwum Państwowe w Radomiu (State Archives in Radom; hereinafter: AP Radom), A-36, Personal files of prisoner Izrael Ajzenman, pp. 12–13.

¹² Here Łączyński evidently means disciplinary penalties.

¹³ AP Radom, A-36, Personal files of prisoner Izrael Ajzenman, p. 89.

¹⁴ Such people were not only allowed to join the military forces of the Polish underground, but were also conscripted. However, unlike in the GL and the AL, they did not have any influence on the character of these military formations.

However, the unit under Banasiak's command was not active for too long. "After a week, [the group] returned completely dispirited, following numerous acts of insubordination (overall disorder in the unit, armed robbery, favouritism, drunkenness etc.). The blame for this state of affairs lay with commander Banasiak. The investigation carried out at that time revealed irrefutable evidence that he was indeed the one to blame. As a result, Comrade Banasiak was convicted by the party court and sentenced to death".¹⁵ After he had been shot by 'Czarny Antek', command of the group was assumed by Ajzenman, also known as 'Lew'. At first, a few Jews from Radom were subordinated to him. They were soon joined by others from Gielniów and Przysucha, in the powiat of Opoczno. Since neither he nor anyone else from the group had had any previous military experience, they were sent to a unit commanded by Józef Rogulski, *nom de guerre* 'Wilk', that operated in the vicinity of the village of Drzewica in the same powiat. At first, both groups of partisans worked together on a regular basis. Instances of support for 'Wilk' from the local people were also reported.¹⁶ Those who were subordinate to 'Lew' stayed mostly in a forest dugout, not far from the village of Zielonka, whence they mainly conducted 'supply operations' in the neighbouring area.¹⁷ Rogulski, on the other hand, operated more often in the villages of the powiat of Grójec. The relations between the two commanders grew worse and worse. According to Ajzenman, in his report to the subordinates in Radom,

¹⁵ AAN, personal files no. 4228, Account of Czesław Nowakowski, n.d., p. 45.

¹⁶ O. Rundke, 'Przysięgę odbierał hubalczyk', in *Gniewnie szumiał las: Wspomnienia leśników polskich 1939–1945*, ed. J. Gmitruk, W. Lipko, P. Matusak, Warszawa 1982, p. 52.

¹⁷ Naturally, all the partisan units had to acquire food and other necessities for their sustenance. However, there was a fundamental difference in the way the units of the Polish pro-independence underground and the Communists did this. The former saw themselves as representatives and genuine defenders of the Polish people, and so confiscating goods from them as well as any forms of robbery were strictly forbidden, even under threat of death. The troops' main source of sustenance was the goods confiscated from large farms under German administration, German cooperatives, outbuildings and so on. Also practised were confiscations for which receipts were issued, whereby the confiscated goods were deducted by the peasants from the quantity of compulsory supplies they were obliged to hand over to the Germans (the Germans honoured such receipts, given that the peasants could not really refuse the demands of the partisans). The Communist units acted in a completely different way. They not only confiscated goods from the Germans, but also attacked Polish manors and farm buildings (which, in their opinion, belonged to political and class 'enemies'). They were thus engaged in large-scale common banditry to the detriment of the Polish people. Such acts (euphemistically referred to as 'supply operations' in the documents of the Communist underground) became an essential component of the activities of individual units of the People's Guard.

At every opportunity, 'Wilk' made it clear to everyone that he, a Pole, did not want to cooperate with our unit, a unit in which there were Jewish bandits stealing from the rich (mainly from mills and manors). He is of the opinion that, if we are short of supplies, we always need to ask first, and take them only when the people are willing to give. As he said, he wanted to maintain a good reputation with them. In the evening, [...] we were passing by the mill in Małe Radzice. 'Wilk' claimed that he would go into the mill to dine there, but without the members of our unit, because he does not want to be seen in our company, in the company of those who are generally considered to be bandits.¹⁸

These were not idle words. The activity of the 'Lions', which was invariably characterised by great brutality, was limited for the most part to night-time attacks on mills, shops, and local landowners. In 1985, still in the days of the Polish People's Republic, and despite the censorship then in force, a local academic journal published a vivid account of their activity, written by Emilia Dąbrowska, the proprietor of the manor in Rusinów:

Their arrival in the village was announced by a volley of gunshots, followed by loud knocking at the manor's doors and windows. Some of the partisans went straight to the communal office, where they destroyed the requisition orders. From us they demanded food and clothes. They searched the entire house, not excluding the attic. Wherever they went, their guns always remained ready to be fired.¹⁹

The terrible reputation of the 'Lions' was enhanced by the murders they committed as acts of revenge, both during the robberies and for other, often utterly incomprehensible reasons. One of their first victims was Tadeusz Trznadlewski, who was shot dead on 5 November 1942 at the mill by the river Brzuśnia near Rozwad, where he had been playing poker with the owners. Prior to that, he had been accused of making fun of Jews whom the Germans had forced to perform public labour in 1940. According to those who knew Trznadlewski, such behaviour

¹⁸ AAN, GL, 191/XXIII-2, Report no. 10, p. 23.

¹⁹ E. Dąbrowska, 'Z dziejów Rusinowa', *Biuletyn Kwartalny Radomskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego* 1985, vol. 22, no. 1-2, p. 92.

was likely caused by his traumatic experiences in September 1939, when, having been taken prisoner by the Soviets and on the route into Soviet territory, he was pelted with rubbish, beaten and verbally abused by the Jewish inhabitants of an eastern Polish town.²⁰

In April 1943, the unit committed another act of murder. According to an official report, “the unit [...] set off for the area beyond the Pilica river. On their way there, on 12 April, they killed Robert Gola, a teacher in the village of Jastrząb (in the region of Tomaszów),”²¹ whom they considered to be a spy. Gola enjoyed a good reputation in the local area, and the accusations that he might have been involved in some kind of espionage were, in all likelihood, no more than just a convenient label regularly used in the documents of the Communist underground with regard to those people who were killed either for political reasons or as a result of the criminal activity of the unit.

It is even more difficult to understand the reason for the murder of the wife of Malak, a forester, an act which the ‘Lions’ committed in June 1943. The woman was on her way home when she was shot a number of times, with the last shot aimed at her head. Krystyna Stępień, who lived in the forester’s lodge at that time, later wrote in a letter to her friend: “Malak was talking to my father in the yard when three shots were fired on the bank of the Chojna River. In reply, the frightened voice of a woman could be heard: ‘What are you doing, sirs...? What are you doing...?’. Everyone rushed to the yard. Two more shots, and a moaning. [...] The whole scene is reported to have been one of horror. The woman’s head was literally blown to pieces, with that last shot they fired meant to finish her off...”²²

News of the ‘Lions’ operations did reach the authorities of the Polish Underground State, albeit distorted and exaggerated. Such was the case with the ‘visit’ by the members of the People’s Guard to the Zameczek manor (in the poviat of Radom) on 27 January 1943.

²⁰ J. Kucharski, *Zanim odejdziemy: Zapiski z konspiracji 1939–1947: NOW, NSZ, AK okręgów Radom i Łódź*, Gdańsk 1996, p. 54; Oral account of Maria Filipczyńska, an eyewitness of the murder, personally told to the author on 25 May 1996.

²¹ AAN, GL, 191/XXIII-2, p. 26.

²² From the letter written by Krystyna Stępień to her friend Celina Sługocka on 18 June 1943 (a copy of the letter from the collection of Leszek Żebrowski). Celina Sługocka was a daughter of Rundtke, a forester who had previously helped the ‘Lions’.

All the while, we were not even aware of the fact that our uncle's life, in fact perhaps even all of us on the farm, was at stake. We owe the fact that, in the end, no one was harmed of the people who worked there. None of those who came to be interrogated said anything against our uncle and his family, and so the Communists could not make any accusations against them. [...] What is intriguing in this whole story is the discipline and subordination. No one was allowed to take anything without the commander's approval. It was clear that everyone was afraid of him, even those ghetto fugitives and, for the most part, common criminals. And this is the infamous band under the command of 'Lew', said to consist of 150 people and regularly, every ten days, supplied by air from Russia with arms and ammunition. [...] One can say without any reservation that, today, power is indeed [still] in the hands of such bands. How this is going to end, we have no idea...²³

There is no doubt that such reports could have been easily imprinted on the minds of the local people and left their mark on their attitude towards Jewish partisans (either active within the structures of the People's Guard or living in loose groups of survivors), as well as those Jews who were in hiding in the countryside and in the forests. In some areas, there was great fear among the civilians of potential acts of violence committed by those hiding in the forests. In April 1943, Zygmunt Szacherski, the chairman of the Government Delegation in the District of Kielce, wrote to his superiors in Warsaw:²⁴

There is a high per centage of Jews among the bands of Communist robbers hiding in the forests. They are a particularly dangerous element for us on account of their vindictiveness. There are also small, well-armed bands, each consisting of only a few people, all of them Jewish. They are less inclined to seek contact with the Germans, but are troublesome for the Polish population.²⁵

²³ AAN, The Government Delegation, anonymous account, pp. 55–56.

²⁴ The Government Delegation for Poland: the civilian structures of the Polish Underground State.

²⁵ AAN, DR, 202/XXI-1, The 'Garbarnia' Report [Government Delegation in the District of Kielce], 15 April 1943, p. 28.

At the same time 'Lew'/'Julek' was ruthless and violent not only in his contacts with the local people, but also his subordinates. This was likely the reason why a mutiny broke out in the unit, with the outcome that its commander was expelled and the command was taken over by an otherwise unknown man called 'Siemion' (also ethnically Jewish). However, 'Julek' did intervene with the PPR committee in Radom, where he received some support. Their eagerness to help probably stemmed from the fact that, previously, some of the loot acquired from the local people (such as gold earrings, watches, fur coats, a camera) were handed over by Ajzenman to his superiors in Radom.²⁶ In any case, the regional authorities of the People's Guard and the Polish Workers Party nominated three comrades whose task was to offer 'Julek' their support in his reassumption of command over the unit hitherto led by 'Siemion' and the group under the command of Józef Rogulski, *nom de guerre* 'Wilk':

The district staff demands that, in accordance with the orders of the central staff, commander Wilk and his unit should submit unconditionally to the party and the central staff. Strict control should also be imposed on commander Wilk. Wilk will remain the commander of two units. Political commissar Julek will remain in charge of the two units, and is also politically responsible for them.²⁷

There was no way, however, that the orders of the PPR authorities in Radom could be carried out, as neither 'Wilk' nor 'Siemion' were ever going to submit to Ajzenman, a man they both considered to be a common criminal. When 'Siemion' refused to obey the order, arguing that he did not know the people who had come to him with 'Julek', these men, feigning acceptance of the situation, decided to spend the night with the unit. After that, however, they set to work. During the shootout that followed, one member of the People's Guard was killed, and part of the group was dispersed. Around ten people remained, with 'Julek' retaking command of them. 'Siemion' was sent to an outpost of the People's Guard

²⁶ AAN, GL, 192-XXII-2, Receipts, p. 108; Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe Wojskowego Biura Historycznego (Central Military Archives of the Military Historical Bureau; hereinafter: CAW WBH) III/19/201, Account of J. Kaniewski in Polish, n.d., p. 5.

²⁷ AAN, GL, 191/XXIII-3, Report no. 6, n.d., p. 6.

in the area of Chotcza (the poviats of Lipsko, another area of the People's Guard's Radom district), where he was soon murdered.²⁸

The next step taken by the authorities of the GL-PPR in Radom was an attempt to subdue the partisan unit commanded by Józef Rogulski, *nom de guerre* 'Wilk'. However, a serious disagreement occurred during the negotiations that Ajzenman (and an envoy sent by the district staff of the People's Guard) were holding with 'Wilk' and 'Maks' (a former member of the 'Lions' who had fled from Rogulski). Following the talks, Rogulski reported that he "heard Maks quarrel with him and commissar Julek, that they tolerate this, and that the latter's activity is thoroughly thuggish. So he will not be associated with any such endeavours".²⁹ 'Wilk' refused to submit to the authorities of the People's Guard, and so they issued further instructions: "The approach to 'Wilk' and 'Maks'. If it is possible to have them disarmed, investigate the case and liquidate them. If it turns out that it is not possible to disarm them, they must be liquidated immediately. Act so as not to be surprised by the unit commanded by 'Wilk'. Keep this in absolute secrecy".³⁰ However, Rogulski remained vigilant, as he probably realised the true intentions of the PPR authorities in Radom. As they talked to Ajzenman and his comrades, Rogulski's men always held armed weapons in their hands. Soon, 'Wilk' left the area around Opoczno and moved north to the poviats of Grójec. He also severed all contact with the Communists. His unit ceased to exist in the summer of 1943.

The unit of the People's Guard which was led by Ajzenman, *nom de guerre* 'Julek', remained active in the poviats of Opoczno until the summer of 1943, having a few months earlier changed its name in honour of Ludwik Waryński, a nineteenth-century Polish socialist. Leaving aside their murders of pro-independence activists, as well as some ordinary citizens (not to mention other criminal acts), the unit carried out only one operation against the Germans during about nine months of its activity. On 1 February 1943, members of the People's Guard dismantled the tracks in the vicinity of the railway station in Białaczów.

²⁸ Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; hereinafter: AŻIH), 301/5816, Account of Władysław Woźniczko, n.d., p. 30.

²⁹ AAN, GL, 191/XXIII-2, Report of the partisan unit under the command of 'Wilk', n.d., p. 22.

³⁰ Ibid., Report no. 10, n.d., p. 24.

As a result, for a few hours, a steam engine and one car were derailed. No other major damage was recorded.³¹ There were much more serious repercussions from another operation which the unit carried out on 22 January 1943, albeit one not aimed at German targets. On that day, at around 10 p.m., a group of fourteen people from the 'Lions' unit under the command of 'Julek' went to the town of Drzewica. Six members of the People's Guard – all of them known only by their partisan *noms de guerre*, namely 'Antek', 'Zenek', 'Józiek', 'Pietrek', 'Jasny', and 'Bac'³² – were deployed to cover the others, while their commander 'Julek' entered the village in the company of seven subordinates ('Władek', 'Janek', 'Maks', 'Słowik', 'Michał', 'Wicek' – their names likewise unknown – and 'Zosia').³³ Their objective was to "clear the area of any fascist bands".³⁴ Unfortunately, none of the sources allow us to make any credible claims as to who initiated the operation and who ordered its execution. The orders may have come from the party officials, or it may have been the partisans' own initiative. In any case, they were probably quite well aware of the political preferences of the people who lived in Drzewica.

This hit squad first headed to the home of Kazimierz Kobylański, the co-owner of the local Gerlach cutlery factory. As he was absent (at that time he was in Warsaw), they took some clothes, blankets and other trinkets. Their next target was the house of August Kobylański, a cousin of Kazimierz and the manager of Gerlach in Drzewica. Some of the men took him to the factory, while the other GL partisans systematically plundered his apartment in the presence of his wife, Maria. In the factory office, the attackers demanded that Kobylański open the cash desk, from which they took a few thousand zloty. From there, they went to the warehouse where the finished products were stored. After robbing this as well, the members of the People's Guard ordered Kobylański to give them his

³¹ AAN, collection Niemieckie władze okupacyjne (hereinafter: German occupation authorities), 214/III-3, 'Aktion Attila': Bandenbekämpfung im Kreise Tomaszow, Aktion am 9.02.43 im Gebiet Wywóz, Zielonka, Gozdziów, Bande 'Lew' bzw. 'Wilk', p. 5. This document is unique. During the manhunt for the 'Lions' conducted by the German gendarmerie on 9 February 1943, their diary fell into German hands. The notes were then translated into German and preserved in a copy.

³² This was probably Chyl Brawerman, who had previously been the commander of another Jewish group of the People's Guard and, after the breakup of the first unit, was sent to join the 'Lions'.

³³ Probably Zofia Jamajka, a GL-PPR activist who was sent to join the unit from Warsaw.

³⁴ AAN, collection German occupation authorities, 214/III-3, 'Aktion Attila', p. 12.

personal belongings (his wedding ring and a gold watch), after which they killed him by shooting him in the back of the head at point blank range. Kobylański's wife found a note (with the unit's official stamp) lying on his body, informing that her husband had been punished in this manner "for his collaboration with the Germans".³⁵

The next act of the tragedy took place in the house located at what is now 16 Armii Krajowej Street. There the members of the People's Guard found two brothers, Stanisław and Józef Suskiewicz, as well as Zdzisław Pierściński. When the neighbours arrived there, after the Communists had left Drzewica, they found three mutilated corpses of people who must have been tortured shortly before being shot in the head at close range. The next victim was the third Suskiewicz brother, Edward, who was murdered in his own house in the presence of his wife and child. Following that, the hit squad went to the local pharmacy, where the household members were awakened by the sound of broken glass. The GL partisans broke all the windows and smashed the shutters. Then a command was given: "Open up, or we'll throw a grenade in!". The pharmacist Stanisław Makomaski left the house and opened the pharmacy, following which he was immediately killed with a shot to the head. Their next victim was Józef Staszewski, whose house was not far from the market square.³⁶ Another group of attackers went to the local presbytery. Sources agree that the group was led by "a young and very aggressive Jewish woman whom everyone called 'Zosia'".³⁷ There, they came across Father Jan Orlik. However, one member of the People's Guard (apparently a local) intervened, saying: "Leave him alone. It's not this one". Then, they went to a nearby house inhabited by Father Józef Pawlik, the one they had originally been looking for. However he was not killed, as the group hastily retreated from

³⁵ AAN, collection Narodowe Siły Zbrojne (National Armed Forces, hereinafter: NSZ), 207/20, Report of the First Department of the General Command of the NSZ, n.d., p. 22; Author's note from the oral report of Helena Faryaszewska, daughter of August Kobylański, *Więści znad Drzewiczki* 1995, no. 10–14, p. 2.

³⁶ Account of Krystyna Staszewska, daughter of the murder victim Józef Staszewski, 12 February 1996; account of Władysław Makomaski, son of the murder victim Stanisław Makomaski, 24 February 1996; account of Zygmunt Rakowiecki (a relative of the Kobylański family), n.d., author's private collection.

³⁷ AAN, Społeczny Komitet Antykomunistyczny (Social Anti-Communist Committee; hereinafter: SKA) 'Antyk' 228/16-2, p. 5. It seems that 'Zosia' ought to be identified with Zofia Jamajka. See E. Mark, 'Zofia Jamajka', *Pokolenia* 1964, no. 1, p. 96.

the town upon seeing an oncoming car, a vehicle which could only have belonged to the Germans.³⁸ Apart from Kazimierz Kobylański, those on the People's Guard hit-list of the who survived included Father Pawlik, Jan Klata, and the fourth Suskiewicz brother, Marian (whose three brothers died that night in Drzewica).

In Ajzenman (Kaniewski)'s post-war account, he wrote:

In February,³⁹ three of my people – 'Kuropatwa', 'Zajac' and 'Lis' – were murdered by an NSZ band.⁴⁰ Three days later, my unit took over the town of Drzewica, disarmed the police station,⁴¹ entered the Gerlach factory, and shot seven main leaders of the National Armed Forces: Kobylański, the main inspector of the NSZ with the rank of colonel, the proprietor of the Gerlach factory, a pharmacist, a teacher, and other main leaders. A note charging collaboration with the occupier was also left there. The sentence was executed by the People's Guard unit under the command of 'Julek'.⁴²

There is no doubt, however, that the accusations brought against those who were murdered in Drzewica on 22 January 1943, blaming them for the earlier deaths of members of the People's Guard, are groundless and were invented after the war by PPR propagandists. In reality, since the first and third of the above-named members⁴³ had already perished on 7 January 1943, there is no reason to believe that their deaths had anything to do with the operation in Drzewica. Moreover,

³⁸ The first historian to tackle the issue of the murder in Drzewica, in the mid-1990s, was Leszek Żebrowski (L. Żebrowski, 'Mord w Drzewicy: Nieznane karty komunistycznej partyzantki', *Słowo – Dziennik Katolicki* 1–3 July 1994; id., 'PPR-owski bohater?', *Słowo – Dziennik Katolicki* 10 May 1995). For more information and a list of documents regarding the operation of the People's Guard in Drzewica, see M.J. Chodakiewicz, P. Gontarczyk, L. Żebrowski, *Tajne oblicze GL-AL i PPR: Dokumenty*, vols 2–3, Warszawa 1999, vol. 2, pp. 124–32; see also, P. Gontarczyk, 'Mord w Drzewicy (22 stycznia 1943). Przyczynek do badań nad rzeczywistym obrazem konfliktów pomiędzy polskim podziemiem niepodległościowym a komunistami', *Biuletyn Kwartalny Radomskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego* 1999, no. 3–4, pp. 89–106; Gontarczyk, *Polska*, pp. 185–86.

³⁹ The operation took place on 22 January 1943.

⁴⁰ That is to say, the NSZ.

⁴¹ That night, the police station was vacant because the policemen had left to take part in a training course. The People's Guard member did not attack the building itself.

⁴² CAW WBH, III/19/201, Account of J. Kaniewski in Polish, n.d., p. 5.

⁴³ Piotr Białek 'Kuropatwa' and Antoni Węgorzewski 'Lis' had a bad reputation among the local people, many of whom assumed their deaths were the result of some kind of gang warfare.

the third, Maciej Wrzosek, *nom de guerre* 'Zajac', is known to have died at the hands of the Germans some months later, in June 1943.⁴⁴

But who were the ones that were murdered and those who managed to survive? August Kobylański was a co-owner of the Gerlach factory, a person widely known and respected. He was also an underground conspirator of the National Military Organisation [*Narodowa Organizacja Wojskowa*, NOW] and the Home Army, and a member of the 'Uprawa', an underground organisation whose objective was to offer financial support to various resistance groups. Far better known was his first cousin, Kazimierz (aka 'Inżynier', 'Jerzy', 'Markowski'), a survivor of the Drzewica massacre. He was a veteran of the battle of Lwów in 1918–19, and had been a plebiscite activist in Upper Silesia. Kazimierz Kobylański, who was still active in the National Party at the time of the GL operation in Drzewica, was the head of the fourth branch (responsible for supplies) of the Main Headquarters of the National Military Organisation. Later on, he was also a member of the Council of National Unity [*Rada Jedności Narodowej*] on behalf of the National Party. On 19 March 1945, he was arrested by the NKVD and 'questioned' at the Trial of the Sixteen (kidnapped leaders of the Polish Underground State) in Moscow.⁴⁵

Before the war, the Suskiewicz brothers were known in the town as National Party (SN) activists. They can be seen in a number of photographs documenting the pre-war ceremonies organised by the SN. During the war, one of them was a member of the Home Army and two belonged to the National Armed Forces. Such was also the case with Józef Staszewski and Jan Klata, *nom de guerre* 'Zagłoba', who were both members of the NSZ.

⁴⁴ Until recently, one of the tenements in Drzewica bore a memorial plaque which read: "This place is sanctified with the blood of comrade Maciej Wrzosek, a former activist of the KPP and PPR in Drzewica, murdered by the Hitlerites on 9 June 1943. In token of our remembrance, on the thirtieth anniversary of the foundation of the PPR. People of the Land of Opoczno, May 1972".

⁴⁵ Shortly after his release in 1945, Kazimierz Kobylański was arrested by the Department of Security [*Urząd Bezpieczeństwa*, UB] under the charge of being a member of the legalisation committee of the National Party. He was released after two months in prison. Kobylański was once again arrested in 1947, and sentenced by the Military District Court to eight years in prison. He was finally released in 1954. Far more active in the political area (and thus more easily recognised) was his brother Tadeusz Kobylański, an activist of the National Party and member of the Great Council of the Camp of Great Poland [*Obóz Wielkiej Polski*], publisher of the newspapers of the National Camp, and, from 1938, a senator of the Republic of Poland. During the war, he was active in the Information and Propaganda Office of the Home Army Headquarters. Arrested in February 1943, he spent the rest of the war in German concentration camps.

Although the pharmacist Makomaski was not an active member of the underground during the war, prior to 1939 he had been a leader of the local branch of the lay Catholic organisation *Akcja Katolicka*. Not much is known about the political activity of Zdzisław Pierściński, apart from the fact that before the war, as in the case of Father Józef Pawlik, his sympathies had been with the SN. Apart from Makomaski, all of those murdered were professionally connected with the Gerlach factory. The last of the Suskiewicz brothers, Marian ('Sosna'), was a local NSZ commissioner in Opoczno powiat.

There could be no doubt that those who were killed by the 'Lions', as well as those who managed to survive, were members of the local elite, national activists, and underground conspirators. Thus, it was precisely on account of their political views that they were targeted by the Communists.⁴⁶ In fact, it cannot be ruled out that, at least in some instances, this action was some form of revenge for their active membership of the allegedly anti-Semitic National Party. Some members of the People's Guard came from the Jewish community of the town or its vicinity, and so they could have known their victims personally. Indeed, while Józef Staszewski was killed in the presence of his wife and daughter, the murderers had their faces covered, which suggests they might have been local people wishing to conceal their identities from the bystanders. Moreover, it cannot be ruled out that the victims were selected in accordance on the basis of the political conflicts of pre-war Poland. Likewise, it is significant that those who were killed were robbed of their personal belongings (watches, wedding rings) and had their houses plundered.

The funeral of the people who died as a result of the People's Guard operation in Drzewica took place on 25 January 1943. The Mass was celebrated by Father Józef Pawlik. The funeral drew a great many people, and the whole event had the character of a sad but nonetheless patriotic and civic demonstration of the local community's feelings. On the same day, the leader of the 'Lions' handed some of the loot over to the Party officials in Radom. The secretary of the PPR, Ludwik Krasieński, aka 'Roman', signed a receipt for 3500 zloty, two fur coats (one man's

⁴⁶ The Germans saw the operation of the People's Guard in Drzewica as an attempt to eliminate the local activists of the National Party (AAN, German occupation authorities, 214/III-3, 'Aktion Attila', p. 3).

and one lady's) and two gold watches. In all likelihood, most of these valuables had previously been owned by the Kobylański family.⁴⁷

The news of the operation carried out by the GL partisans in Drzewica found resonance in the Polish underground; reports on the events of 22 January 1943 can be found in the archives of several organisations. According to a report by the Social Anti-Communist Committee 'Antyk':

Having taken over the public security posts,⁴⁸ part of the gang entered the premises of the cutlery factory run by Kobylański. Its owner, August Kobylański, was then taken to the factory and ordered to open the cash desk in order to obtain the money. After that, he was shot dead. Besides him four other clerks were also killed: three workers employed at the factory and a pharmacist. In total, as many as eleven people from the immediate vicinity were murdered.⁴⁹ Kobylański's residence was plundered for several hours. The gang was made up of Jews, heavily armed with grenades and machine guns, led by a Jewish woman. According to the local police, the gang is based in the vicinity of [the village of] Jedlnia and carries out its attacks from there. [...] The gang then retreated without incurring any losses.⁵⁰

The murder in Drzewica was also mentioned, in an anti-Semitic context, in one of the articles of the nationalist-leaning press.⁵¹

Fear reigned in Drzewica and the surrounding area, with further attacks by the 'Lions' on mills and manors, armed robberies in the neighbouring villages, and inexplicable murders. These incidents had nothing to do with the struggle against the Germans. Indeed, they were particularly hard to deal with for the local Polish population, many of whom began to see the situation as a confirmation

⁴⁷ AAN, GL, 191/XXIII-6, Receipt, n.d., p. 6.

⁴⁸ That night, the local police station was closed. In fact, there were no permanently stationed German policemen in the town. Some of them only occasionally came there from Radom.

⁴⁹ Seven people are reported to have been killed in Drzewica on 22 January 1943. Perhaps the report also takes other local acts of killing by the 'Lions' into account.

⁵⁰ AAN, SKA 'Antyk', 228/16-2, p. 5. See also AAN, microfilm 423, Report by 'Korweta' about the situation in 'K' [Communist organisations] for the period from 20 February until 20 March 1943, p. 330; AAN, AK, 203/XII-9, vol. 1, p. 55; AAN, NSZ, 207/20, p. 22.

⁵¹ 'Organizacja narodu', *Szczerbiec*, 31 January 1944.

of the pre-war slogans of the National Party that often referred to left-leaning Jews as evidence of so-called Judeo-Bolshevism (*Żydokomuna*). As a result, the Jews who were hiding from the Germans in the forests began to be seen as a potential threat.

Two or three weeks after the murder in Drzewica, the German security troops went into action. It is not known whether the fact that the unit's whereabouts were finally tracked down had anything to do with the local people who had been severely affected by the activity of the 'Jewish gang'. In any case, it was common knowledge that the partisans were based in the forest near Gielniów, some 5 km south of the village.⁵² Indeed, even a cursory look at the map of the area in which the 'Lions' regularly committed their acts of armed robbery (always within a radius of 5–10 km from the place they were based) evidently indicated the spot where the partisans should be found. On 9 February 1943, the German Gendarmerie started the manhunt as a result of which two hideouts of the GL members were found. According to what Ajzenman claimed about the incident, the Germans not only brought Waffen SS elite troops into action there, but also suffered large casualties:

We were [...] attacked and bottled up in an area of 50 km² by a group of German SS men destined for the frontline. [...] I had to position the machine gun at the rear, so as to protect us from the German assault. [...] The Germans continued with their offensive. Standing behind the machine gun, I let the SS men come within the distance of 30 metres and then started firing at them, while at the same time shelling their positions.⁵³

According to a remaining German report, more than 200 gendarmes and policemen took part in the operation. None of them carried heavy weapons. There was literally no battle to speak of; many of the People's Guard members were shot as they tried to flee from their hideouts. In total, sixteen of them died and no more than ten managed to flee; not a single German soldier

⁵² Such had been the prevailing image of the 'Lions' since the beginning of 1943.

⁵³ J. Chytry [J. Kaniewski], 'Odwetowe akcje oddziału "Lwy" GL', *Polska Niepodległa* 1946, no. 6.

was injured.⁵⁴ Although at first the surviving partisans remained under the command of Ajzenman, in the spring of 1943 a new leader arrived, Stanisław Wiktorowicz, *nom de guerre* 'Stach'. The activity of this group (of which Ajzenman was the political commissar) was hardly different from that of the 'Lions'. It remained a fixed part of the banditry that was then ravaging the provincial areas of Poland. According to the Government Delegation for Poland regarding the area of Kielce,

There are more and more bands of robbers, consisting of Communists, Jews and others, afflicting the people in the countryside and the villages. When people are unwilling to render any services to the bands, they use terror and physical violence. Some people are even killed. [...] The increase in the number of crimes is reflected in the following figures. In the poviats of Iłża, for instance, in February, 48 instances of armed robbery were recorded. Three months later, in June, there were as many as 144, that is to say three times more. It should also be noted that the scale of individual crimes is far larger than it used to be.⁵⁵

The activity of 'Lew's gang', as Ajzenman's unit was then called in the area (the local people did not know that it had been renamed in honour of Ludwik Waryński and that Wiktorowicz had taken over command), and the murder in Drzewica in particular, were the main subjects during the briefing by the Radom commanders of the National Armed Forces led by Captain Mieczysław Borkowski, *nom de guerre* 'Wróbel'. Present there were two commanders of the NSZ: Władysław Pacholczyk, *nom de guerre* 'Adam', and Witold Borowski, *noms de guerre* 'Witek', and 'Andrzej Brzeziński'. The poviats of Opoczno, where Drzewica lies, was represented by Second Lieutenant Marian Suskiewicz, *noms de guerre* 'Sosna', and 'Mścisław', whom the members of the People's Guard had been looking for on that memorable night of 22 January 1943, and whose three brothers had been killed at that time. In accordance with the order issued on 1 December 1942 by the commander of the National Armed Forces, Colonel Ignacy Oziewicz, *nom de guerre* 'Czesław',

⁵⁴ AAN, German occupation authorities, 214/III-3, 'Aktion Attila', *passim*.

⁵⁵ AAN, DR 202/XXI-1, The 'Garbarnia' Report [Government Delegation in the Kielce Area], April–June 1943, p. 30.

it was decided that a permanent partisan unit should be set up, one whose purpose would be to protect its own ranks, as well as the local population.⁵⁶

In July 1943, in the powiat of Opoczno, Marian Suskiewicz, *nom de guerre* 'Sosna', organised such a unit under the command of Sergeant-Major Józef Woźniak, *nom de guerre* 'Burza'. The otherwise unidentified Lieutenant/Captain 'Tom', who frequently took command of it, was appointed Commander of Special Operations (of the partisans) for the powiat.⁵⁷ Initially, the unit consisted of eleven soldiers, namely: Józef Woźniak, *nom de guerre* 'Burza'; Second Lieutenant Mieczysław Drabik, *nom de guerre* 'Słoń'; Officer Cadet Antoni Kozłowski, *nom de guerre* 'Pogan'; Officer Cadet Zdzisław Kacer, *nom de guerre* 'Gapek'; Officer Cadet Emilia Natkańska, *nom de guerre* 'Emilka'; Platoon Leader Waclaw Napora, *nom de guerre* 'Dan'; Platoon Leader Szczepan Kozieli, *nom de guerre* 'Tońko'; Corporal Franciszek Worach, *nom de guerre* 'Bil'; Posieczyński, *nom de guerre* 'Kanarek' (first name unknown); Stanisław Karbownik, *nom de guerre* 'Ferdek'; and Leszek Szmata, *nom de guerre* 'Tadek'.⁵⁸ Not long after that, the unit found itself in the vicinity of Drzewica, charged with the task of finding and liquidating 'Lew's gang'. One of the last nights the National Armed Forces soldiers spent in the house once belonging to the Suskiewicz family, they heard the details of the atrocities committed there a few months earlier. Many years later, Waclaw Napora, *nom de guerre* 'Dan', wrote: "Our host was a man who had been resettled there from beyond the River Bug, but he was well informed of what happened there during the war. Even though I had considered myself an

⁵⁶ "Carry out counter-attacks in the areas where armed bands are known to operate (prisoners-of-war escaped from the Bolsheviks, Bolshevik landing parties, Jews, common criminals, and some local delinquents). Seize their weapons, ammunition, radios, etc. Members of these bands ought to be shot, as they have either been sent there by the enemy or are acting as local criminals, endangering the life and property of the Poles, the people that the occupiers do not care about" (order dated 1 December 1942, copy in the collection of L. Żebrowski). It must be noted that the word 'Jews' was not meant to mean just any Jews, but those who were armed and organised in criminal groups.

⁵⁷ The identity of the person known as 'Tom', sometimes identified with Hubert Jura, has provoked a number of speculations and controversies. According to some, he was in regular contact with Paul Fuchs, the head of the Gestapo in Radom. He is also believed to have participated in some internal leadership struggles within the National Armed Forces that took place towards the end of 1944. He then left Poland together with the Holy Cross Mountains Brigade (*Brygada Świętokrzyska*), ultimately withdrawing to the territories occupied by the Western Allies.

⁵⁸ Notes from the interview with Ryszard Kozłowski 'Pogan', 10 February 1996; Kucharski, *Zanim*, pp. 98–99.

apolitical person, after he told me everything he knew, I became rather hostile towards Communism”⁵⁹

In mid-July 1943, the unit set off in the direction of the Brudzewice Forest in search of the People’s Guard unit they had been ordered to find. A few days later, the NSZ soldiers heard from one of the foresters that he had been visited by a member of the ‘Jewish gang’ who, under the threat of killing him and his family, demanded that he prepare some food products in accordance with the list that the visitor had submitted. They were to be collected the following day. Indeed, one day later, two members of the People’s Guard came, but seeing a group of armed men lying in wait, they quickly tried to withdraw. The NSZ soldiers fired at them and began a pursuit, as a result of which one of them was killed and the other, ‘Heniek’ (N/A), was captured. Captain ‘Tom’ played a trick, saying that his unit belonged to the People’s Guard and that he had come to this area on an important mission from Lublin voivodeship. The commander also scolded the captured man for insubordination and disobeying orders. ‘Tom’ then threatened him with court martial and demanded to be put in contact with his unit commander immediately. Completely disorientated, ‘Heniek’ was only released after having first committed himself to fetching his commander. ‘Tom’ then instructed the soldiers that, when the members of the People’s Guard came, they were not to ‘mix’ with them, but remain in a separate group and feign interest. Their objective was to get hold of the machine guns that belonged to the GL partisans. The most important task was assigned to ‘Burza’, the holder of a light automatic rifle, who was supposed to constantly tinker with the allegedly broken rifle and, at a convenient moment, then open fire.⁶⁰

At first, a man came to meet the National Armed Forces soldiers, introducing himself as ‘Stach’ (quite possibly Stanisław Wiktorowicz), the commander of a People’s Guard unit. The situation which had happened with ‘Heniek’ repeated itself, that is, he came under threat of court martial for disobeying orders. Finally, ‘Tom’ declared that the two units would be united under his command, and demanded that the entire People’s Guard unit be brought in for the purpose of a mutual presentation and

⁵⁹ Letter from Waclaw Napora to Jerzy Kucharski, n.d., copy in the collection of L. Żebrowski.

⁶⁰ Account by Antoni Kozłowski ‘Pogan’, author’s private collection.

in order to agree on the particulars of any further actions. On 22 July 1943, a group of seven partisans from the 'Waryński' unit of the People's Guard arrived at a clearing near Stefanów. The unit looked dreadful; its members were extremely dirty and neglected, without any signs of belonging to a military formation. One of them was recognised by a subordinate of 'Tom' as a Jew from Gielniów with whom the NSZ soldier had once served in the army. The GL partisans owned a Polish pre-war Mk. 1928 light machine gun; apart from that, they only had a few guns and sawn-off shotguns. The types and general condition of the weapons they had clearly demonstrated that they would be of little use in any kind of military operations against the Germans. Following a brief greeting, both groups spread out into the clearing. The GL partisans' interest was aroused by the Polish eagles and other elements of the uniforms and insignia used by the NSZ soldiers, none of which had ever been used in their ranks. 'Tom' explained that all the GL units in the Lublin region were obliged to dress in that way for political reasons. During some of the more casual conversations, various topics were discussed. The GL partisans, for instance, said that they had "dealt with the National Democrats" in Drzewica and that "they were already following [Marian] Suskiewicz around the markets and would soon kill him as well".⁶¹ It also turned out that those present did not represent all the members of the unit, as some of the members had been sent to obtain some provisions and a few partisans were stationed at their headquarters. The plan that 'Tom' accepted at the beginning of the operation was carried out. When, under some pretext, Zdzisław Kacer, *nom de guerre* 'Gapek' seized the GL's light machine gun, 'Burza' stood up and cried out almost simultaneously: "Hands up!" He then opened fire at the members of the People's Guard. Most of them were killed and only two, 'Heniek' and 'Zenek', managed to flee. One of the members of the People's Guard did not manage to escape. He was captured alive, but was soon shot on 'Tom's' orders. Soon after that, 'Heniek' was also killed. 'Zenek' then left the fearful farmer on whose farm he had been hiding, and took cover in the woods, where, after about two months, he established contact with the structures of the People's Guard. It was then that he reported what had happened near Stefanów. On account of this delay,

⁶¹ Ibid.

the leaders of the PPR had to wait until October before starting their propaganda campaign. According to the text published in their periodical *Gwardzista*,

A belated report was sent to the General Headquarters of the People's Guard, informing us of the fratricidal crimes of some reactionary thugs committed even before those near Borów. [...] Our commander, Stach, personally went to see the newcomers' unit. He believed that they were a unit of the People's Guard from Lublin voivodeship, and so the two units sat together to eat dinner. At some point, the commander of the newly arrived unit looked at his watch and said: "Now we need to devise a plan of how we should act together". This was their sign, following which they began to shoot at our men. Seven members of the People's Guard were murdered: Stach, Marian, Wyrwilas, Madej, Genek, Stary and Henryk. Only one of them, Zenek, managed to escape, as can be seen in the present report.⁶²

From the beginning, the operation near Stefanów appears to have been overshadowed by a similar operation undertaken by the National Armed Forces, the aforementioned action that took place near Borów on 9 August 1943 (in the poviát of Kraśnik, Lublin voivodeship). There, the 'Jan Kiliński' unit of the People's Guard was liquidated by a group of NSZ soldiers under the command of the *Cichociemny* ['Silent Unseen' paratrooper unit] Major Leonard Zub-Zdanowicz, *nom de guerre* 'Ząb'.⁶³ This National Armed Forces operation soon became the subject of a heated campaign in the underground media and international press.⁶⁴ In response to these

⁶² *Gwardzista* 25 October 1943.

⁶³ *Gwardzista* 15 September 1943. The direct cause of the operation was the crimes (murders and robberies) committed by the People's Guard unit as well as activity in support of Communism and the Soviets. At first, the units remained neutral towards one another. However, being aware of the Communist agitation in his own unit by the newly arrived members of the People's Guard (and fearing the possibility of being attacked), Major 'Ząb' ordered that the partisan headquarters be surrounded and the members of the GL unit disarmed. A court martial was held, resulting in a death sentence being passed on the GL partisans for banditry and Communist activities. Almost all of them were shot, one was released, and one escaped. For more information, see in particular, M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne: 'Ząb' przeciw dwu wrogom*, Warszawa 2005, pp. 120–24; Chodakiewicz, Gontarczyk, Żebrowski, *Tajne oblicze*, vol. 3, pp. 207–46. Perhaps the best study of these events is found in R. Drabik, 'Wydarzenia pod Borowem', *Glaukopis* 2003, no. 1, pp. 114–43.

⁶⁴ See, in particular, Gontarczyk, *Polska*, pp. 292–300.

events, the leaders of the PPR issued a statement condemning the National Armed Forces for their attacks on the Communist partisans:

The occupiers, so hated by the Polish nation for their monstrous crimes, have unfortunately found among some circles of Polish society those who, under the cloak of patriotic decorum, are willing to be their obedient tools, carrying out anti-Polish policies. A gang of these paid or voluntary agents of the Gestapo is prowling the areas of our ongoing conflict with the occupiers, encouraging fratricidal violence and organising bands of marauders.⁶⁵

The former commander of the 'Lions', Izrael Ajzenman (Julian Kaniewski), survived because he was not present during the operation near Stefanów. A new unit was formed from the remaining members of the 'Ludwik Waryński' unit: the Stanisław Wiktorowicz unit, under the command of 'Góral' (unidentified), a fugitive from one of the nearby ghettos, with 'Julek' as its political commissar. However, for reasons that remain unknown, a conflict broke out within the unit itself, as a result of which, towards the end of 1943, Ajzenman was disarmed and sent to work in the propaganda department of one of the local outposts. He did, however, return to the unit and, on his own accord, tried to take over the command by force, probably killing the previous commander 'Góral'. According to a PPR report,

The other disgrace of Radom region is the person of 'Julek'. He is similar to the first one who, among other charges, is suspected of the murder of 'Góral' and Sergeant 'Zenek'. Together with 'Organista',⁶⁶ we have decided to impose the capital punishment on Julek. The unit commanded by 'Wiktorowicz' has been broken up (with only eight people remaining). The weapons were deposited in a place which, for the moment, appears to be known only to 'Julek', as we do not yet have

⁶⁵ AAN, 190/I-1, Statement by the PPR concerning the issue of political murders and initiating a civil war, p. 62.

⁶⁶ Jan Gruszczyński ('Janek', 'Organista') was a member of the second Initiative Group of the PPR, sent to Poland in May 1943. Although at first he seemed to have remained inactive in the Communist underground, in fact he was in charge of the Soviet intelligence network in Radom. At the turn of 1944, he began to work for the PPR.

any contact with the other people. As for that matter, we are trying to secure the weapons as fast as we can, since the other GL partisans are not to be trusted.⁶⁷

However, Ajzenman was not yet liquidated, due to the general personnel problems that existed in the PPR. Despite his reputation as a murderous and 'bloodthirsty person', Ajzenman remained in several partisan units of the AL until the end of the war. For some time, he was even a commander of the 'task force' of 'Chytry', which was famous for its banditry and unwarranted murders in and around the town of Końskie.⁶⁸ Shortly before Soviets soldiers entered the area, he became a member of an NKVD assault group with the code-name 'Nitra', led by Lieutenant Anatoly Sapronov, *nom de guerre* 'Kiriev'. By the time the Red Army arrived, and Ajzenman was briefly made an officer of the District Department of Security in Końskie, members of this group had arrested a number of Polish pro-independence activists.⁶⁹

Between March 1945 and April 1946, Ajzenman served as a lieutenant in the Voivode's Department of Security in Poznań. Following his first breaches of the law in this new post, a letter was sent to the PPR's Central Committee, enquiring about Ajzenman's activity in the partisan movement. In reply, Hilary Chełchowski, a member of the Central Committee, wrote:

I first met comrade 'Chytry' (back then known as 'Julek') in 1942, in a partisan unit. He did not have a good reputation. [...] There is no exact data that could prove it, but it cannot be denied that he has on his conscience [the disappearance of] a number of comrades from his partisan unit, including the liaison officer

⁶⁷ AAN, PPR, 190/I-5, Report of the Third District, p. 24.

⁶⁸ "To Lieutenant 'Chytry': I have looked at your reports up to and including the ninth day of the present month. I thus wish to draw your attention once again to the inadmissibility of your group executing its own sentences, except on the basis of manifestly irrefutable facts. [...] I consider the last two cases of those young men to be wrong and the motives insufficient. [...] I wish to let you know that, in the area, you have the reputation of a bloodthirsty person. From my own observation, I can see that the local people are turning against you and that there might soon be organised attempts to break up your unit" (AAN, AL, 192/XXIII-16, Letter sent on 10 January 1945 by Józef Małecki 'Sęk', 'Witek', the commander of the Third District of the People's Army, p. 56).

⁶⁹ J. Wroniszewski, 'Śmiertelny skok "Czeremosza"', *Konecki Wrzesień* 1996, no. 1, p. 3. After the war, Ajzenman (Kaniewski) boasted that, along with the group led by 'Kiriev', he had set up a network of agents to infiltrate the Polish underground: "our counterintelligence still operates between Końskie, Radom, Kielce and Tomaszów. For as long as I was in Końskie, I was able to detect every action undertaken by the fascist organisations" (CAW WBH, III/19/201, Account of J. Kaniewski, manuscript in Russian, n.d., p. 11).

‘Zosia’. [...] He was undisciplined, unwilling to comply with the orders of the party and the commanders of the [People’s] Army, he committed various abuses. For this and for the above, he received a death sentence. The sentence was not carried out, as it was hoped that he would improve, but until the very end, no such improvement was ever seen in him.⁷⁰

Ajzenman was dismissed from service in the Department of Security for various incidents of malpractice, theft and a suspected attempt of rape of a female minor. On 17 August 1946, he was found guilty by the Military District Court in Warsaw and sentenced to three years in prison, which was conditionally suspended for two years.⁷¹ After being released from prison, he was employed as a guard in a number of state institutions, including the Polish Radio, the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the Railway Security. He died on 19 December 1965, in Lublin.

After the war, the history of the ‘Lions’ underwent a considerable amount of distortion. At first, the major source of information concerning this unit was the underground press of the PPR, in which one could regularly find a great deal of incorrect material concerning the People’s Guard and the People’s Army, as well as, most importantly, the personal accounts of Ajzenman (Kaniewski) himself. For several decades after the war, all the records concerning the activity of the ‘Lions’ during the German occupation of Poland were in the possession of the PPR/PZPR, and were thus unavailable to historians. Moreover, right after the war, most of them were falsified on a massive scale.⁷² For a long time, the documents issued by Polish underground organisations as well as the underground press were in the possession

⁷⁰ L. Żebrowski, ‘Julian Kaniewski’, in *Encyklopedia białych plam*, vol. 9, Radom 2002, p. 114. For almost as long as the PPR remained in the underground, in 1942–45, Hilary Chełchowski was responsible for Radom and Kielce regions.

⁷¹ Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Poznaniu (Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance, Branch in Poznań), 084/6, Report of the criminal record of Julian Ajzenman, pp. 12–13, J. Ajzenman’s petition dated 18 September 1946, p. 17.

⁷² In the Archives of the Central Committee, the reports of the PPR authorities in Radom and Kielce had to be rewritten (or even written again from scratch) in an attempt to portray the activities of Ajzenman’s unit (as well as that of other groups) as having been directed against the occupier, rather than being criminal. After the war, the report of the ‘Lions’ operation in Drzewica was also forged. In it, those murdered were accused of collaboration with the Germans, denunciation and murder. The existing document is therefore a post-war hoax (AAN, GL, 191/XXIII-5, Report of the partisan unit, n.d., p. 41). For more information concerning such forgeries in the post-war era, see Chodakiewicz, Gontarczyk, Żebrowski, *Tajne oblicze*, vol. 2, pp. 1–15.

of the Polish United Workers' Party and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Coupled with censorship, this certainly did not allow for a factual reconstruction of the true nature of the 'Lions' or the nature of the unit's operations. It is also worth mentioning that some of the measures undertaken at that time were deliberate falsifications of historical sources, in particular, emphasising the 'fact' that some of the men killed by the members of the NSZ were Jewish.⁷³

As early as 1952, the operation near Stefanów was referred to in schoolbooks as the beginning of "a fratricidal conflict which was initiated by reactionaries".⁷⁴ In the Communist era, the very same view was endorsed by all the most important publications on the subject.⁷⁵ Security officers searched the homes of the victims' families for any photographs taken at the funeral, as well as other documents concerning the murder in Drzewica.⁷⁶ Any attempts to sneak in written information on this subject in the public press or academic works were suppressed by the censors. One notable exception was a brief note that could be found in a local academic journal, which published the memoirs of Emilia Dąbrowska (*née* Kobyłańska), the former owner of the Rusinów estate. According to her, "on 22 January 1943, tragic events unfolded in Drzewica, when the same 'Lew' group that had been in Rusinów four days earlier murdered seven people, local citizens and factory workers, including August Kobyłański, director and co-owner of the Gerlach factory."⁷⁷ At that time, however, the prevailing version of the events was the one that came to be established as 'factual' in the Communist historiography. This was

⁷³ In the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, in the collection of Bernard Marek, remains a document signed by Ajzenman/Kaniewski entitled 'My experiences from 1939 onwards, in the struggle for social and national liberation from the Hitlerite yoke. Concerning the murder of a group of Jewish partisans in the ranks of the People's Guard (twenty people) by the NSZ' (AŻIH, Collection of Bernard Marek, 349). Not only were some of the seven members of the People's Guard not Jewish, but their total number was definitely less than twenty. Many of the document's details, including the surnames of the allegedly Jewish partisans, were simply invented.

⁷⁴ *Historia Polski 1864–1945: Materiały do nauczania w klasie XI*, Warszawa 1952, pp. 472–73. The chapter about the Second World War was written by Maria Turlejska.

⁷⁵ See, for instance, J. Garas, *Oddziały Gwardii Ludowej i Armii Ludowej 1942–1945*, Warszawa 1971, pp. 268–69; B. Hillebrandt, *Partyzantka na Kielecczyźnie 1939–1945*, Warszawa 1970, p. 132.

⁷⁶ The search proved to be futile. There are remaining photographs of the row of the victims' coffins, as well as those that were taken during the funeral. There among the people can be seen the figure of Marian Suskiewicz, bending over the coffins of his murdered brothers. Last but not least, there are also pre-war photographs of the victims.

⁷⁷ Dąbrowska, *Z dziejów*, p. 92.

sometimes supplemented by the claim that the operation of the National Armed Forces near Stefanów was primarily of an anti-Semitic character. As for the criminal character of the activity of the 'Lions' and their operation in Drzewica, there was a consensual silence.

The 'historian' who violated these unwritten rules in a rather intriguing way was Stefan Krakowski. In an article published in *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* in 1968, he wrote that "on 15 January 1943, the unit attacked a German police station in Drzewica. The partisans killed seven Hitlerites, including the chief constable [*sic*]"⁷⁸ Such revelations may well be set side-by-side the aforementioned biography of Izrael Ajzenman (Julian Kaniewski) in *Słownik biograficzny działaczy polskiego ruchu robotniczego*, [Biographical dictionary of the activists of the Polish labour movement] where, instead of his four years in prison for ordinary crimes in the pre-war era, Krystyna Arciuch says he was sentenced for political activity in the KPP.⁷⁹

It is important to note that this version of the events, nourished by the propaganda of the Polish People's Republic, still had its die-hard advocates in the early years of the Third Polish Republic after 1989. For instance Professor Krystyna Kersten, in her analysis of the above-related issues, did not bother to rely on her own research, but rather uncritically drew on the *Biuletyn Informacyjny*⁸⁰ and other publications from the post-war period. In her substantial work *Narodziny systemu władzy*, [Birth of the system of power], she writes,

The increasingly real prospect of the arrival of the Red Army, which prompted the Communists to create their own structures, also led the political and

⁷⁸ Krakowski, *The War*, p. 56. The date of 15 January is incorrect and comes from Ajzenman's account that Krakowski used in his research, namely, the account whose main focus is "a Polish fascist organisation". According to Ajzenman, "that fascist organisation followed my unit and denounced it to the Germans. On 15 January 1943, we encircled the town of Drzewica and executed seven fascists, including the owner of the Gerlach factory, a pharmacist and a postmaster" (CAW WBH, III/19/201, account of J. Kaniewski, manuscript in Russian, p. 3). The author of the article knew very well that the said 'fascists' were not to be identified with German policemen.

⁷⁹ See above, fn. 10.

⁸⁰ There was a statement, issued in *Biuletyn Informacyjny* 46 (201), on 8 November 1943, claiming that 'UNITS of the Armed Forces in Poland' [*ODDZIAŁY Sił Zbrojnych w Kraju*: that is to say, the Home Army] had nothing to do with the "hideous murder" of the GL unit near Borów. It is hard to say with any degree of certainty whether this attitude to the activity of the People's Guard in the Polish provinces stemmed from ignorance or sheer naivety.

military groups of the far right to intensify their activities. The National Armed Forces, not yet allied with the Home Army, initiated these fratricidal conflicts, liquidating a few units of the People's Guard. [...] On 22 July [1943], in Stefanów, in Kielce voivodeship, the entire Ludwik Waryński unit of the People's Guard was liquidated.⁸¹

Those 'historians' who, in the past, had been members of the Communist partisan groups and the security apparatus of the Polish People's Republic, and who had also falsified the history of Poland in the first few decades after the war, were also very active at that time. One of them, Ryszard Nazarewicz, a UB/SB former major writing as late as the mid-1990s, once again wrote about the liquidation of the 'Lions', trying to cast the matter in an indisputably ethnic context:

The need to supply [the Jewish units of the People's Guard] with food provoked serious conflicts in the area and accusations of banditry. They were thus hammered with particular ferocity, not only by the Hitlerites, but also members of the NSZ. The latter are in fact responsible for [...] hanging the GL partisans, most of them Jewish, in the forest near Przysucha on 22 July 1943.⁸²

However, it seems that today, when the origin of the 'Lions', the nature of their activities and the person of their commander are so well known, it is worth taking the above facts into account when considering several important issues. One of them is the question of the genuine attitude towards the Jews in the ranks of the PPR during the Holocaust. This concerns whether the recruitment for the People's Guard in the ghettos was, as was commonly held over the years, indeed an attempt to save those who were in danger of extinction, or whether the recruitment campaign was only meant to gain more people for their own ranks.

⁸¹ K. Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 27–28. In the light of what is known today of the activity of the 'Lions', later renamed the 'Ludwik Waryński' unit, it is difficult to take such claims seriously. Likewise, it is difficult to say in what sense the criminal Izrael Ajzenman and his people were 'brothers' to Marian Suskiewicz. After all, three of his own brothers had been murdered by the 'Lions', a People's Guard unit.

⁸² R. Nazarewicz, 'Podziemie związane z PPR wobec tragedii i walki Żydów', in *Spółczesność polskie wobec martyrologii i walki Żydów w latach II wojny światowej: Materiały z sesji w Instytucie Historii PAN w dniu 11 III 1993 r.*, ed. K. Dunin-Wąsowicz, Warszawa 1996, p. 111.

On the other hand, it ought to be stressed that, unlike Ajzenman (Kaniewski), Jewish fugitives who could not in any way be described as social outcasts often became members of the Communist partisan groups because they had no alternative. As has been observed, in 1942, there were still no units of the Polish pro-independence underground in the field.⁸³ Hence, these fugitives had no choice but to cooperate with people (many of whom were common criminals) participating in a regime whose target was Polish society, for such, indeed, was the nature of the People's Guard and the People's Army.

The present study should, therefore, be seen as an attempt to provide a serious contribution to further studies on the subject of Jews and Jewish groups in the People's Guard and the People's Army. Another key issue that should be taken into consideration is whether (and, if so, to what extent) the confrontations with or even denunciations of armed Jewish partisan groups (and Jews in general) were the result of anti-Semitism or an element of self-defence by the local people, their fear for their property and lives, as well as their wish to avenge the robberies, rapes and murders they experienced. Moreover, was there ever a chance that some kind of consensus could ever be reached between the Jewish groups in the forests, which were in desperate need of food and clothes, and the local population who refused to provide them with such any such means? What role did this unjustified cruelty, such as rape and murder (in combination with the confiscation of food and clothing), play in the downward spiral of resentment against these Jewish groups? Last but not least, what role could the victims' pre-war political sympathies have played in the crimes committed by the 'Jewish' groups?

The above-mentioned questions should all be taken into consideration while studying the attitudes of the Polish population towards Jews in the provincial areas of Poland during the period 1942–45.

⁸³ The Polish underground was preparing for the mobilisation of its troops which, in more favourable political as well as strategic circumstances, could have played an active part in the liberation of Poland. Active partisan units were practically non-existent until 1943 on account of the difficulties that could have arisen from any activity of larger groups. In this way, they were trying to avoid any heavy losses or acts of German retaliation. One very painful episode, for instance, was the history of the partisan unit commanded by Maj Henryk Dobrzański, *nom de guerre* 'Hubal'. While searching for them, German soldiers murdered over 700 people in the surrounding villages and burned down several hundred farms.

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SUMMARY

The article discusses the activity of the 'Lions', a partisan unit of the Communist People's Guard, from the beginning of its formation in September 1942 until July 1943, when it was liquidated by the National Armed Forces. Its establishment was closely connected with the Communists' concept of immediate action. Like many other units of the People's Guard, the 'Lions', which were based in the Radom area, consisted mainly of Jewish fugitives from nearby ghettos. The unit was commanded by Izrael Ajzenman (Julian Kaniewski, *noms de guerre* 'Lew', 'Chytry', 'Julek'), a man who, before the war, had been convicted of ordinary crimes. From the beginning, its members only rarely carried out operations against the Germans. Instead, they often indulged in looting, murder, and other crimes against the local Polish population, including a raid on the town of Drzewica. The article also studies the relations within the unit itself and the way in which it was commanded, clearly demonstrating that the 'Lions' were perhaps more reminiscent of a gang of criminals than of a self-disciplined group of partisans whose code of conduct would be based on a set of regulations and procedures.

KEYWORDS

People's Guard • People's Army • Polish Workers' Party • Izrael Ajzenman
 • Julian Kaniewski • 'Lions' unit • Jewish partisans • Drzewica
 • National Armed Forces • Tadeusz Kobylański • Stefanów • Opoczno

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JEWS IN THE MIŃSK MAZOWIECKI POWIAT DURING
THE GERMAN OCCUPATION, 1939–44*. THE STATE
OF RESEARCH, RESEARCH POSTULATES, SOURCE BASE

The state of research

Issues concerning the Jewish minority during the German occupation in the Mińsk Mazowiecki powiat have so far rarely been discussed. However, both researchers of the Second World War and regional historians have been involved in this discussion. A dozen or so brochures and articles of a scientific, popular or educational nature have been published. Memoirs and journals about the life of Jews in Mińsk Mazowiecki and the Mińsk powiat constitute a separate category of publications.

Generally speaking, the research works have revolved around two basic issues: the Holocaust, and the help Poles gave to Jews who were at risk of death at the hands of the Germans.

The first type is represented by an article by Emil Noiński, 'Likwidacja getta żydowskiego w Mińsku Mazowieckim w świetle relacji i wspomnień naocznych świadków' [The liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Mińsk Mazowiecki in eyewitness

* In 1939–1944, the Mińsk Mazowiecki powiat was located in the eastern part of the Warsaw district of the General Government. This article concerns the Mińsk Mazowiecki powiat in the boundaries of the German occupation period, i.e. of *Kreis Radzyn*. All references to 'Mińsk' in this text refer to this town, and not the Belarusian city.

accounts and memoirs].¹ He initiated a number of research publications on the subject of the Holocaust in relation to Mińsk and the surrounding area. The article was based primarily on accounts collected in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute and published memoirs, as well as notes in encyclopaedias. It discusses the basic facts related to the extermination of the Mińsk Jews, i.e. the liquidation of the ghetto on 21 August 1942, and the murder by the Germans at the beginning of 1943 of several hundred people from the labour camp located at the Kopernik school on Siennicka Street in Mińsk.

In another text by Noiński, which speaks in a cross-sectional way about the Jews of Kałuszyn over the centuries, the issue of the final years of the existence of the Jewish community in this city also appears. However, the author limits this part to a minimum, focusing on creating a general picture of the life of this community before 1939. Nevertheless, this article represents the first attempt to discuss the extermination of Jews in Kałuszyn, although it should be noted that Noiński cites no sources and only draws upon previously published publications. He treats Holocaust issues in a very brief manner, devoting only two pages of the work to it.²

In the collective work *Prowincja noc. Życie i zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim* [Province Night. Life and destruction of the Polish Jews in the Warsaw District], wherein researchers intended to create a general picture of the Holocaust in this region, we will search in vain for a separate study devoted to the Jewish community of the Mińsk district. Nevertheless, in many places, albeit perfunctorily and randomly, the book does touch upon issues concerning the area of interest to us. Particularly noteworthy is the article by Jacek Andrzej Młynarczyk entitled “Akcja Reinhardt” w gettach prowincjonalnych dystryktu warszawskiego 1942–1943’ [Operation Reinhardt in the provincial ghettos of the Warsaw district 1942–43]. The liquidation of each powiat ghetto, including Mińsk, receives several pages. Młynarczyk extensively cites documents from the criminal proceedings that were conducted after the Second World War against Nazi criminals in the courts

¹ E. Noiński, ‘Likwidacja getta żydowskiego w Mińsku Mazowieckim w świetle relacji i wspomnień naocznych świadków’, *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* 2006, no. 14, pp. 75–83.

² E. Noiński, ‘Ludność żydowska Kałuszyna od XVII do XX wieku’, *Rocznik Kałuszyński* 2005, no. 5, pp. 80–82.

of the Federal Republic of Germany. These are currently stored at the Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes [*Unterlagen der Zentralen Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*] in Ludwigsburg. Another positive aspect of Młynarczyk's work is the attempt to investigate the problem of the extermination of Jews in small ghettos scattered throughout the powiat. We learn from the article that people were forced to go to the Jewish districts of Dobre and Mrozy at the hands of the German torturers. These people died on the spot, or were transported to the extermination camp in Treblinka.³

In the rest of the studies in this book, however, we find little mention of Jews from the Mińsk powiat. For example, in the work of Jan Grabowski, *Żydzi przed obliczem niemieckich i polskich sądów w dystrykcie warszawskim Generalnego Gubernatorstwa 1939–1942* [Jews before German and Polish courts in the Warsaw District of the General Government, 1939–42], the abuses of Karl Bittrich, the district governor (*Kreishauptmann*) of Mińsk, are mentioned in the context of the displacement of the Jewish population from their homes in 1940.⁴

The fate of the Jews of Mińsk is also referred to in the pages of Barbara Engelking's article, 'Życie codzienne Żydów w miasteczkach dystryktu warszawskiego' [The everyday life of Jews in the towns of the Warsaw district]. However, this work includes only individual pieces of information illustrating the brutality of the German terror against Jews, the background to the formation of the *Judenrat* in Mińsk, the issue of sending the inhabitants to labour camps and the provision of food supplies, among others. The excerpts on Mińsk were based on reports from the Jewish Historical Institute and Yad Vashem.⁵

In turn, Jacek Leociak's study *Wizerunek Polaków w zapisach Żydów z dystryktu warszawskiego* [The image of Poles in the writings of Jews from the Warsaw district],⁶

³ J.A. Młynarczyk, "Akcja Reinhardt" w gettach prowincjonalnych dystryktu warszawskiego 1942–1943', in *Prowincja noc. Życie i zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim*, ed. B. Engelking, J. Leociak, D. Libionka, Warszawa 2007, pp. 64–66.

⁴ J. Grabowski, 'Żydzi przed obliczem niemieckich i polskich sądów w dystrykcie warszawskim Generalnego Gubernatorstwa 1939–1942', in *Prowincja noc*, pp. 105–06.

⁵ B. Engelking, 'Życie codzienne Żydów w miasteczkach dystryktu warszawskiego', in *Prowincja noc*, pp. 126, 133, 138, 182.

⁶ J. Leociak, 'Wizerunek Polaków w zapisach Żydów z dystryktu warszawskiego', in *Prowincja noc*, pp. 373–441.

included in the above-mentioned collection, presents a one-sided view of the Polish population. Its sources are accounts by Jewish witnesses to the Holocaust who left their own testimonies after the end of the German occupation, which are often filled with suffering and bitterness caused by the deaths of their loved ones and the entire Jewish community. Without the help of Poles, the survival of the Jews would have been very difficult. Despite this, many of these testimonies are characterised by a great aversion towards the Polish community. Not only does Leociak fail to take these factors into account, but also selects only those extracts of accounts in which Jews attribute negative attitudes towards Poles or pursue statements and behaviours filled with dislike. He cites *inter alia* the opinion of Lejb Guz, who wrote in his post-war memoirs about the indifference of Poles to the tragedy of the Jews murdered in the Mińsk ghetto.⁷ An extract from the article which quotes the diary of Lejb Rochman, a Holocaust survivor, emphasises the indifference of the Polish population to the tragedy of the Jewish nation in a similar vein:

Leib Rochman, who was hiding after the liquidation of the ghetto in Mińsk Mazowiecki, tried to join a group of Jewish survivors who had worked in the local factory and were barracked in the building of the Copernicus school. Pushing through the fields, he met an old farmer grazing a cow. He had the courage to approach him. "The peasant listened to me indifferently. I tried to read his gaze, but his face was expressionless. He was grazing the cow in the stubble as usual. For a moment I imagined I was waking up from a bad dream, and now everything was back to normal. There were noises in the distance. I shivered. The peasant who was looking at the grass said slowly: 'It's nothing, these are the Jews who the Germans are taking off to a labour camp.'"⁸

The article is structured in such a way as to move away from the problem of the Polish population's indifference and towards (as Leociak sees it) their anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. Following this line of thinking, in order to confirm his thesis about the Poles' anti-Semitic attitudes, Leociak quotes another extract from Rochman's memoirs, in which he quoted a peasant woman in February 1943

⁷ Ibid., p. 391.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 397–98.

as saying, “I realise that if the Jews were still alive, today bread would cost as much as a house, and we would all have starved to death”⁹

According to Leociak, the memoirs of the above-mentioned Lejb Guz should also serve as a hard argument for the fact that the Poles were anti-Semites:

We marched through streets that we had seldom travelled before. After the liquidation of the Jewish population in Mińsk Mazowiecki, the appearance of Jews was a kind of sensation. This could be clearly observed in the way passers-by reacted. This time the ‘madman’ who escorted us decided to show his power over us, and at the same time to ridicule us in front of the Poles. [...] In a word, a recruiting exercise. [...] These exercises lasted quite a long time, to the delight of the watching passers-by. [...] Many of us, after a day of hard work, felt great hunger – and then we had to undergo additional physical and spiritual suffering, to be exposed to mockery.¹⁰

Apart from the excerpts quoted, the article also contains many more in a similar vein. These are supposed to testify to the Poles’ rising antipathy, which implicitly led to the murders and robberies committed against the Jews. Leociak tries to lead the reader along with the use of subheadings, and tries to insist that the Poles’ indifferent attitude and aversion towards the Jews led in a straight line to extreme behaviour such as helping with the robbery, denunciation and finally the murder of the Jews: ‘Those who helped’, ‘Those who betrayed’, ‘Those who robbed’, ‘Those who murdered’.¹¹

In his work on the image of the Poles, Leociak did not attempt to construct any positive image of the Polish community. It seems that he did not find any such excerpts in the diaries of the Jews, as never once did they positively testify to the attitude of the Polish people. This is all the stranger as every person rescued from the Holocaust often received help from the Polish community in order to survive. Hence the conclusion that Leociak’s article treats Polish-Jewish relations in a one-sided manner, and only ‘illuminates’ that aspect of reality which

⁹ Ibid., p. 381.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 393.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 402–04, 407–08, 414, 420, 423, 432, 434–35, 438.

testifies to the anti-Semitism of the Poles and their participation in the Holocaust. After reading this article, the reader will get the impression that no Poles helped the Jews in the Mińsk powiat, and all were against them; they only waited for the Jews' end, or worked towards it themselves. This is of course demonstrably untrue.

Recent years have brought a certain increase in the number of regional publications which are characterised by academic value. One such is an article by Ewa Maria Borkowska, published in 2015 in the *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* [Mińsk Mazowiecki Yearbook], entitled 'Obozy pracy przymusowej dla Żydów w powiecie mińskim w latach 1939–1943' [Forced labour camps for Jews in Mińsk powiat in 1939–43].¹² This study was based not only on the relatively sparse literature on the subject dealing with labour camps, but above all on documentation, which the researcher cites quite richly. The documents listed include questionnaires from municipal courts from the Mińsk powiat in the IPN Archive, Jewish accounts deposited in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, and documents of the Mińsk powiat communes from the period of the German occupation, now stored in the Otwock branch of the State Archives in Warsaw.

The author deals with an issue that has been poorly researched, and still remains virtually unknown. The issue of forced labour by the Jews, excluding the larger or more famous camps, has not so far been of interest to historians. Excavating this important issue from the darkness of oblivion becomes something important in itself. The forced labour camps for the Jewish population were located in Chyżyny near Latowicz (a water management camp), Kołbiel (a water management camp), Kuflewo-Jeziorek (an agricultural and water management camp), Mińsk Mazowiecki (the Copernicus school on Siennicka Street), Mienia and Kałuszyn (labour camps) and in Zimnowod in the Chróścice commune (a water purification camp).¹³ Borkowska has introduced new facts into academic circulation. Not only does her work reveal many unknown events in the history of the Jews in the Mińsk district, but it also indicates an important direction for future research on Jewish issues in the countryside and smaller towns.

¹² E.M. Borkowska, 'Obozy pracy przymusowej dla Żydów w powiecie mińskim w latach 1939–1943', *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* 2015, no. 23, pp. 79–106.

¹³ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

Borkowska presents further considerations in her article 'Przymusowa praca Żydów powiatu mińskiego – placówki i kolumny robocze przed akcją Reinhard (1939–1942)' [Forced labour by the Jews from the Mińsk powiat: Workplaces and work columns before Operation Reinhard (1939–42)].¹⁴ In fact, it continues the research work undertaken earlier. This time it focuses on depicting the places where Jews were employed before the Holocaust. The Germans forced them to work at the railway station and factory in Mińsk, at the airfield in Janów near Mińsk, in the former Fogelnest factory in Stojadła and on one of the neighbouring estates, among other places. In the opinion of those working in the camps, their situation was much better than that of those who remained in the ghettos. This was because the camp was guarded by Poles, who did not harass or 'harry' the Jews, were sluggish in performing their duties, and did not force them to perform hard, inhuman work.¹⁵ In addition, as Borkowska points out, in Mrozy, where there was a work column, Poles passed parcels to employees through the fence.¹⁶

Borkowska highlights an important, previously unknown problem concerning forced labour in small towns, villages and farms. Her articles set the direction of research for other authors who intend to deal with the problems of camps in other poviats of the General Government. Despite the scanty source base, there is a need for more in-depth research in this field. It would be worth trying to answer questions about the scale of the phenomenon. How many Jews participated in such work? Who did the Germans try to recruit to it? It should also be considered to what extent help from the Poles was possible. Did the Jews have any opportunity to escape from the labour camps? These questions should be answered through further research and academic publications.

The brochure published in 2007 by Beata Gładys entitled *Mińsk Mazowiecki. Z dziejów społeczności żydowskiej* [Mińsk Mazowiecki, From the history of the Jewish community],¹⁷ should be considered the first popular academic publication in which some space has been dedicated to the life of the Jewish community during the Second World War. It is strictly educational in nature.

¹⁴ E.M. Borkowska, 'Przymusowa praca Żydów powiatu mińskiego – placówki i kolumny robocze przed akcją Reinhard (1939–1942)', *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* 2016, no. 24, pp. 165–80.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁷ B. Gładys, *Mińsk Mazowiecki. Z dziejów społeczności żydowskiej*, Warszawa 2007.

The author discusses the history of the Jews in the town within a specific framework: she begins with the first mentions of their arrival, and discusses many issues such as education and Hasidism. It also deals with the issues of the Holocaust, discusses the profiles of the Righteous Among the Nations, including Julian Grobelny, Emilia Dyna, and Aleksander & Jadwiga Gawrych. She also mentions the liquidation of the Copernicus camp on Siennicka Street in Mińsk.¹⁸

The book by Alicja Gontarek entitled *Judenrein. Bez Żydów. Żydzi mińscy w czasie wojny i po jej zakończeniu* [*Judenrein. No Jews. The Jews of Mińsk during and after the war*],¹⁹ published in 2011 by *Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Mińska Mazowieckiego* [The Society of Friends of Mińsk Mazowiecki], is also a popular academic work. Here we find an interpretation of many facts and events that have not yet been written about. The author begins the narrative by discussing the brutal German invasion of Mińsk in mid-September 1939; she then turns to the story of the creation of the Mińsk ghetto, and describes the extermination of its inhabitants. Gontarek also discusses the problem of tracking down and murdering Jewish escapees after the liquidation of the ghetto. As many of them were hidden on the 'Aryan side', the German police services and the gendarmes waited for denunciations as they were combing through the buildings. Finally, the author shows what the city became without the Jews, and what the fates of those who survived the Holocaust were. In her work she draws upon testimonies from the Mińsk memorial book [*yizkor*], as well as other source materials obtained from Yad Vashem, the YIVO Institute, the State Archives in Siedlce and Warsaw, and the Institute of National Remembrance among others. An additional value of the book is its rich illustrative material.

In a sense, Gontarek's other article, 'Obóz pracy "Kopernik"' [The Copernicus labour camp], can serve as a complement to the publication discussed above,²⁰ as it presents many aspects of the camp's operation, especially the everyday life of this place, interpersonal relations within it, and its brutal liquidation in January 1943.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 21–25.

¹⁹ A. Gontarek, *Judenrein. Bez Żydów. Żydzi mińscy w czasie wojny i po jej zakończeniu*, Mińsk Mazowiecki 2012.

²⁰ A. Gontarek, 'Obóz pracy "Kopernik"', *Biuletyn Gminy Wyznaniowej Żydowskiej w Warszawie* 2012, no. 3, pp. 14–16.

So far, little attention has been devoted to the problem of Poles helping Jews in the Mińsk powiat. The first article in which this subject was discussed a little more broadly was a small text by Tomasz Roguski entitled 'Julian Grobelny "Trojan" – cegłowlanin, który kierował "Żegotą"' [Julian Grobelny, 'the Trojan': The Cegłów native who headed *Żegota*], published in *Zeszyty Ziemi Mińskiej* in 2012.²¹ The author focuses on illustrating the activities of Grobelny as the president of the *Żegota* Council to Aid Jews, mainly drawing upon the well-known studies by Anna Mieszkowska²² and Teresa Prekerowa.²³

The local context of Julian Grobelny's activity is primarily related to his home town of Cegłów, as well as the fact that during the German occupation he served as chairman of the Polish Socialist Party in the Mińsk powiat and as the *starosta* of Mińsk in 1944. The author of the article did not try to go any deeper into Grobelny's biography, preferring to repeat (with a few exceptions) what was already known from previous publications.

The brochure about the life of Grobelny published by Roguski in 2013 does not bring any fresh perspectives either.²⁴ The narrative about saving Jews is largely based on the aforementioned publications, and Roguski does not add to the knowledge that was included in them. Nevertheless, the reader will find many important, hitherto unknown biographical elements in it, especially concerning the pre-war period.

Damian Sitkiewicz's article 'Działalność Juliana Grobelnego w latach 1939–1944 (poza "Żegotą")' [The activity of Julian Grobelny in 1939–44 (apart from 'Żegota')] portrays this individual in a different light.²⁵ The author demonstrates Grobelny's connections with the Communist underground, especially with the so-called radical peasants and Communist socialists, and with activists of the Polish Workers' Party

²¹ T. Roguski, 'Julian Grobelny "Trojan" – cegłowlanin, który kierował "Żegotą"', *Mińskie Zeszyty Muzealne* 2012, no. 1, pp. 89–100.

²² A. Mieszkowska, *Dzieci Ireny Sandlerowej*, Warszawa 2010.

²³ T. Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie 1942–1945*, Warszawa 1981.

²⁴ T. Roguski, *Pierwszy w "Żegocie". Julian Grobelny "Trojan" (1893–1944)*, Mińsk Mazowiecki 2013.

²⁵ D. Sitkiewicz, 'Działalność Juliana Grobelnego w latach 1939–1944 (poza "Żegotą")', *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* 2013, no. 21, pp. 101–26 (This is an extended and supplemented version of the text, 'Mechanizmy instalowania władzy i administracji komunistycznej na przykładzie działalności Juliana Grobelnego jako starosty mińskiego (10 października – 5 grudnia 1944 r.)', *Historia i Świat* 2013, no. 2, pp. 161–84).

during the German occupation. The environment in which Grobelny operated also influenced his appointment by the Polish Committee of National Liberation [*Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego*, PKWN] authorities to the position of the Mińsk *starosta* in October 1944. He then issued several important decisions, including the confiscation of equipment from manor houses being subjected to land reform: paintings, furniture and other valuable items owned by landowners, whom the Communist authorities had expelled from their own homes. The article does not deal with the issue of saving the Jewish population, but does open up a previously unknown chapter in the life of the president of *Żegota*. Information from the article has been published in a slightly more accessible form in the journal *Do Rzeczy Historia*.²⁶

The topic of saving Jews in the local context was also examined by Lilla Małgorzata Kłos in her article 'Apolonia Chmielewska – sprawiedliwa mińszczanka' [Apolonia Chmielewska: a righteous native of Mińsk].²⁷ On the basis of the sources which the author draws upon – the accounts of the heroine's family members, the rich literature on the subject, as well as documents from the Archives of the Parish Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Mińsk Mazowiecki and the State Archives' Warsaw Branch in Otwock – she describes how Chmielewska saved two Jewish women, Cypra (later Danuta) Dina and Barbara Berger. The author speaks in an accessible way about the complexity of the problem of hiding Jews in a provincial town.

The journalistic article by Alicja Gontarek entitled 'Emilia Dyna – zapomniana Sprawiedliwa wśród Narodów Świata i jej działalność w Mińsku' [Emilia Dyna: One of the forgotten Righteous Among the Nations, and her activity in Mińsk] concerns one of the most distinguished saviours of the Jewish population in the Mińsk powiat. This *Kripo* officer in Mińsk Mazowiecki, together with her friend Elżbieta Gajewska, saved Elżbieta Kowner and Henia Nuss, who hid from the Germans in this town until the end of the war.²⁸

²⁶ A. Gontarek, D. Sitkiewicz, 'Tajemnice Juliana Grobelnego. Z "Żegoty" do komuny', *Historia. Do Rzeczy* 2013, no. 6, pp. 51–53.

²⁷ L.M. Kłos, 'Apolonia Chmielewska – sprawiedliwa mińszczanka', *Mińskie Zeszyty Muzealne* 2013, no. 2, pp. 65–73.

²⁸ A. Gontarek, 'Emilia Maria Dyna – zapomniana Sprawiedliwa wśród Narodów Świata i jej działalność w Mińsku', *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* 2016, no. 24, pp. 233–36.

Further interesting material for research into the issues of aiding the Jews in the Mińsk powiat is provided by the works of Urszula Grabowska: 'Mariawici i Żydzi – rzecz o pomocy' [The Mariavites and the Jews: on the nature of the assistance]²⁹ and 'Stosunki mariawicko-żydowskie czasu Zagłady. Kilka przykładów z Mazowsza i Podlasia' [Mariavite-Jewish relations during the Holocaust. Some examples from Mazowsze and Podlasie].³⁰

While undertaking such research, it would also be worth taking advantage of the knowledge gathered in the work of Edward Kopówka and Fr. Paweł Rytel-Andrianik *Dam im imię na wieki (Księga Izajasza 56,5). Polacy z okolic Treblinki ratujący Żydów* [I will give them an everlasting name (Isaiah 56:5). Poles from the Treblinka area saving Jews], in which a number of examples of help from Poles were cited.³¹ One should also mention the two-volume *Księga Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata. Ratujący Żydów podczas Holocaustu* [The Book of the Righteous Among the Nations. Saving Jews during the Holocaust], which was published in Cracow in 2009.³²

One very specific study is the list of residents of the Mińsk powiat who were awarded the medal 'Righteous Among the Nations', included in the second issue of *Mińskie Zeszyty Muzealnych*.³³ It contains the names of 36 people along with a short note on the history of hiding the endangered Jews. It is a compilation of information taken from several books devoted to the above-mentioned subject.

Research postulates

Few studies on the history of the Jews in the Mińsk powiat during the Second World War have been published so far. For this reason, there is a need to articulate the problems in conducting research in this field. Over time, the publication of research in the form of articles and books will fill this gap.

²⁹ U. Grabowska, 'Mariawici i Żydzi – rzecz o pomocy', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2008, vol. 4, pp. 442–65.

³⁰ U. Grabowska, 'Stosunki mariawicko-żydowskie czasu Zagłady. Kilka przykładów z Mazowsza i Podlasia', in *Żydzi w Podlasie*, ed. Z. Chyra-Rolicz, R. Tarasiuk, E. Kopówka, Siedlce 2010, pp. 341–55.

³¹ E. Kopówka, P. Rytel-Andrianik, *Dam im imię na wieki (Księga Izajasza 56,5). Polacy z okolic Treblinki ratujący Żydów*, Oxford–Treblińska 2011.

³² *Book of the Righteous Among the Nations. Saving Jews during the Holocaust. Poland*, vol. 1–2, ed. D. Libionka et al., Kraków 2009.

³³ 'Sprawiedliwi wśród Narodów Świata w powiecie mińskim', *Muzeum Ziemi Mińskiej* 2013, no. 2, pp. 51–64.

The most important thing seems to be to investigate the issue of the ghettos located in smaller towns such as Kałuszyn, Kuflew, Mrozy and Stanisławów. In addition, there is a lack of academic work devoted to the social relations between the inhabitants of ghettos, as well as the survival strategies adopted both inside the Jewish districts and – in the case of people trying to save themselves – after leaving them.

Research is also needed into the issue of relations between Poles and Jews before the ghettos were organised, during the period when the ghettos were functioning, and after their liquidation. Nor have Jewish-German relations been characterised either. Not only is it worth considering exactly how the German policy of exterminating the Jewish population proceeded, but one should also answer the question of whether the contacts between some Jews and Germans affected the social and economic conditions in the ghettos. It is also worth considering the existence of German agents in the ghettos, and the possible participation of Poles and Jews among such individuals.

Authors of future research papers should also raise the issue of the assistance to Jews coming from underground organisations such as ZWZ-AK, NOW, NSZ, BCh GL-AL³⁴ and others. We do not know at present whether such assistance was provided. We do not know whether the above-mentioned organisations had intelligence networks in Jewish quarters, or what the work of these networks looked like. Historians should also consider investigating the question of Jews who belonged to armed underground organisations in the Mińsk district.

Further research should also consider the problem of aid to the Jewish population and its scale in the Mińsk powiat. As of now, only the names of those who were awarded the Medal of the Righteous Among the Nations are known. Apart from them, other cases of helping Jews, unknown in the literature, should also be investigated; this can be found out by querying the sources.

Through postulated research, we should also learn more about the forcible involvement of Poles – both peasants and city inhabitants – in hunting Jews

³⁴ ZWZ-AK: Związek Walki Zbrojnej-Armia Krajowa – Union of Armed Struggle-Home Army; NOW: Narodowa Organizacja Wojskowa – National Military Organisation; NSZ: Narodowe Siły Zbrojne – National Armed Forces; BCh: Bataliony Chłopskie – Polish Peasants' Battalions; GL-AL: Gwardia Ludowa-Armia Ludowa – People's Guard, People's Army (Communist-led Polish armed formations).

and handing them over to the German services. Similar research should also be conducted into the German uniformed services in which Poles served, such as the 'Polish Police' (*Polnische Polizei*), colloquially called the 'Navy-blue police' or the Fire Department. It should be taken into account that the Germans tried to find concealed Jews after the liquidation of the ghettos, and they could have forced Poles – both civilians and uniformed officers – to search for them.

There is also a need to enumerate all the crimes committed by the Germans in the Mińsk powiat, along with information on the numbers of people murdered in specific places, as no research in this area has been conducted so far.

Further detailed analysis should also consider the structure and activity of the German terror apparatus, in particular the composition and activity of the *Kriminalpolizei* field office as it existed in Mińsk in 1939–43 (to be replaced by the Gestapo in autumn 1943). Similar research should be carried out on the German military police, the *Sonderdienst* and other auxiliary formations, as well as the Wehrmacht. A complete picture of how these services operated in the Mińsk powiat will contribute to expanding our knowledge about the extermination of the Jews in the region.

The source base

Let us begin with an overview of the memoirs published in print. At present, we have four publications which testify to the extermination of the Jews in the Mińsk area. These are: *The pit and the trap. A chronicle of survival* by Lejb Rochman; *Targowa 64. Dziennik 27 I 1943 – 11 IX 1944* [Targowa 64. Journal 27 January 1943 – 11 September 1944] by Leon Guz; *Moje notatki z piekła* [My Notes from Hell] by Chil Kirszenbaum; and *Sny chociaż mamy wspaniałe... Okupacyjne dzienniki Żydów z okolic Mińska Mazowieckiego* [Yet our dreams are so wonderful: Jewish diaries under occupation from Mińsk Mazowiecki and surroundings] edited and introduced by Barbara Engelking.³⁵

³⁵ L. Rochman, *The Pit and the Trap. A Chronicle of Survival*, New York 1983 (Holocaust Library); L. Guz, *Targowa 64. Dziennik 27 I 1943 – 11 IX 1944*, Warszawa 1990; C. Kirszenbaum, *Moje notatki z piekła*, Mińsk Mazowiecki 2016; *Sny chociaż mamy wspaniałe... Okupacyjne dzienniki Żydów z okolic Mińska Mazowieckiego*, ed. B. Engelking, Warszawa 2016.

In each of these publications, the dominant topics are the liquidation of the ghetto and the Holocaust. The witnesses discuss a wide range of matters, as well as the problems resulting from hiding with Polish families. In Leon Guz's memoirs, the theme of the Copernicus camp on Siennicka Street in Mińsk appears.³⁶ The liquidation of this facility also appears in the memoirs of Chil Kirszenbaum, who describes the issue of the Holocaust quite extensively.³⁷ The extermination of Jews at Copernicus, the relations between the ghetto inhabitants, as well as the problem of hiding among Poles appear in the collection *Sny chociaż mamy wspaniale*.³⁸ The reality of the occupation, as well as the conditions and emotional state of the person in hiding, are perfectly reflected in the diary of Lejb Rochman.³⁹

In addition to those mentioned above, another important memoir is the book *Szumcie wierzby* [Murmur, ye willows] by Franciszek Mówiński,⁴⁰ an underground activist of the Polish Workers' Party (later PZPR, the Communist party) in the Mińsk powiat. In his diary, which was written from a position of distrust towards the other underground movements (especially the Home Army and the NSZ), Mówiński discussed the liquidation of the ghetto in Mińsk, exaggerating the help provided to the Jews by members of Communist organisations. Therefore, any information he gives must be verified and juxtaposed against other historical sources. In addition to the ideological tinge, the book is characterised by a fictional style in some parts, which reduces the credibility of the facts which the diarist gives.

The memorial books (*yizkors*) of the Jewish community of Kałuszyn and Mińsk Mazowiecki may shed new light on the history of Jews during the German occupation. The first such book to be published in 1961 was the Kałuszyn book, while that of Mińsk was published in 1977.⁴¹ So far, they have not been well researched by historians, the direct reason for which is probably the language

³⁶ Guz, *Targowa 64*, pp. 100–09.

³⁷ Kirszenbaum, *Moje notatki z piekła*, pp. 136–75.

³⁸ In the collection *Sny chociaż mamy wspaniale*, the journals of Adam Kamienny (pp. 25–134), Brandla Siekierki ('Ja, Fiszbajn Branka, opisała', pp. 171–202), Chajcia Goldsztejn (pp. 289–352), and Eli Goldsztejn ('Straszliwy wyrok śmierci na Żydów i na wszystko, co żydowskie', pp. 353–448).

³⁹ Rochman, *The Pit and the Trap*, pp. 11–86.

⁴⁰ Franciszek Mówiński, *Szumcie wierzby*, Warszawa 1972.

⁴¹ *Seifer Kalushin: gehaylikt der khorev gevorener kehile*, ed. A. Shamri, S. Soroka, Tel Aviv 1961; *Seifer Mińsk-Mazowiecki: izker bukh nokh der khorev-gevorener kehile Mińsk-Mazowiecki*, ed. E. Szedlecki, Jerusalem 1977.

barrier, as they were written in Yiddish; only excerpts translated into English or other languages can be read. They are certainly valuable sources, especially since a large part of the texts contained therein concern the period of the Second World War.

A great deal of new information could also be provided by the publication of Jewish sources, the Ringelblum Archive, which were issued from 1997 to 2018.⁴² These sources have not yet been analysed from the viewpoint of regional research into the Mińsk powiat. Such an inquiry might yield new information about the Holocaust, the strategies employed to survive, and the help provided to the Jewish community by the Polish population.

It is worth considering the possibilities offered by the testimonies which Jews themselves left behind. Thanks to these, we can reflect on the methods which the Poles used to try and help the Jews. In addition, these memoirs give the opportunity to depict the surrounding, 'Polish' world in the way it was perceived by the rescued themselves. Finally, they make it possible to learn many facts about the occupation in a slightly broader context – social relations, the behaviour of the occupiers – especially since not many testimonies on Jewish issues in the Mińsk powiat have been published.

In addition to the published memoirs, sources for further research include Polish and German documents, as well as previously unprinted memoirs and reports. First, the German documentation prepared during the occupation should be presented, and then the Polish documentation, produced both by the underground and by the administrative and self-government bodies of cities and communes. Then, the archives produced after the war by common courts and offices should be discussed, and then the accounts of witnesses to the Holocaust kept at the Jewish Historical Institute.

Of the original documents created during the German occupation and prepared by representatives of the Jews themselves, as the later victims of the German occupier, we only have two collections of correspondence: the Jewish Council in Mińsk Mazowiecki from the American Joint Distribution Committee in Warsaw for the period from

⁴² *The Ringelblum Archive. Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto*, vol. 1–35, Warszawa 1997–2018.

5 October 1940 to 23 June 1941;⁴³ and the Presidium of the Jewish Social Self-Help with the Delegation of the Jewish Social Self-Help in Kałuszyn for the period from 1 September 1941 to 31 October 1941.⁴⁴ These materials concern the assistance to the Jews confined in the ghettos in Kałuszyn and Mińsk, and also include financial reports. These – albeit to only a small extent – allow researchers to learn more about the conditions in which the Jews of Mińsk and Kaluszyn found themselves.

Reading the German documents from the *Amt des Gouverneurs des Distrikts Warschau 1939–1945* collection, deposited at the State Archives in Warsaw, may be troublesome for several reasons. Information about the Mińsk powiat, and especially about the Jews living in it, can only be found in more general documents concerning the district's affairs, in which references to the powiat only appear in various collective reports. There are no files in this collection whose titles would directly indicate that the data contained therein concerns the Mińsk powiat. Hence it is quite difficult to make archival queries in this collection. However, documents devoted to the problems of Mińsk Jews are present in the files. For example, we can find detailed statistical data in file 1025, in which the information is divided into localities and nationalities.⁴⁵ The Holocaust researcher will also find important data in file 939, which contains statistics on the displacement of Jews in the Mińsk district by the Germans during autumn 1941.⁴⁶ The group also includes many files containing circulars and other regulations concerning the Jewish population, especially forced labour or the organisation of the ghettos. In one of them, for example, we find listed the legal provisions on the basis of which Jews were employed as forced labourers.⁴⁷

⁴³ Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; hereinafter: AŻIH), American Joint Distribution Committee, 210/493, Correspondence of the Jewish Council in Mińsk Mazowiecki with the AJDC in Warsaw, 5 October 1940 – 23 June 1941.

⁴⁴ AŻIH, Jewish Social Self-Help, 211/508, Correspondence of the Presidium of the Jewish Social Self-Help with the Delegation of Jewish Social Self-Help in Kałuszyn, 1 September 1941 – 31 October 1941.

⁴⁵ Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie (State Archives in Warsaw; hereinafter: APW), Amt des Gouverneurs des Distrikts Warschau 1939–1945, 1025, p. 19.

⁴⁶ In November 1941, 150 people were resettled from Jakubów to Kołbiela, 7 from Wielgolas to Kołbiela, 120 from Jeruzal to Łatowicz, 138 from Cegłów to Mróz, 32 from Glinianka to Stanisławów, and 33 from Dębie Wielki to Stanisławów (APW, Amt des Gouverneurs des Distrikts Warschau 1939–1945, 939, p. 1).

⁴⁷ APW, Amt des Gouverneurs des Distrikts Warschau 1939–1945, 1159.

In addition to German-language documents, the materials produced by municipal and communal authorities are of great academic value. We have two well-preserved sets for the Mińsk powiat: the files of the city of Mińsk Mazowiecki and the files of the commune of Kuflew. Both are stored in the Otwock branch of the State Archives in Warsaw. Jewish topics, although not widely represented, appear in many archival files, in particular issues related to the creation and functioning of ghettos in cities and larger villages. One file entirely devoted to the Mińsk ghetto has been preserved in the Otwock archives.⁴⁸ In the remaining collections, among the matters undertaken by the local government, we can find, for example, a discussion of how to combat the spread of typhus in the Mińsk ghetto, as well as the issue of the city authorities' takeover of a Jewish bath house located in the Jewish district.⁴⁹

German wall posters preserved in several file collections represent further excellent material reflecting the occupation policy. These contain detailed orders by the *Kreishauptmann* and other German officials covering both Poles and Jews from 1939 to 1943.⁵⁰

The available documentation also covers details of the forced labour camps. In one of the file units from the Kuflew commune we can find a German order to Jewish councils to start work and note the data they obtain.⁵¹ In the documents from Kuflew, a great deal of space is devoted to the situation of the population in the local labour camps in 1942.⁵² The documentation also reflects the problem of Jewish crime in Mińsk.⁵³

Little archival material produced by the underground has been preserved. Indeed, we only have some reports from the Home Army's Warsaw Area Command concerning national minorities; moreover, these were mainly drawn up in 1943 or later, i.e. after Germans had exterminated Jews in the ghettos, and those who had managed to escape from the ghettos were hiding with Poles, mostly

⁴⁸ APW, Otwock Branch (hereinafter: APW, OB), Files of the city of Mińsk Mazowiecki, 533.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 492, p. 23.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 466, 467, 468, 469.

⁵¹ APW, OB, Files of the Kuflew commune, 347, p. 82.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 386, pp. 9–10.

⁵³ Jews were punished for various offences, including for starting fights in Mińsk (APW, OB, Files of the town of Mińsk Mazowiecki, 515, p. 90).

in the countryside. Facts about life in the ghettos, and from the time before their creation, are almost absent from this class of documentation. Nevertheless, it does provide some data or clues about the hunting of Jews by the gendarmerie, as well as their concealment and betrayal in 1943 and 1944.

A little more information about the situation in the Mińsk ghetto can be found in an excerpt from a report of the Warsaw Area Command for August 1941.⁵⁴ The dispatches drawn up in 1943 regularly repeat reports about searches for Jews by the German military police, the *Sonderdienst* and the *Polnische Polizei*, as well as about their immediate execution when discovered.⁵⁵ According to the Home Army informants, in 1943 the German security services rounded up about two hundred Jews in the Warsaw district each month and shot them on the spot.⁵⁶ Moreover, the Germans repressed or killed Poles who sheltered Jews or provided them with help in any other way;⁵⁷ for example, in June 1943, the military police burned down the farm of a Polish farmer in Kędzierak.⁵⁸

The documents of the Polish Home Army report quite broadly about how Jews joined bands of thieves or Communist groups in order to protect themselves from death at the hands of the German security services. This phenomenon occurred in the Home Army's Warsaw Area,⁵⁹ whose informants also wrote about this happening in the Mińsk powiat.⁶⁰ Some reports contain much more detailed data. In one of them, for example, we read that on 10 June 1943 Jews in hiding took part

⁵⁴ Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records; hereinafter: AAN), Home Army (hereinafter: AK), 203/X-70, Report on the state of subversive organisations and national minorities for August 1941, p. 6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Situational report on the organisational status & activities of subversive organisations, national minorities and the occupier for the period from 1 to 30 June 1943, p. 18; *ibid.*, Report on the organisational status & activities of subversive organisations and national minorities for the period from 1 to 31 August 1943, p. 56; AAN, AK, X/35, Situation report on the organisational status & activity of subversive organisations, national minorities and the occupier for the period from 1 to 30 September 1943, p. 10; AAN, AK, X/73, Monthly report for the period from 1 to 25 November 1943, p. 11.

⁵⁶ These data concern the Home Army's entire Warsaw Area.

⁵⁷ AAN, AK, II/13, Reports from field offices of September 1943, p. 10.

⁵⁸ AAN, AK, 203/X-70, Situational report on the organisational status & activities of subversive organisations, national minorities and the occupant for the period from 1 to 30 June 1943, p. 18.

⁵⁹ AAN, AK, II/13, Reports from field offices of September 1943, p. 10.

⁶⁰ AAN, AK, X/22, Situational report on the organisational condition, activities of subversive organisations and national minorities and the occupier for the period from 1 to 31 May 1943, p. 67; AAN, AK, X/35, Report on the state of subversive organisations, national minorities and the occupier for the period from 1 to 30 September 1943, p. 10; AAN, AK, 203/X-69, Information report no. 1, 4 October 1943, p. 95.

in an attack on civilians from the village of Trojanów in the Kuflew commune.⁶¹ In a report from the end of 1943, we find more precise data: it lists 20 Jews who took part in the attacks in the Mińsk powiat.⁶²

Home Army informants also reported other problems related to the presence of the Jewish population in this powiat. They warned against infectious diseases, especially fever, which might have been spread by Jews in hiding.⁶³ From the documents collected in the file devoted to the history of the Home Army's Warsaw Area, we learn about the campaign to bring aid to Polish children from the Hrubieszów and Zamość poviats in 1943, in which disinfected clothes taken from Jews murdered by the Germans were used.⁶⁴

We will begin the review of the post-war documentation with the significant source materials produced as a result of the activities of common courts (especially criminal departments) and prosecutor's offices, especially in the years 1944–51. The cases and investigations undertaken at that time mainly concerned cooperation with the German occupier. The court proceedings were mainly conducted at the District Court in Warsaw in 1944–49, and at the Provincial Court for the Warsaw voivodeship in Warsaw after 1950. The relevant documents are deposited in the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw, and the Warsaw State Archives' division at Milanówek.

The vast majority of investigations into matters regarding Jews concern German criminals or officers of the German police forces such as the *Kripo*, the *Sonderdienst* and the *Polnische Polizei*. Nevertheless, these include criminal proceedings against Poles, including Kazimierz Sowiński, who was deputy chief of the Mińsk *Kripo* in 1942–4, and later the Gestapo; the charges against him included the shooting of six Jews on Siennicka Street in Mińsk.⁶⁵ The case of Zbigniew Barbachen also attracts the attention; he was a *Sonderdienst* officer in 1940–43, and was

⁶¹ AAN, AK, 203/X-70, Situational report on the organisational status, activities of subversive organisations and national minorities and the occupier for the period from 1 to 30 June 1943, p. 18.

⁶² AAN, AK, X/73, Monthly report for the period from 1 to 31 December 1943, p. 14.

⁶³ AAN, AK, X/22, Report on the political, social and national status for the period from 1 January to 15 April 1943, p. 38.

⁶⁴ AAN, AK, 203/X-68, Quarterly report of the Public Information Bulletin of the Warsaw Area for the period from 15 July to 25 October 1943, p. 24.

⁶⁵ APW, District Court in Warszawa 1944–1950, V (Criminal) Department (hereinafter: APW, SOW), 260, pp. 3–4.

accused of murders committed during the liquidation of the Copernicus camp; in the indictment, he was accused of shooting Brandla Grynberg, Ita Grynberg, Chaja Frajman and two people from the family of Moszek Siekierka.⁶⁶

Charges were also brought against Poles who were functionaries of the German-created *Polnische Polizei*. They were repeatedly accused of murdering Jews as a result of their own activity, or as a result of denunciations.⁶⁷

Considering the complexity of the trials records and historical occurrences of their production (Stalinist era), it seems obvious, that each case should be dealt with separately; the case files should be examined in detail and, if possible, one should try to compare them with other sources.

Court proceedings were also initiated against officers of other Nazi terror groups. Stanisław Konicki, an officer of the *Kriminalpolizei*, was accused of murdering Jews in the Copernicus camp together with the Polish police.⁶⁸ Another member of the *Kripo*, Stanisław Szeweluk, heard the same charge.⁶⁹ The prosecutor's office of the District Court in Warsaw brought charges against Emilia Dyna, a *Kripo* officer;⁷⁰ however, this trial was halted because Dyna did not harm any Jews; on the contrary, she hid them.⁷¹

⁶⁶ APW, SOW, 1366, pp. 4 and 4v.

⁶⁷ In the indictment against Jan Smolak and Władysław Bakula, we read that in autumn 1943 they brought an unknown Jew to policemen in the town of Kędzierak: Czesław Czajkowski and Władysław Czerniawski (Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej [Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance; hereinafter: AIPN], 1023/26, p. 66). The accusation of police officers from the Kałuszyn station murdering Jews is contained in the proceedings against Konstanty Muszalik, pending before the Supreme Court in Warsaw. The indictment states that in spring 1943, he ordered the Jews to be locked up in a pigsty in the village of Aleksandrów Muszalik for the night, and then he ordered Józef Bieliński and Stanisław Nowakowski to take them to the police station in Kałuszyn. There certain officers, who were not named in the file, shot the Jews (AIPN Branch in Lublin, 314/1, pp. 208–11). According to the indictment against several inhabitants of Cyganka, Władysław Gniado was guilty of the capture of a Jewish woman, Cecylia Kałucka, while Stanisław Krusiewicz, Józef Jackiewicz and Piotr Rek were accused of denouncing Kałucka to police officers in Mińsk (APW, SOW, 3850, p. 7). The 'blue' policemen Józef Szaflik and Feliks Woźniak were accused of taking part in the murder of a Jewish family of four in Jędrzejów in the Jakubów commune (AIPN, 318/81, p. 138). In turn, the policeman Wiktor Bernas was tried for the murder of two men who were hiding Jews (AIPN, GK 227/53, p. 7; AIPN, 227/54). A similar-sounding indictment was laid against one Piotr Moro: he was accused of taking part in a raid on Jews organised by the Germans near the village of Wielgolas as a 'blue' policeman in the summer of 1943 (AIPN, GK 318/54, p. 82).

⁶⁸ APW, SOW, 2614, pp. 4–5.

⁶⁹ APW, SOW, 252, p. 180.

⁷⁰ AIPN, GK 453/63, p. 7.

⁷¹ For more on the help provided to Jews by Emilia Dyna, see AIPN Kr, 00100/49/Diazo, passim; Gontarek, 'Emilia Maria Dyna', pp. 233–36.

Charges of murdering Jews were also brought against members of underground organisations. In the indictment against Stanisław Makoś, who came up before the Provincial Court for the Warsaw Province, there is no information about the name of the underground organisation to which he belonged. However, it was stated that Makoś took part in the murder of three Jews, two men and a woman.⁷² On the other hand, in the case against Stanisław Kania, his affiliation with the Home Army was precisely defined. In 1942, the accused handed over a Jewish woman named Nejman and her five-year-old daughter to the Germans.⁷³

Civilians, including Józef Wojciechowski, were also accused of killing Jews or handing them over to the Germans;⁷⁴ these included Ignacy Grajda,⁷⁵ Jan Kamiński,⁷⁶ Polikarp Kalkowski, Stanisław Duda, Bartłomiej Witkowski, Daniel Aniszewski,⁷⁷ and Kazimierz Herdt.⁷⁸ The latter did indeed sign a *Volkslist*, but he helped many Jews in hiding.⁷⁹

In addition to the documentation described above, the resources of the Institute of National Remembrance include a large batch of documents from the Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland [*Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce*]. Among them, the files concerning the investigation into the liquidation of the ghetto in Mrozy in summer 1942 deserve special attention,⁸⁰ as do the questionnaires from the Municipal Court in Mińsk Mazowiecki. The court employees strove to record German repressions and crimes in individual towns of the Mińsk powiat as widely as possible. Information from witnesses to the events was grouped into questionnaires according to issues

⁷² AIPN, GK 317/150, p. 4.

⁷³ AIPN, GK 209/11, p. 12.

⁷⁴ Józef Wojciechowski was accused of handing over a concealed Jew to the gendarmes in 1943, as well as indicating places where Jews were hiding (APW, SOW, 3809, pp. 6–7).

⁷⁵ In the light of the indictment, in 1943 Ignacy Grajda indicated the whereabouts of the hidden children of Jewish nationality to the German military police (APW, SOW, 3314, pp. 4–5).

⁷⁶ Jan Kamiński was accused of murdering three Jews hidden by Zofia Kur in the village of Gamratka in June 1943 (APW, SOW, 3165, p. 22).

⁷⁷ The Provincial Court for the Warsaw Province tried Polikarp Kalkowski, Stanisław Duda, Bartłomiej Witkowski and Daniel Aniszewski for handing over two people of Jewish nationality to the gendarmes (AIPN, GK 318/34, p. 4).

⁷⁸ AIPN, GK 453/1283, Prosecutor files against Kazimierz Herdt.

⁷⁹ A. Gontarek, *Judenrein. Bez Żydów. Żydzi mińscy w czasie wojny i po jej zakończeniu*, Mińsk Mazowiecki 2012, pp. 37–38.

⁸⁰ AIPN, 2205/6, vol. 1–4.

such as ghettos, the aid provided to Jews, the repression of the Jewish population and others.⁸¹ The employees of communal offices, who in 1945–46 searched for information in this regard among the inhabitants of the powiat, also tried to find witnesses to the German crimes and repression. The work was carried out at the request of higher authorities. In the documentation, population losses in the powiat were estimated, among other facts.⁸² The collections of the Main Commission also include a list of people murdered in the Mińsk powiat.⁸³

We can obtain additional information about the Jews thanks to the documents preserved from the civilian state security authorities at the powiat level, and from other source materials, such as the Security Offices of all levels functioning after the war. For example, from a file on the activities of ‘Zionist elements’ in the Mińsk powiat, we can learn that Leokadia Bartniczka, born on 20 October 1902, in Siennica, hid Jews during the occupation.⁸⁴ The file also contains much other information, obtained mostly through denunciations, concerning the Jewish problem both during and after the Second World War.⁸⁵ One of the tasks of the officers of the District State Security Office (PUBP) in Mińsk was to investigate people who had cooperated with the German occupier. Documentation of such activities undertaken in the Mińsk powiat has been preserved. People who were officers of the *Gestapo*, *Kripo*, *Orpo*, gendarmes and other formations included in the German terror apparatus, as well as people cooperating with the Germans or who had been entered onto the German national list were dealt with.⁸⁶

It is also worth paying attention to the file collection created during the work of the District Office of Information and Propaganda in Mińsk Mazowiecki operating from 1944 to 1947. The reader will find a great deal of information therein about the German occupation and statistical data concerning the Holocaust.⁸⁷ Material devoted to personal losses can be found in one of the files of the War

⁸¹ The questionnaires also registered individual cases of crimes or repression against the Polish population. See AIPN, 2448/90; 2448/91.

⁸² AIPN, 166/488, vol. 4.

⁸³ AIPN, GK 162/393.

⁸⁴ AIPN, 0201/247, Summary of materials from subtask no. 5916 of codename ‘S-14’, p. 283.

⁸⁵ AIPN, 0201/247, Secret file concerning the activity of ‘Zionist elements’ in the Mińsk Mazowiecki powiat.

⁸⁶ The file also includes the investigation into people cooperating with the German security authorities in the district of Węgrów. This subject was also investigated in the Mińsk powiat (AIPN, 0255/337, pp. 40–194).

⁸⁷ APW, Office of Information and Propaganda of the Warsaw Province 1944–47, 375.

Compensation Department of the Warsaw Voivodship Office from 1944 to 1950.⁸⁸ Much valuable material can also be obtained from an archival query in the files of the Municipal Court from 1940 to 1950, which contain files devoted to persons considered dead or missing. This documentation concerns *inter alia* the deaths of Chaia Estera Berger,⁸⁹ Sura Rozenblum,⁹⁰ and Laia Felner.⁹¹

When conducting research into the Jews of the Mińsk powiat, it is sometimes worth making the effort to search in files created many years after the war, because they may contain important documentation which can serve not only as supplements to facts already known, but can also contribute much new information. One example may be the archives of the Provincial Office in Siedlce from 1975 to 1999, especially archival unit 1330, from which we learn that 650 Jews from the labour camp located in the Kopernik school and the Rudzki & Co. factory were buried in the cemetery in Mińsk Mazowiecki.⁹²

The extensive collection of Jewish and Polish Holocaust testimonies includes narratives recounted by persons residing in the Mińsk powiat during the German occupation. This collection contains several accounts of the help Poles provided to Jews convicted by the Germans. Halina Grobelna, the wife of Julian Grobelny, spoke in two accounts about her and her husband's activities; living in Cegłów near Mińsk, they saved Jews together.⁹³ Natalia Siuta also talks about the help she offered, thanks to whom Frajda Gewisówna from Jędrzejów avoided the German manhunt coming from Kałuszyn.⁹⁴ Krystyna Wasiak, aka Henia Niewiadomska, a Jewish woman who found herself with her mother in Kałuszyn during the German occupation, mentioned the help she had received from Polish people. By August 1942 the mother had gone on to Mińsk, from where she never came back, but thanks to the help of a Polish family, the orphaned girl survived the war.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ APW, Warsaw Voivodship Office 1944–50, War Compensation Department, 25.

⁸⁹ State Archives in Siedlce (hereinafter: APS), the Town Court in Mińsk Mazowiecki 1945–51, 626, Documentation on Chaja Estera Berger.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1682, Documentation on Sura Rozenblum.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1361, Documentation on Lai Felner.

⁹² APS, Provincial Office in Siedlce 1975–1999, 1330, Study 'The Jewish Cemetery in Mińsk Mazowiecki', p. 13.

⁹³ AŻIH, ZR, 301/5863 and 301/6412, Halina Grobelna's accounts.

⁹⁴ AŻIH, ZR, 301/6129, Testimony of Natalia Siut.

⁹⁵ AŻIH, ZR, 301/5874, Testimony of Krystyna Wasiak, aka Henia Niewiadomska.

Another group of accounts kept in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute consist, first of all, of testimonies of survival in the ghettos and descriptions of their liquidation. Róża Berek gave an account of the expulsion of Jews from the ghetto in Stanisławów.⁹⁶ The fate of her family, who lived in Dobre and Stanisławów among other locations during the German occupation, was described by Stanisław Słomkowski, aka Dawid Słoń.⁹⁷ Apolonia Przybyjewska related her experiences from the Mińsk ghetto,⁹⁸ as did Łopacki (first name unknown),⁹⁹ Mojsze and Brajndla Siekierka,¹⁰⁰ Boruch Gartenkranc, Aleksander Walewski, Ludwik Michalski and Icek Lipczyński.¹⁰¹

Two accounts kept at the Jewish Historical Institute concern the struggle of the Jews: they present one of the strategies of survival which Jews resorted to: either armed resistance or joining partisan units. The latter method was chosen by people who were the heroes of the account given by Szczepan Janicki, who wrote about a partisan group composed of a dozen or so Soviet prisoners of war who escaped from the POW camps, as well as two Poles and three Jews. According to Janicki, this group operated in the forests around Mińsk and Stoczek. He described the Jews taking part in partisan actions.¹⁰² The armed rebellion by the Jews imprisoned in the camp located in the Kopernik school on Siennicka Street in Mińsk is mentioned by Efraim Siedlecki.¹⁰³

The Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute also contain an account by Stanisław Jurkowski, appointed by the Communist authorities as mayor of Mińsk Mazowiecki after the end of the war. There are many threads in his memoirs: the liquidation of the ghetto in Mińsk, the transports to Treblinka, the labour camps at the Rudzki factory and the Kopernik school, and the execution of Jews by the gendarmerie in the town of Chochół.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁶ AŻIH, ZR, 301/5108, Account of Róża Berek.

⁹⁷ AŻIH, ZR, 301/3358, Testimony of Stanisław Słomkowski aka Dawid Słoń.

⁹⁸ AŻIH, ZR, 301/5890, Apolonia Przybyjewska's testimony.

⁹⁹ AŻIH, ZR, 301/6044, Account by Łopacki [no first name given].

¹⁰⁰ AŻIH, ZR, 301/4098, Testimony of Mojsze and Brajndla Siekierka (the authors describe their experiences in Mińsk Mazowiecki and Żwirówka). See also AŻIH, ZR, 301/4158, Brajndla Siekierka's testimony.

¹⁰¹ AŻIH, ZR, 301/5088, Accounts by Boruch Gartenkranc, Aleksander Walewski, Ludwik Michalski and Icek Lipczyński about the liquidation of the ghetto in Mińsk.

¹⁰² AŻIH, ZR, 301/5805, Testimony of Szczepan Janicki.

¹⁰³ AŻIH, ZR, 301/1680, Efraim Siedlecki, 'The fight and death of the last 400 Jews in Mińsk Mazowiecki'.

¹⁰⁴ AŻIH, ZR, 301/1010, Testimony of Stanisław Jurkowski.

Sizeable collections, especially of personal accounts, can be found in the Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem. Relatively many testimonies of this type have been preserved. These materials are numerous, and contain information not only about the experiences of specific Jews, but also about the living conditions in individual towns, such as Chyżyny (the labour camp),¹⁰⁵ Dobre,¹⁰⁶ Kaluszyn,¹⁰⁷ Kołbiel,¹⁰⁸ Mińsk Mazowiecki,¹⁰⁹ and Mrozy.¹¹⁰ In addition, the Yad Vashem Archive contains a list of Jews from Kalisz who survived the Holocaust, prepared in 1945.¹¹¹

Another group of important materials, albeit little used in academic research so far, includes the investigative files concerning German crimes kept in the Bundesarchiv Branch in Ludwigsburg, the former Centre for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes. The files from the investigations carried out in the 1960s are particularly valuable, as they were created as a result of interrogations of war criminals, as well as their victims and witnesses from the Second World War period. Extensive evidence has been collected for the Mińsk powiat in ten volumes of files.¹¹² The other files therein should not be overlooked either, although their titles do not directly indicate that they contain any information about the Jews from the Mińsk powiat. Nevertheless, it is worth examining them due to their high research value. One could at least, for example, consider the documentation in which we can find data on the criminal activities of Herman Botz, the clerk for Jewish affairs in the Mińsk starostwo.¹¹³ Other archival materials related to the Holocaust in the General Government are also characterised by their high value as sources,¹¹⁴ as are the files

¹⁰⁵ Yad Vashem Archive (hereinafter: AJW), O.3., Testimonies Department of the Yad Vashem Archives (hereinafter: Testimonies), 2074, 2078.

¹⁰⁶ AJW, O.3, Testimonies, C/5994

¹⁰⁷ AJW, O.3, Testimonies, 501, 3438, 504, 506, 507, 4457, O.33.C5598, VT/6513; AJW, O.12 Perlman Collection-Refugees from Poland, 51.

¹⁰⁸ AJW, O.3, Testimonies, V/T.3474.

¹⁰⁹ AJW, M.1, Central Historical Commission (CHC) of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the US Zone, Munich, 1062; AVY, O.3, Testimonies, 2777, 3469, 3471, 6321, 7491, 9844, 11472, 13133, 14170, VT/1152, VT/1734, VT/2260, VT/2455; AJW, O.39 Collection of Memoirs Written for the Yad Vashem Competition, 184; AJW, O.62, Borwicz Collection, 455. AYU, O.62, Borwicz Collection, 455.

¹¹⁰ AJW, O/3, Testimonies, 2824, 3139.

¹¹¹ AJW, M.54, National and Provincial Archives in Poland, JM/10005.

¹¹² Bundesarchiv Aussenstelle Ludwigsburg (hereinafter: BAL), 6833-42.

¹¹³ BAL, 162/3518.

¹¹⁴ BAL, 162/30530.

on the participation of gendarmerie members in the Warsaw district,¹¹⁵ the archives depicting the forced labour of Jews in this district¹¹⁶ or the lists of Germans who murdered Jews there on behalf of the civil apparatus, gendarmerie, etc.¹¹⁷

The diverse archival collections, especially those kept abroad, should be subjected to research. When looking for documents relating to the history of the Holocaust in the Mińsk powiat, we should also reach for the archival materials collected at the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust [*Studium Polski Podziemnej*], and at the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London.

¹¹⁵ BAL, 162/26469.

¹¹⁶ BAL, 162/7443.

¹¹⁷ BAL, 162/5545.

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SUMMARY

The article discusses the state of research, research postulates and sources which could be used for research into Jewish issues in the Mińsk powiat (Warsaw district) during the German occupation in this area in 1939–44.

The author presents this article in the form of a review. It cites the results of research conducted in this area, referring to the academic literature that has been published as of the time when this article was submitted for further editorial work. In submitting a critical analysis of the known academic items, the author turns to as yet unarticulated issues in relation to the study of Polish-Jewish relations in the area under discussion, i.e. the Mińsk powiat.

The issue of the source base is discussed in the last part of the text. The author focuses on presenting the available sources, both printed and archival, including central archives (such as the Archives of New Records and the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance), local ones (e.g. the State Archives in Warsaw and its branch in Otwock), as well as foreign ones (the Yad Vashem and the Bundesarchiv Branch in Ludwigsburg).

KEYWORDS

State of research • Jews • Mińsk powiat • research postulates
• German occupation

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CONVERSIONS OF JEWS TO CATHOLICISM IN THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT: THE EXAMPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF KIELCE

While pursuing the anti-Jewish policy and, ultimately, the *Endlösung* during the Second World War, the German authorities in the occupied Polish territories issued a considerable number of various orders defining the situation of the Jewish population. These affected almost the smallest details of existence. Some of these documents, which even forbade trading with Jews or offering them any help either directly or indirectly, also applied to the rest of the subject population.¹

The ordinances organising Jewish life that the German occupying authorities issued in accordance with their racial policy also affected the religious sphere, concerning issues such as conversion to Catholicism or other Christian denominations. Both in practice and in theory, the German authorities treated Jews who converted to Christianity as persons who were still subject to the anti-Jewish racial laws. Starting at the ghettoisation stage, Jews who had converted

¹ From the latest literature on the subject, see M. Grądzka-Rejak, A. Namysło, 'Relacje polsko-żydowskie w okresie II wojny światowej. Kontekst i uwarunkowania', in *Represje za pomoc Żydom na okupowanych ziemiach polskich w czasie II wojny światowej*, ed. M. Grądzka-Rejak, A. Namysło, Warszawa 2019, pp. 7–63; B. Musiał (in collaboration with O. Musiał), *Kto dopomoże Żydowi...*, Poznań 2019, and others.

to Catholicism were still forced to live in ghettos, and the issues concerning the presence of Catholic Jews inside the Warsaw ghetto are well known. The problem then arose of enabling them to carry out their religious practices.² Similar requests to the German authorities were also made by Jewish Catholics from other ghettos in the General Government, including Jews from Kielce, who arrived there as part of a wave of people displaced from Vienna.³ In June 1942, the German authorities refused to allow them to participate in Catholic services.⁴ Ultimately, as a consequence of the German orders, these converts were murdered on an equal footing with the rest of the Jewish population.

The conversion of Jews to Catholicism during the German occupation also took place in the Kielce region, and although the history of the diocese of Kielce in that period has already been frequently discussed,⁵ this particular issue has not appeared in historians' considerations at all. Therefore, this article aims to fill this gap in the research through quantitative and qualitative analysis. Attention will be paid to the scale of the phenomenon, the motivations driving the Jews who wanted to convert to Catholicism, and the position of the church authorities towards the requests they received. In the latter case, the tangible question of the various phases of German policy towards the Jews was also taken into account. Above all, however, this article will present the role of the German occupying authorities, whose orders decisively determined the possibility of conversion in the General Government. For this purpose, source texts in the form of three small 'legal' acts have been attached to the article.

² K. Madaj, *Proboszcz getta*, Warszawa 2010.

³ For more on the fate of Jewish deportees from Vienna, see G. Zeisler, *Zza drutów kieleckiego getta*, ed. J. Daniel, R. Nowakowski, Kielce 2012.

⁴ See Archiwum Diecezji Kieleckiej (Archives of the Kielce Diocese; hereinafter: ADK), *Acta Kurialne Ogólne* (General Curial Files; hereinafter: AKO), OE-2/2, Letter from the Catholic Jews to the Kielce Curia, Kielce, 4 June 1942, pp. 162–63.

⁵ M. Paulewicz, 'Diecezja kielecka', in *Życie religijne w Polsce pod okupacją hitlerowską 1939–1945*, ed. Z. Zieliński, Warszawa 1982, pp. 234–52; D. Olszewski, *Diecezja kielecka. Zarys dziejów 1805–1987*, Kielce 1988; A. Szafrński, 'Diecezja kielecka w XX wieku', in *Księga jubileuszu stulecia Diecezji Kieleckiej (1883–1983)*, Kielce 1986; L. Müllerowa, 'Organizacja terytorialna diecezji kieleckiej', *ibid.*; T. Gocel, *Duszpasterstwo w diecezji kieleckiej w latach II wojny światowej 1939–1945*, Kielce 2012. See also biographical works: J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek biskup kielecki 1895–1963*, Kielce 2008; J. Gapys, 'Bp Czesław Kaczmarek jako patron i organizator akcji charytatywnej duchowieństwa w Diecezji Kieleckiej 1939–1945', in *Trzy rocznice. Biskup Czesław Kaczmarek 1895–1963*, ed. J. Gapys (in collaboration with S. Gawlik 'Natasza'), Kielce 2014, pp. 79–104.

Contrary to the belief, which existed until recently, that Jewish interest in conversion increased during the German occupation and the ongoing Holocaust,⁶ a preliminary diagnosis suggests that in the diocese of Kielce, which was led during the entire period under discussion by Bp. Czesław Kaczmarek, no increase in the number of requests was recorded. For the period from September 1939 to October 1942, a total of 25 applications (concerning 44 people), sent from various parishes of the Kielce diocese to the curia with a request for baptism, have been found. Most often these applications were written by individual parish priests, and less often by those directly involved. The state of the documentation as preserved does not allow us to give an unambiguous answer as to whether the statistics presented are complete and final.⁷ We have detailed data on the number of baptisms in relation to the cathedral parish, the second largest in Kielce at that time.⁸ All the Jews baptised in this parish first addressed their requests to the Kielce curia, which issued the final consent. During the Second World War, from 1 September 1939 to 10 October 1942, a total of nine baptisms of Jews were recorded in the *Liber Conversorum*, i.e. one less than in the entire interwar period.⁹ For the Jewish community, which until 1942 numbered around 100,000 people in the geographical area of the diocese of Kielce (c. 27,000 in Kielce alone), the figure of 44 people applying for conversion constituted a number which was less than marginal.¹⁰ The negligible phenomenon of conversion undoubtedly confirms the Jews' deep religiousness and their deeply rooted attachment to tradition.¹¹ In the Kielce region, most Jews lived according to Hasidic principles, mainly in small towns and

⁶ J. Wysocki, 'Archidiecezja warszawska', in *Życie religijne w Polsce pod okupacją hitlerowską 1939–1945*, ed. Z. Zieliński, Warszawa 1982, p. 280.

⁷ ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2 and OJ-9/1.

⁸ During this period, there were a total of six parishes in Kielce: the cathedral parish, St Wojciech (Adalbert), Holy Cross, Christ the King, the garrison church, and the church at Karczówka. See ADK, AKO, OW-A/34, List of priests and parishes in the Kielce powiat, Kielce, 27 March 1940, p. 200v. The cathedral parish numbered around 11,000 parishioners (*ibid.*).

⁹ Files of the Cathedral Parish in Kielce, *Liber Conversorum* 1905–, unpagged.

¹⁰ Relations in the Archdiocese of Kraków were quite similar. See M. Grądzka-Rejak, "Od dłuższego czasu straciłem wszelki kontakt z żydami i żydostwem". Neofici w okupowanym Krakowie w świetle materiałów Archiwum Kurii Metropolitalnej w Krakowie', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2017, no. 13, p. 344.

¹¹ An unknown author using the initials EG, quoted by Marian Fuks, wrote on this subject in *Gazeta Żydowska*. See M. Fuks, 'Życie w gettach Generalnej Guberni na tle *Gazety Żydowskiej* 1940–1942', *Biuletyn ŻIH* 1971, no. 4 (80), p. 26.

settlements.¹² No wonder, then, that some of the neophytes came from immigrant populations, forced to live in the region by the circumstances of the war. Certainly, the phenomenon of acculturation and assimilation must have played a large role in the decision to convert, just as their previous contact with Polish culture undoubtedly facilitated their decision to convert to Catholicism.

In the initial period of the German occupation, the position of the Kielce diocesan authorities as addressed to the clergy regarding the consent to the baptism of Jews was a continuation of their pre-war stance. Priests submitting requests were, according to 'standard procedure', ordered to check and certify whether the candidate's motivation was due to the desire to 'save the soul' (*ex unico salutis desiderio*) or "for the sake of one's own life or out of material calculations".¹³ The position of the curia resulted from the general practice of the Catholic Church, which was quite clearly described in the letter to Fr. Tadeusz Kozłowski, dean and parish priest in Piekoszów, written by Bp. Franciszek Sonik (then vicar-general of the diocese): "Because, when welcoming people of the Mosaic faith into the bosom of the Catholic Church, both the Holy See and the bishops ordinary advise parish priests to be very prudent, especially nowadays, when the material and utilitarian element plays a predominant role".¹⁴

In fact, in Kielce, these guidelines were not strictly followed. The readiness of catechumens for baptism, as it appears from an analysis of the correspondence between the parishes and the curia, was mainly determined by individual parish priests who 'examined' candidates on the spot. For example, in May 1940, the diocesan authorities received applications from the following parishes: Blessed Wincenty Kadłubek at Jędrzejów, the cathedral parish, and Our Lady, Queen of the Polish Crown (the garrison church) in Kielce, and the parish of Piekoszów. In turn, in July 1940, two requests were received from the cathedral parish in Kielce;

¹² This issue already has its own literature. See M. Pawlina-Meducka, 'Zmierch świętokrzyskiego sztetl (1918–1939)', in *Życie codzienne społeczności żydowskiej na ziemiach polskich do 1942 roku*, ed. E. Majcher-Ociesa, B. Wojciechowska, Kielce 2013, pp. 169–80; R. Renz, 'Polacy i Żydzi w małych miasteczkach województwa kieleckiego w okresie międzywojennym. Wzajemne relacje', *Biuletyn Kwartalny RTN* 1999, vol. 34, pp. 33–41.

¹³ ADK, AKO, OJ–9/1, Letter from Bp. F. Sonik to the parish priest of the cathedral parish in Kielce, Kielce, 4 May 1940, unpagged.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Letter from the Diocesan Curia of Kielce to Fr. Tadeusz Kozłowski, dean and parish priest at Piekoszów, Kielce, 8 May 1940, unpagged.

and in September from the parish of the Holy Cross in Kielce. The curia gave its consent to the baptisms in the same month (sometimes the answer even bore the same date as the application). All the documents began with the words:

Since the priest [...] recognises [the applicant] as sufficiently prepared and enlightened in the principles of the Roman Catholic faith, and is convinced that the mentioned [...] wishes to be baptised only for the salvation of his soul, and not for the sake of his own life or out of material considerations, the Diocesan Authority finds no obstacles to baptising him according to the provisions of the Roman Ritual.¹⁵

The processing of Kaila Perla Z's application took place at an equally rapid pace. The letter to the curia was received on 5 May 1941, and the positive response to the parish priest in Skala was dated 8 May. It seems that in this particular situation the rush resulted from the poor health of the 'petitioner'.¹⁶ The personal convictions of individual priests regarding the baptism of Jews were also important, as they could extend the procedure if they chose.¹⁷

¹⁵ ADK, AKO, OJ-9/1, Letter from Bp. F. Sonik to the parish priest of the cathedral parish in Kielce, Kielce, 4 May 1940, unpagged; *ibid.*, Letter from Bp. F. Sonik to Fr. Tadeusz Kozłowski, dean and parish priest at Piekoszów, Kielce, 17 May 1940, unpagged; *ibid.*, Letter of Bp. F. Sonik to Fr. F. Wajda, Kielce, 10 May 1940, unpagged; *ibid.*, Letter from Bp. F. Sonik to the parish priest of the cathedral parish in Kielce, Kielce, 16 July 1940, unpagged. *ibid.*, Letter from Bp. F. Sonik to the parish priest of the cathedral parish in Kielce, Kielce, 23 July 1940, unpagged. *ibid.*, Letter from Bp. F. Sonik to the parish priest of the cathedral parish in Kielce, Kielce, 19 September 1940, unpagged.

¹⁶ The request clearly indicated that the catechumen was in poor health (with a heart defect) and asked that the baptism take place in Skalka near Ojców (ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2, Request of the parish priest in Skalka to the Kielce ordinariate, Skalka, 2 May 1941, unpagged; *ibid.*, Letter from the vicar general of the Kielce diocese to the parish priest in Skalka, Kielce, 8 May 1941, unpagged).

¹⁷ In a letter addressed to the Kielce curia, Fr. Zdun, the parish priest in Brzesko-Nowe (Miechów powiat) wrote: "Basically, I was against the baptism of the Jews. However, this matter has been bothering me for several months. As far as I have been able to ascertain, no material or other benefits are expected or anticipated. Nationalities are not mentioned [changed]. So despite my great prejudice, when I examine my priestly conscience, I feel it is my duty to present their request to the Illustrious Curia". The reply addressed to the Brzeg parish priest was of an extremely diplomatic nature, although it formulated the Church's theses very clearly: "There are no grounds for a fundamentally negative attitude towards Jewish conversions. In each case, when such candidates apply, the pastor is obliged to convince himself of the sincerity of the applicants' intentions, and then prepare them thoroughly so that they not only get to know the Catholic faith properly, but also live according to these rules". (*ibid.*, Letter from the notary of the Kielce Curia to the parish priest of Brzesko-Nowe, Rev. Józef Zdun, Kielce, 19 August 1941, unpagged). It is significant that in December 1941 the same priest asked the diocesan authorities to shorten the catechumenate for spouses and their children seeking baptism. The curia responded positively to this request (*ibid.*, Letter from the parish priest of Brzesko-Nowe to the diocesan curia in Kielce, Brzesko-Nowe, 29 November 1941, unpagged).

In the case of Kielce diocese, it is not possible to make a definitive statement about the intentions of Jews applying for baptism.¹⁸ The letters sent to the curia, in which the catechumen's motivation was clearly indicated, assured the purely religious factors. However, under the conditions of the occupation, pragmatic issues could play an important role, such as 'legalisation' as a Christian which could enable the acquisition of 'Aryan' papers,¹⁹ getting help from trusted Catholics, or getting married to a Catholic woman.²⁰ From some of the applications, a belief in salvation thanks to the new religion was clearly apparent: "Apparently the father of this family (an intellectual) is very much interested in Christian teaching, which he has already learned with his family members in general terms, because he often tells me about different dreams. For example, 'I saw the Mother of God, who assured me that I would not die'".²¹

The situation in Kielce diocese changed at the end of 1940. In the curia's writings, precise guidelines appeared as to the length of the catechumenate and the preparation period. When granting consent to baptism, the diocesan authorities recommended that, before making a final decision, the applicant should be 'tested' as to their sincerity for a period of six months, and sometimes even a year.²² For the same reasons (as in other dioceses located in the General Government, such

¹⁸ This problem is discussed in detail by Grądzka-Rejak, 'Od dłuższego czasu', pp. 348 and ff.

¹⁹ This possibility is demonstrated by the findings of Dariusz Libionka regarding Róża and Marek Reibschoid, who were baptised in Wawrzeńczyce in August 1942. Their conversion was dictated by pragmatism. See D. Libionka, 'Powiat Miechów', in *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski*, vol. 2, ed. B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, Warszawa 2018, p. 119.

²⁰ For example, in a letter to the bishop of Kielce, Lola and Salome P. (daughter and mother) wrote: "The material side does not motivate us, nor the fear of the ghetto, because we know that even neophytes are often treated equally as Jews. I and my mother have only a sincere desire to become Christians" (ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2, Letter from Lola and Salomea to Bishop Kielecki, [Chęciny], 17 April 1941, unpagged). From the examination of this request, as issued by the local parish priest, Fr. S. Marchewka, it appears that the women had come to Chęciny from Zakopane, and were known among the local community as Christian women who regularly attended services. In the light of the above findings, it seems that the issue of obtaining an official certification of baptism was a priority for P., for her own safety. The letters asking for permission to be baptised were sent by P. on 17 April and 27 May 1941.

²¹ *Ibid.*, letter from Fr. Józef Nowak, pastor of the Saspów (Sułoszowa) parish to the Diocesan Curia in Kielce, Sułoszów, 30 January 1942, unpagged.

²² ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2, Letter from the vicar general of the diocese of Kielce to Fr. Chwistek, dean in Wolbrom, Kielce, 19 December 1940, unpagged; *ibid.*, letter from the notary of the Kielce Curia to the parish priest of Brzesko-Nowe, Fr. Józefa Zdun, Kielce, 19 August 1941, unpagged.

as the Archdiocese of Warsaw), a minimum 6-month period of preparation for baptism was recommended as early as the mid-1940.²³

It remains an open question as to whether the steps taken resulted only from care for the purity of the rite, or whether they were the result of the increasingly harsh conditions of the occupation policy, as the German authorities increasingly limited the options for converting Jews. In April 1941, the *Kielecki Przegląd Diecezjalny* [Kielce Diocesan Review] announced that accession to or apostasy from the Church would have legal force if it was certified by the relevant district or city *starosta*.²⁴ In practice, therefore, it was not the Church which decided whose baptism would be recognised, but the local German administration. The contents of the correspondence between the Diocesan Curia in Kielce and the parish priest of Mieronice in the Jędrzejów powiat regarding the case of Szyja Lejbuś E. clearly show that the German authorities treated the baptism of Jews as a form of assistance to them. After obtaining the curia's consent for baptism, E. went with the parish priest to 'Kreis Jendrzejow' (the powiat *starosta* in Jędrzejów) to ask about the possibility of 'civil legalisation of the change of religion.'²⁵ There he heard the following words from a clerk: "Priests, do not dare to dip your fingers in this matter, because it could go very bad for you if we found out that during the war you were smuggling [*szwarcujecie*] Jews into the Catholic religion".²⁶ The words of that clerk effectively discouraged the priest from baptism, because – as he himself wrote – he was trying "not to cause any trouble for the curia or himself".²⁷ This unidentified clerk quite clearly stated that the baptism was intended to save a Jew, and was thus an illegal activity. Importantly, the diocesan authorities strongly supported baptism. In response to the parish priest's letter, they rebuked him to a degree, referring to the officially published regulations: "The Pastor will wish

²³ According to Fr. Jan Wysocki, the order from Bp. Stanisław Gall was a positive manifestation of church life, and not dictated by security or concern for personal safety (Fr. Wysocki, 'Archidiecezja warszawska', p. 280).

²⁴ See document no. 1.

²⁵ The records show that E. lived with a farmer in the village of Emilianów. After receiving baptism, the host supposedly gave E. his daughter to be his wife. The case of E's baptism lasted several months (ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2, letter from the parish priest of Mieronice to the bishop's curia in Kielce, Mieronice, 20 February 1941).

²⁶ ADK, OJ-2/2, letter from the parish priest in Mieroki, Fr. Stanisław Sajan to the Diocesan Curia in Kielce, Mieronice, 16 January 1942, unpagged.

²⁷ Ibid.

to fulfil his pastoral duties imposed on him by the law of the Church, without paying attention to the opinion of the unreliable clerks [*referentów*] of the secular authorities. The decree of the secular authorities regarding the change of religion was announced in the Diocesan Review [...] along with the relevant official note, which the Pastor will wish to apply to the fullest extent'.²⁸ Finally, on 23 January 1942, E. was baptised in the parish of Mieronice, taking the name of Jan Sylwester.²⁹

The rapidly changing situation in the General Government and the transition of the German authorities to a programme of total extermination of the Jews is also noticeable in the tone of the letters sent by the diocesan authorities to the parish priests' subordinates. While in January 1942 the chancellor of the curia firmly recommended baptising the Jewish 'petitioner', as it was officially formulated, in June 1942 he wrote to Fr. Piotr Pytlakowski, pastor of Minoga parish:

With regard to the preparation to admit three Jews into the bosom of the Church and to give them baptism. The Curia recommends that the Rev. Father exercise great caution and pastoral prudence. The petitioners should be subjected to a longer trial, and check whether they are guided by sincerity of intentions and whether it is not due to material or worldly reasons. It should also be made clear to them that by being baptised they will not be free from life's difficulties.³⁰

The Curia responded similarly to a request from the parish priest in the parish of Smardzewice, from which an application for the baptism of Stella S. was received:

Regarding the letter of 9 June, in which the Rev. Father asks for information about the transition to the Church of the Jewess Stella S., the Curia explains that this matter should be approached with great caution, as the Rev. Father still has no evidence of complete and moral certainty about the [petitioner's] purely

²⁸ Ibid., Letter from the chancellor of the curia to the parish priest of Mieronice, Kielce, 16 January 1942, unpagued.

²⁹ State Archives in Kielce, Town Court at Jędrzejów, 2076, Birth and baptism certificate, Mieronice, 18 March 1942, p. 3. On 3 September 1944, this man was abducted by unknown perpetrators from his place of residence in the village of Olszówka Nowa and shot dead (ibid., Statement, Wodzisław, 16 December 1946, p. 2).

³⁰ ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2, Letter from the vicar general of the diocese of Kielce to Fr. Piotr Pytlakowski, parish priest of Minoga parish, Kielce, 22 June 1942, unpagued.

idealistic reasons for baptism, [i.e.] that no material or utilitarian considerations or benefits are involved. It should also be said openly that the reception of [the holy sacrament of] baptism will not free [her], especially nowadays, from the difficulties of life. Regardless of this, the provisions of the civil law as issued by the authorities of the General Government must be strictly observed.³¹ Finally, the law on civil status records prohibits the name of a neophyte from being changed. Only the administrative and judicial authorities are competent to change the name.³²

From the above situation, it can be concluded that the position had been changed. We should refer once again to the already discussed case from Mieronice parish and the baptism of the Jew E. In view of the refusal to legalise the official baptism which had initially taken place in May 1941,³³ the vicar general wrote that “Baptism itself may be given independently of civil legalisation, but due to the [petitioner’s] intended marriage to a Catholic woman, such legalisation would be desirable”³⁴

The curia sent the same answer as to Smardzewice to Michał Wójcik, parish priest at Bodzentyn.³⁵ In this case, the content of the parish priest’s request for baptism for “a certain 18-year-old Jewess” is much more important than the instructions of his superiors. In a veiled form, the clergyman wrote about the brutal reality and difficult dilemmas facing him. The baptism of Jews, while not formally banned, aroused his fears for his own safety. The letter reads:

I kindly ask the Illustrious Curia for advice or authorisation in the following matter. An 18-year-old Jewish woman has lived in Bodzentyn throughout the war, and she has been begging for admission to the Catholic faith for a long time. The curriculum vitae of this person, according to her story, is as follows – she

³¹ See document no. 1.

³² ADK, AKO, OJ-2/2, Letter from the vicar general of the diocese of Kielce to Fr. Stefan Cichoń, parish priest of Smardzewice, 4 July 1942, unpaginated.

³³ *Ibid.*, Letter from the parish priest of Mieronice, Fr. Sajan to the curia in Kielce, Mieronice, 10 May 1941, unpaginated.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Letter from the vicar general of the diocese of Kielce to Fr. Sajan, parish priest of Mieronice, Kielce, 4 June 1941, unpaginated.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Letter from the vicar general of the diocese of Kielce to Fr. Michał Wójcik, parish priest of Bodzentyn, Kielce, 18 May 1942, unpaginated.

was born in Berlin in 1924, the illegitimate child of a German father and a Jewish mother. Her father died soon after, and her mother left her unattended. A certain charitable Catholic institution took care of the child, raising her up to the age of 14. There she learned the principles of the Catholic religion in German. She claims that she was not baptised. Shortly before the war, the mother suddenly moved to Berlin and took her daughter to Warsaw, then to Łódź. Here she left the girl to her fate again. The latter joined a certain Jewish family as a servant, and in the first weeks of the war she came to Bodzentyn with this family. Here, from the beginning, she thought about being baptised. and she was learning Catholicism. Several weeks ago now she broke off completely with the Jews. An intelligent and religious person has taken care of her, and she has quietly been receiving lessons in Catholicism. She is quite an intelligent, quick-witted girl, and in general she makes quite a nice impression. I do not know how to proceed in this case in today's conditions – whether to take the matter seriously without fear of conflict, or to drop the whole thing. The girl desires baptism very greatly, she is well prepared. Therefore, I kindly ask the Illustrious Curia for their guidance in this matter.³⁶

In the content of the official correspondence, the allusion to the situation of the Jewish population and the awareness of the German regulations, euphemistically called 'today's conditions', draws very considerable attention.³⁷

Finally, on 10 October 1942, the Internal Department of the General Government issued an order prohibiting the baptism of Jews.³⁸ The prohibition applied not only to conversion to Catholicism, but to all denominations recognised by the Germans.³⁹ The document referred to the definition of the term 'Jew' in accordance with the ordinance of 24 July 1940, and required detailed verification

³⁶ Ibid., letter from Fr. Wójcik to the diocesan curia in Kielce, Bodzentyn, 30 April 1942, unpaginated 1332.

³⁷ Perhaps, however, Fr. Wójcik baptised an unknown Jewish woman, which may be indicated by an entry in the baptism book from this parish. On 5 October 1942, the parish priest prepared a certificate confirming the birth in 1923 in Germany of a child by one of the parishioners (Act no. 147/1942).

³⁸ The existence of the above prohibition has been mentioned in previous publications. See Fr. Wysocki, 'Archidiecezja warszawska', pp. 280–81; Grądzka-Rejak, 'Od dłuższego czasu', p. 347; D. Libionka, 'Polska hierarchia kościelna wobec eksterminacji Żydów – próba krytycznego ujęcia', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2009, no. 5, p. 29. Importantly, the prohibition was not mentioned in the book *Dalej jest noc*.

³⁹ See document no. 2.

of the candidates. It is undeniably necessary to reflect upon the sources of this prohibition because, as mentioned above, baptism did not protect Jews from repressions. So what was the purpose of this prohibition? Reading the above-mentioned ordinance and analysing the circulation of internal correspondence among the clergy of Kielce diocese, we can come to the fairly obvious conviction that the convergence of the ban with the ongoing mass deportation of Jews to death camps could not have been accidental. It was this time that saw the publication of the German criminal regulations, as issued by the *starostas* and representatives of the police authorities, which prohibited any assistance to Jews under the penalty of death. The ordinance of 10 October 1942 fit into a logical sequence of norms. By prohibiting baptism, the Germans met two of the basic goals accompanying the mass genocide of Jews. First, the occupiers strongly emphasised the anti-religious and racial nature of National Socialism. Second, the prohibition was a clear warning to the clergy; anyone who dared to baptise Jews would be committing an offense against German legislation. Thus the ban, combined with a very real awareness of the possible consequences, served to effectively scare clergymen of various denominations and the rest of the conquered population from helping the Jews. Certainly, the Germans feared that the Poles would be more willing to help a baptised person; there would be a motivation here to save a fellow believer. And finally, this official act was part of the German authorities' overall policy of limiting the rights of the Churches, for whom the acquisition of new members was (and remains) one of their main forms of activity.

It can be assumed that this ordinance was not followed strictly, and that unregistered baptisms did take place. After all, it was not without reason that the diocesan authorities of Kielce, fearing possible German reactions, reminded the clergy of another order by the General Government of 26 November 1942. This document mentioned the need to "document matters concerning marital status".⁴⁰ It is known that the baptism of Jews by priests continued despite the German ban;⁴¹ however, due to the realities of the occupation and the underground nature of such activity, this phenomenon is extremely difficult to confirm by precise sources.

⁴⁰ See document no. 3.

⁴¹ Libionka, 'Powiat Miechów', p. 165.

The text presented here does not treat the issue of Jewish conversion to Catholicism in the diocese of Kielce exhaustively. It presents issues that could be analysed further on the basis of the preserved archives, mainly correspondence. We do not know – as already stated – whether the number of requests and baptisms indicated corresponded to reality. In any event, in the light of the above findings, the figures appear to be low. We also do not know whether, apart from the formal letters, the diocese authorities provided parish priests with more detailed, oral guidelines on how to deal with Jewish converts, which would have been quite an obvious step to take in the reality of the occupation. The attitude of the Jews themselves to the Jewish catechumens and neophytes in the period 1939–42 would also require a factual analysis.

Undoubtedly, however, the materials presented confirm the large and then decisive influence of the German occupying authorities on the option of baptising Jews. Below are three documents related to this topic. They come from the official body of the curia, the above-mentioned Kielce Diocesan Review, and from the Diocesan Archives in Kielce. The translation attempts to reflect the original spelling.

Documents

No. 1

[no date or location] – Order of the Governor General's Office in Kraków, on joining and leaving the Catholic Church

The Office of the Governor General in Kraków (department for church matters) announced that joining and leaving the Church under civil law will only be legally binding if the act has been testified to by the rel[evant] city or poviát *starostas*. The *starostas* will *ex officio* notify the respective parish priests. – In announcing this, it is noted that this provision will in no way infringe the provisions of the canon law on the admission of dissenters and schismatics, and they should therefore be applied in their entirety. On the other hand, the parish priests will wish to inform those interested about the existence of the above-mentioned provision of the civil authorities in order to save them from undesirable consequences.

Source: Kielce Diocesan Review 1941, no. 4, p. 161, typescript

No. 2

1942, 10 October, Kraków – Order of the Governor General's Office in Kraków,
prohibiting baptism for Jews

^aV. S. 26 X 42^a

Government of the General Government

Kraków, 10 October 1942

Internal Administration Department

1st General State Administration

1492/42 (VIII - 6)

To

The heads of all churches in the General Government

Subject: Subdivision for Church Affairs

Re.: Ban on baptising Jews in the General Government

It is hereby prohibited to baptise Jews in the General Government.

Who is a Jew, or who passes for a Jew, results from the ordinance on the definition of the term 'Jew' in the General Government of 24 July 1940 (VBlGG [*Verordnungsblatt für das Generalgouvernement*] I p. 231). For your information, I am enclosing a copy of this regulation.

The prohibition on baptising Jews in the General Government implies an obligation for priests and clergy to check carefully before each baptism whether the baptised person is not a Jew or does not pass for a Jew. How the priest obtains such certainty depends on the circumstances surrounding each case. The priest should check this especially carefully in cases where adults present themselves for baptism. He will then have to request that the baptised person show documents and certificates in order to be able to state without any doubts that the baptised person is not a Jew and does not pass for a Jew.

Regarding the duty of control incumbent on priests, attention is particularly drawn to the following:

1. If the baptised person has German citizenship, is of German nationality or German descent, they should be able to show a German passport, a German

^{a-a} Text written by hand in red on the right-hand side.

Kennkarte, a *Kennkarte* of a person belonging to the German race (see the regulation on granting *Kennkarte* to persons belonging to the German race in the General Government of 26 January 1940 (VBlGG I p. 36) and the executive orders published here of 2 February 1940 (VBlGG II p. 73) and of 15 July 1942 (VBlGG I p. 412), or a *Kennkarte* for persons of German descent (see the regulation on granting the *Kennkarte* to persons of German descent in the General Government of 29 October 1941 (VBlGG I, p. 622), as well as the executive amendment of 2 June 1942 appended to it (VBlGG I p. 357). If a priest is presented with one of these documents, then he can generally assume that the person being baptised is not a Jew nor passing for a Jew.

2. The same applies in a situation when the baptised person can show a blue card (for persons belonging to a minority) or a grey card (for all other persons obliged to have a *Kennkarte*) in accordance with the order of 26 October 1939 on the introduction of *Kennkarten* in the General Government (VBlGG I p. 8) and its executive regulation of 13 June 1941 (VBlGG I p. 344). In such cases, the priest will additionally inform himself about the race of the baptised person only if, for special reasons (such as the name or appearance of the baptised person), he suspects that he is dealing with a Jew despite the documents submitted.

3. Pursuant to the first executive order of 13 June 1941 (VBlGG I p. 344) to the order on the introduction of *Kennkarten* in the General Government of 26 October 1939 (VBlGG I p. 8), yellow cards are issued to Jews. These cards have a black capital letter 'J' on the front side. If the baptised person submits such a *Kennkarte*, it is information for the priest that he cannot offer baptism.

4. In addition to submitting the documents listed in points 1, 2 and 3, the priest in each case should also require the baptised person to provide the following declaration:

“I assure you that, despite careful checking, I am not aware of any circumstances that would justify the assumption that I am a Jew or that I may pass for a Jew”.

If the baptised person can prove that he does not yet have an official document about his/her person or nationality, then it will suffice to submit a written declaration.

The declaration should indicate which documents and certificates have been submitted, or for what reason the submission of documents has not taken place.

5. If the baptised person is under the age of 15, then parents, guardians or other persons with the right of care should prove that the baptised person is not a Jew and does not pass for a Jew. In addition, they should make the following statement:

“I assure you that despite careful checking, I am not aware of any circumstances that would justify the supposition that the baptised person is a Jew or may pass for a Jew”.

Point 4, paragraphs 2 and 3 shall apply accordingly.

6. If, during the baptism of new-borns, it is proved that the documents necessary to prove their nationality do not exist and cannot be delivered on time, then it is sufficient to provide the written statement required in point 5), unless special circumstances raise doubts as to the truthfulness of such documents.

Point 4, of paragraph 3 shall apply accordingly.

7. The written declarations submitted in accordance with points 4, 5 and 6 of this regulation should be bound into the annals on an ongoing basis. With each declaration, the appropriate number in the record book should be indicated.

I am asking for the special commitment of the priests and clergy of your diocese – your Church – in abiding by this ordinance, and for your ongoing supervision of the precise fulfilment of your duty of control.

Signed, Dr. Siebert

Authenticated by^b
(Hilse)
Clerk

Source: ADK, OW-A / 34, pp. 554–55, typescript

^b Signature handwritten below.

No. 3

1942, 26 November, Kraków – Order of the Governor General's Office regarding Church matters

Order of the General Government, Kraków, 26 November 1942.

Re.:

Subdivision: Keeping files of civil status

The events recurring in the field of keeping files of civil status compel the following order:

The clergy of religious denominations recognised by the GG who keep records of civil status are obliged to comply with the orders of the *Kreis-* and *Stadthauptmännern* of their district in the field of documenting matters of civil status. The obligation to investigate further details regarding the validity of these data will be waived once the order of the competent *Kreis-* or *Stadthauptmann* has been issued. If, however, the data in the *Kreis-* or *Stadthauptmann's* instruction are insufficient to make a complete record, according to the former Polish [government's] records, these data should be clarified by asking the relevant *Kreis-* or *Stadthauptmann*.

[Ordered] by Wilden

Source: Kielce Diocesan Review 1942, no. 8–9, p. 4, typescript

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SUMMARY

This article presents the phenomenon of the conversion of Jews to Catholicism during the German occupation. The research conducted proved that conversions attracted little interest among the Jews living in Kielce diocese. For the period from September 1939 to October 1942, we found a total of 25 applications (concerning 44 people), sent from various parishes of the Kielce diocese to the curia with requests for baptism. At the same time, the German authorities treated the baptism of Jews as an obvious form of assistance. During the period analysed, pressure on priests not to baptise was gradually increased. Finally, on 10 October 1942, the German occupying authorities introduced a total ban on the baptism of Jews in all Christian rites on the territory of the General Government.

KEYWORDS

The Holocaust • Jewish converts • Catholics
• the diocese of Kielce

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OUTLINE OF THE ISSUE OF THE AID PROVIDED TO JEWS
DURING THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF POLAND IN THE FILES
OF CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS INITIATED ON THE BASIS
OF THE POLISH COMMITTEE OF NATIONAL LIBERATION DECREE
OF 31 AUGUST 1944 IN THE POST-WAR CRACOW VOIVODESHIP*

Despite the fact that 76 years have passed since the end of the Second World War, there are still no historical works of a synthetic nature that would provide a comprehensive picture of the issue of the aid provided to the Jewish population in particular regions of Poland.¹ Research

* Some of the criminal cases appearing in this article were analysed in the book: R. Gieroń, *Półmrok. Procesy karne w sprawie przestępstw okupacyjnych popełnionych przez chłopów wobec Żydów w województwie krakowskim*, Kraków 2020.

¹ See: A. Krochmal, 'Pomoc Żydom w czasie II wojny światowej w świetle polskich i niemieckich źródeł archiwalnych', in *Z dziejów stosunków polsko-żydowskich w XX wieku*, ed. E. Czop, E. Rączy, Rzeszów 2009, pp. 38–29. This gap was filled by Elżbieta Rączy, who developed this issue for the area of the present-day Podkarpackie voivodeship. This area was conventionally called in her work 'Rzeszowszczyzna' (E. Rączy, *Pomoc Polaków dla ludności żydowskiej na Rzeszowszczyźnie 1939–1945*, Rzeszów 2008). For other works presenting this issue in different regions of the country, see, among others, A. Pyżewska, 'Pomoc dla ludności żydowskiej w Okręgu Białystok w latach okupacji niemieckiej', in *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945. Studia i materiały*, ed. A. Żbikowski, Warszawa 2006, pp. 941–60; K. Samsonowska, 'Pomoc dla Żydów krakowskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej', in *Polacy i Żydzi*, pp. 827–90; D. Siepracka, 'Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w Łodzi podczas okupacji niemieckiej', in *Polacy i Żydzi*, pp. 691–762;

conducted so far has shown that gathering comprehensive material on this issue from the period of the German occupation is difficult for several reasons. The basic problems are as follows: the very broad territorial distribution of archives in many countries of the world; the extremely detailed nature of the information being sought; the need to consult thousands of pages of documents in many languages; and the incomplete nature of surviving source materials.² It can also be assumed that many cases of assistance were not reflected in any sources.³

Apart from archival material directly or indirectly mentioning the subject of aid, it is interesting to note the various court cases initiated after the war against those who collaborated with the German occupier in the extermination of the Jewish population. These materials have rarely been considered in the context of the issue of aid up to now, and they contain names and details of people who helped

ead., 'Postawy Polaków wobec ludności żydowskiej w Kraju Warty', in *Zagłada Żydów na polskich terenach wcielonych do Rzeszy*, ed. A. Namysło, Warszawa 2008, pp. 195–210; T. Domański, 'Udział Polaków w pomocy Żydom na wsi kieleckiej 1939–1945', in *Pomoc świadczona ludności żydowskiej przez Polaków w latach 1939–1945 ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Kielecczyny*, ed. J. Gapys, A. Dziarmaga, Kielce 2016, pp. 55–70. The issue of Polish literature on the subject was presented by D. Libionka, 'Polskie piśmiennictwo na temat zorganizowanej i indywidualnej pomocy Żydom (1945–2008)', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały* 2008, vol. 4, pp. 17–80. Other important studies discussing the issue of aid include: T. Berenstein, A. Rutkowski, 'O ratownictwie Żydów przez Polaków w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej', *Biuletyn ŻIH* 1960, vol. 35, pp. 3–46; eid., *Pomoc Żydom w Polsce 1939–1945*, Warszawa 1963; S. Datner, *Las sprawiedliwych. Karta z dziejów ratownictwa Żydów w okupowanej Polsce*, Warszawa 1968; W. Bielawski, C. Pilichowski, *Zbrodnie na Polakach dokonane przez hitlerowców za pomoc udzieloną Żydom*, Warszawa 1981; P. Friedman, *Their Brother's Keeper*, New York 1957; K. Iranek-Osmecki, *Kto ratuje jedno życie. Polacy i Żydzi 1939–1945*, London 1968; M. Paldiel, *The Path of the Righteous: Gentile Rescuers of Jews Turing the Holocaust*, Hoboken (NJ) 1993; M. Gilbert, *The Righteous. The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust*, New York 2004; T. Prekerowa, 'Who Helped Jews During the Holocaust in Poland?', *Acta Poloniae Historica* 1997, vol. 76, pp. 153–70; *Księga Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata. Ratujący Żydom podczas Holocaustu. Polska*, vols 1–2, ed. I. Gutman, S. Bender, S. Krakowski, Kraków 2009; M. Urynowicz, 'Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc Polaków dla ludności żydowskiej eksterminowanej przez okupanta niemieckiego w okresie drugiej wojny światowej', in *Polacy i Żydzi*, pp. 209–79; N. Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness. Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland*, New York 1986; G.S. Paulsson, *Utajone miasto. Żydzi po aryjskiej stronie Warszawy (1940–1945)*, Kraków 2007; Z. Schnepf-Kołacz, 'Pomoc Polaków dla Żydów na wsi w czasie okupacji niemieckiej. Próba opisu na przykładzie Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata', in *Zarys krajobrazu. Wieś polska wobec zagłady Żydów 1942–1945*, ed. B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, Warszawa 2011, pp. 195–254.

² On archival sources for research on the issue of aid see: Krochmal, *Pomoc Żydom*, pp. 38–55; A. Skibińska, *Źródła do badań nad zagładą Żydów na okupowanych ziemiach polskich. Przewodnik archiwalno-bibliograficzny*, Warszawa 2007.

³ Krochmal, *Pomoc Żydom*, p. 53.

the persecuted.⁴ Therefore, the subject of this article constitutes an attempt to show the significance of files concerning criminal proceedings initiated on the basis of the decree of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (also known as the Lublin Committee) of 31 August 1944⁵ in post-war Cracow voivodeship⁶ as

⁴ Urynowicz, 'Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc', p. 214; E. Rączy, 'Znaczenie dokumentacji sądowej w badaniach nad stosunkami polsko-żydowskimi w czasie II wojny światowej na przykładzie regionu podkarpackiego', *Humanities and Social Sciences* 2018, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 277–83; S. Piątkowski, 'Oprawcy, prześladowcy, ratownicy. Problematyka Zagłady w aktach radomskiej ekspozytury Prokuratora Specjalnego Sądu Karnego w Lublinie', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2008, vol. 4, pp. 494–97.

⁵ On 31 August 1944, the PKWN (Polish Committee of National Liberation) promulgated a decree on the punishment of fascist-Nazi criminals guilty of the murder and abuse of civilians and prisoners of war, as well as traitors to the Polish Nation, called the August Decree or 'Sierpniówka' (*Dziennik Ustaw* [Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland; hereinafter: Dz.U.] 1944, no. 4, item 16). This legal act has been amended up to five times (Dz.U. 1945, no. 7, item 29; Dz.U. 1946, no. 69, item 376; Dz.U. 1947, no. 65, item 390; Dz.U. 1948, no. 18, item 124; Dz.U. 1949, no. 32, item 238). At present, only Article 1(1) of the Decree, which has the character of a special criminal provision, remains in force (R. Ignatiew, 'Komentarz do art. 1 pkt 1 dekretu z dnia 31.08.1944 r. o wymiarze kary dla faszystowsko-hitlerowskich zbrodniarzy winnych zabójstw i znęcania się nad ludnością cywilną i jeńcami oraz dla zdrajców Narodu Polskiego', in *Zbrodnie przeszłości. Opracowania i materiały prokuratorów IPN*, vol. 2: *Ludobójstwo*, ed. R. Ignatiew, A. Kura, Warszawa 2008, pp. 104–06). The introductory provisions of Poland's 1997 Criminal Code introduced life imprisonment in place of the death penalty (Article 13.1, introductory provisions of Criminal Code), Dz.U. 1997, no. 88, item 554. In its final wording, the decree defined the following offences: (1) taking part in the murder of persons from among the civilian population or military persons or prisoners of war (Art. 1 pt. 1 of the August Decree); (2) indicating or capturing persons wanted or persecuted for political, national, religious or racial reasons (Art. 1 pt. 2 of the August Decree); (3) acting to the detriment of the Polish State, a Polish legal person, persons from among the civilian population or military persons or prisoners of war, in a manner or under circumstances other than those provided for in Art. 1 (art. 2 of the August Decree); (4) extortion under threat of persecution or otherwise acting to the detriment of wanted or persecuted persons (art. 3 of the August Decree); (5) participation in a criminal organisation whose aim is crimes against peace, war crimes or crimes against humanity (art. 4 of the August Decree). See A. Pasek, *Przestępstwa okupacyjne w polskim prawie karnym z lat 1944–1956*, Wrocław 2002, p. 40; E. Kobierska-Motas, *Ekstradycja przestępców wojennych do Polski z czterech stref okupacyjnych Niemiec 1946–1950*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1992, p. 7; L. Kubicki, *Zbrodnie wojenne w świetle prawa polskiego*, Warszawa 1963, pp. 66–67; A. Rzepliński, 'Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej? Sprawy karne oskarżonych o wymordowanie Żydów w Jedwabnem w świetle zasady rzetelnego procesu', in *Wokół Jedwabnego*, vol. 1: *Studia*, ed. P. Machcewicz, K. Persak, Warszawa 2002, pp. 355–56; A. Lityński, *O prawie i sądach początków Polski Ludowej*, Białystok 1999, pp. 63–64; J. Wojciechowska, *Przestępcy hitlerowscy przed specjalnym sądem karnym w Toruniu (1945–1946)*, Toruń 1965, p. 16.

⁶ The territorial scope of this article is determined by the borders of the former Cracow voivodeship, as finally established in July 1945. In 1945, Kraków province was reduced in size on its eastern side, and the following poviats were detached from it: Jasło, Mielec, Dębica and Gorlice. In the north, the voivodeship was enlarged by including the poviats of Miechów and Olkusz (Dz.U. 1945, no. 27, item 167). The area covered 15 poviats: Biała, Bochnia, Brzesko, Chrzanów, Dąbrowa Tarnowska, Cracow, Limanowa, Miechów, Myślenice, Nowy Sącz, Nowy Targ, Olkusz, Wadowice, Tarnów, Żywiec. In 1945, the region covered an area of 15,918 km². It was inhabited by 2,133,400 people (M. Korcuć, *Zostańcie wierni tylko Polsce. Niepodległościowe oddziały partyzanckie w Krakowskiem [1944–1947]*, Kraków 2002, p. 12).

a source for research on aid provided to the Jewish population during the period of German occupation in Poland. The term 'aid' used in this work refers to all actions taken to save the lives of Jews, regardless of their motives.⁷ The materials analysed so far have been used mainly in connection with research on negative behaviour of the Polish population during the German occupation. However, this article will show other research possibilities that are inherent in this kind of documentation.

Aid to Jews in the light of records of criminal proceedings

The article makes use mainly of the collections of the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance Branch in Cracow.⁸ The collection examined here, bearing the catalogue number AIPN Kr 502, includes the group of the so-called 'August' prosecution and court files, containing 4,263 archival units.⁹ In the files of post-war criminal proceedings stored in this group, information concerning cases of aid provided to Jews was found in 126 archival units (3 per cent).

The preliminary searches conducted revealed that single files, or significant parts of files, are also to be found in various state archives. The National Archive in Cracow holds the second most important collection of sources used in this article. They constitute a part of the file collections resulting from the activity of the Court of Appeal¹⁰ and the Regional Court in Cracow, as well as the prosecutors' offices of those courts. It is worth noting that in the Court of Appeal file group, materials concerning aid were found in as many as 40 archival units (constituting approximately 17 per cent of the cases gathered in this group initiated on the basis of the August decree). In the remaining archival collections examined, far fewer

⁷ Rączy, *Pomoc Polaków*, p. 19.

⁸ By order of the Minister of Justice of 9 February 1966, the files of the August decree cases were transferred to the Archives of the Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes, and then, after the transformation of this institution, to the Institute of National Remembrance Archives (Urynowicz, 'Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc', p. 214).

⁹ The number of references does not correspond to the number of criminal proceedings as some large cases, which are contained in several volumes, have more than one catalogue number.

¹⁰ According to Dagmara Szałtek, the Cracow Court of Appeal file group contains approximately 240 cases initiated on the basis of the August decree. D. Szałtek, 'Dla płaszcza, walizki i jabłka. Zbrodnie na Żydach ukrywających się we wsiach Falkowa, Wieniec i Janowice w świetle powojennych dokumentów procesowych', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2008, vol. 4, p. 423.

such cases were recorded.¹¹ However, the numbers given above are not definitive. There may be more criminal cases with references to, and broader descriptions of other aid activities from the area being examined here. It is also worth conducting a search through the files of the Provincial Court in Cracow and in the materials which cover the activities of the Military District Court in Cracow.

The size of the analysed archives varied, with some court cases even amounting to several volumes of files. On the other hand, the prosecutors' case files, which ended in a motion of dismissal in most cases, consisted of only a dozen or a few dozen documents. The examined materials included, among other things, minutes of the questioning of witnesses and explanations given by defendants, indictments or motions of dismissal of proceedings, agents' materials, decisions regarding the application of preventive measures against suspects, motions for evidence, minutes of subsequent hearings, judicial sentences, overturned rulings, and instruments of appeal with regard to the grounds of judgements and judgements themselves of the Polish Supreme Court. These materials, when taken together, constituted a very extensive source.

The largest number of cases of aid provided to Jews appeared in documentation concerning the poviats of Cracow, Miechów and Dąbrowa Tarnowska (together constituting almost half of all recorded aid-related activities). This concerned the number of criminal cases in this area after the war and should not be linked to the actual scale of aid in the entire area under investigation here, as well as the number of actual cases of harming and informing on Jews. Also of note was the high rate of cases from outside Cracow voivodeship. These cases concerned aid provided in the pre-war Polish voivodeships of Tarnopol, Lwów (now Lviv) and Stanisławów (now Ivano-Frankivsk) that today lie in Ukraine.¹²

On the basis of the examined files of criminal proceedings, we are unable to answer the question as to why aid was provided.¹³ Data concerning the motivation behind such acts appeared very rarely. They concerned both remuneration and

¹¹ These are the collections with the reference numbers: 29/1304, [Prosecutor's Office of the Court of Appeal in Cracow]; 29/1305, [Prosecutor's Office of the District Court in Cracow]; 29/1989, [District Court in Cracow].

¹² Thus, the files analysed in this study can be valuable material also for researchers of Polish-Jewish relations in the area of Eastern Galicia.

¹³ On the subject of motivation see: Rączy, *Pomoc Polaków*, p. 101.

pre-war acquaintances. It should be remembered that the reasons declared in the interrogations do not necessarily have to be true. Based on the preserved court documentation, we also cannot provide exact data concerning the time when given acts of aid started and ended.¹⁴ Indeed, information on the timing of aid activities or the moment of their termination was recorded in less than half of the recorded cases. These data are fragmentary and very general in nature, merely reporting on the time of year or a date in years. Dates in terms of exact days are rarely recorded.

However, a catalogue of forms of assistance can be established. The most common was the long-term and temporary hiding of Jews. Other, much rarer forms of support were, in turn: emergency aid and other forms of assistance, the provision of food and the supply of false documents.¹⁵ In the documentation analysed here, there are approximately 300 people who helped Jews in one way or another. Although most of them were of Polish nationality, they also included Ukrainians and *Volksdeutschen*. Among them, one can find representatives of all social strata, from peasants to members of the intelligentsia, with the vast majority being rural people. After the war, indictments were filed against several dozen of these people, accusing them of committing the acts described in the August decree.

Information concerning aid provided to Jews in the testimonies of survivors, neighbours and defendants

Reading the testimonies of survivors in court documents, we sometimes find they include information about people who aided them or contributed to their rescue. In some court cases, rescued Jews, either called as witnesses for the defence or on their own initiative, testified in favour of the accused. However, these were small in number (most Jews did not live to the end of the occupation, while some of those who did survive left Poland). It sometimes happened that the accused asked for help, through someone else, for a Jewish family which – at the risk of their own lives – they had helped during the war.¹⁶ An example of a case in which we

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 251.

¹⁵ Cf. Rączy, *Pomoc Polaków*, p. 69; Urynowicz, 'Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc', p. 245.

¹⁶ Cf. Piątkowski, 'Oprawcy', pp. 485–98; Urynowicz, 'Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc', pp. 209–364.

find this type of material were the proceedings initiated against Mikołaj Jarema¹⁷ and his son Lesław,¹⁸ who were suspected of the following:

in the autumn of 1942 or 1943 in Szyce in the powiat of Olkusz, in going along with the authorities of the German state, they acted to the detriment of persons persecuted for racial reasons in such a way that they captured an individual of Jewish origin and then handed him over to the Navy Blue Police, with the result that this individual could have suffered death at the hands of the Germans.¹⁹

In the files, we find the following testimony of Kamila Zagórska, a girl whom the Jarema family took care of during the German occupation:

In 1941 I was living with my mother in Lwów. In 1939, my father went to the Polish-German war, from where he has not returned to this day [...] Since my mother was of Jewish nationality and although before 1939 she had assumed Polish nationality, i.e. she had been baptised, nevertheless, in 1941, my mother was arrested by the German authorities and deemed a Jewess²⁰ and deported to Auschwitz, from where she never returned, it follows that she was executed there. I, as a minor without a father or mother or any family, was taken in by a lady called Wiśniewska, who took care of me and took me with her to her home. As Mrs Wiśniewska was afraid to keep me in her home [...] that same year, 1941, she took me with her and brought me to her cousin, or sister, who is the wife of Mikołaj Jarema, living at that time in the village of Szyce near

¹⁷ During the Second World War, Mikołaj Jarema was a soldier of the Home Army. He disclosed his identity in 1945 (Oddziałowe Archiwum IPN w Krakowie [Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance Branch in Cracow; hereinafter: AIPN Kr], 502/4193, Protocol of the interrogation of suspect Mikołaj Jarema, Olkusz, 13 March 1951, p. 15; AIPN Ka, 00185/1, General-information file of the WUSW in Katowice; AIPN Kr, 010/5380, Case of evidentiary-observation concerning Mikołaj Jarema; AIPN Kr, 00142/1, General-information file of the WUSW in Cracow/Nowy Sącz/Tarnów).

¹⁸ During the occupation period, Lesław Jarema, *nom de guerre* 'Lech', was a Home Army soldier. He revealed himself in 1945 (AIPN Kr, 502/4193, Protocol of the interrogation of the suspect Lesław Jarema, Olkusz, 16 March 1951, p. 17v; AIPN Kr, 080/1, so-called 'saved records' WUSW file in Kraków).

¹⁹ AIPN Kr, 502/4193, Request for discontinuation of investigation, Olkusz, 9 May 1951, p. 56.

²⁰ In the source texts quoted, it has been decided to retain the original terms of the words 'Jew' and 'Jewess'.

Cracow, in Olkusz powiat. Leaving me in the care of Mikołaj Jarema from Szyce, Mrs Wiśniewska went back and I hid under the care of Mikołaj Jarema; they hid me partly for the whole time of the occupation, that is, until the liberation of Poland. After the liberation of Poland in 1945, Mikołaj Jarema left with his family for Bytom, and I left with them, where I continued to live under their care until 1947. In 1947, through Mikołaj Jarema, I was sent to an orphanage in Czeladź. [...] Despite the fact that nowadays the state is responsible for my upkeep and education, nevertheless, during holidays or Christmas breaks, I come to the Jaremas as good friends, who took care of me from a young age and gave me all the help they could. I know that during the occupation, when I was staying with the Jaremas, some Jewish people came to their house; I saw them a few times and they stayed with the Jaremas for a couple of days at a time, but I do not know whether they were Jews in hiding or not, as I have not been informed about this matter.²¹

Eliasz Geller,²² who survived the war also testified in this case:

I know that in 1944 my friend Ludwik Rudnicki of Jewish nationality was hiding at Mikołaj Jarema's in Szyce and in Cracow, but for how long, I cannot give any information [...] The above-mentioned [Rudnicki] was hiding for up to two months at Wolińska's in Cracow, which the Jaremas also knew about. I know about the fact that Ludwik Rudnicki was hiding at the Jaremas', because he told me personally [...] After the liberation [in] 1945 I found out from Rudnicki and his wife that during the occupation the Jaremas were hiding a girl of Jewish nationality.²³

As we can see, these two testimonies complement each other. Finally, in May 1951, due to the lack of grounds for indictment, the investigation in this case was discontinued. On the basis of the preliminary investigation it was established that in the autumn of 1942 or 1943:

²¹ AIPN Kr, 502/4193, Protocol of interrogation of witness Kamila Zagórska, Olkusz, 29 May 1951, pp. 22v-23.

²² On some documents he is erroneously written as "Eriasz". See e.g. *ibid.*, Request for discontinuation of investigation, Olkusz, 9 May 1951, p. 57.

²³ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the hearing of the witness Eliasz Geller, Olkusz, 27 March 1951, p. 21.

in the afternoon, three individuals entered Jarema's shop, where Lesław Jarema was behind the counter, and demanded he sell them cold meat, and when they met with a refusal, they started to behave in a suspicious manner, referring to Lesław Jarema in an increasingly aggressive manner. At this, Lesław Jarema ran out of the shop, stopped for a while and then returned to the shop, where he no longer saw the men, but noticed that the drawers were open, so he ran out again and saw one of the men running away. On hearing Lesław Jarema shouting, one of the passers-by stopped this individual and together with the suspect led him back to the shop.²⁴

Several people then gathered in the shop. The village leader was called and ordered the chief of the guard, Józef Rosa and Jan Litewka, to take the captured man away. It was not until he was in Rosa's house that the detainee admitted that he was a Jew. The investigator drawing up the application for remission stated that:

Lesław Jarema, in grabbing the unknown individual, had only the protection of the shop in mind, and his father was in the shop already after the individual had been detained, while the act of handing him over to the authorities was initiated and completed by village leader Stanisław Gabaj through Józef Rosa, who took the captured individual to the police station in Ojców.²⁵

The fact that the Jarema family had been hiding Kamila Zagórska and Ludwik Rudnicki was for the investigators evidence of "the absence of any racial hatred, but also of the most far-reaching positive attitude towards people of Jewish origin, to the point of placing themselves in danger".²⁶

Interesting material can also be found in the case file against Janina Tomczyk (*née* Gosławska). She faced the accusation that in Cracow during the period of German occupation: "she persuaded Alfred Weinert to shoot the Jew Dr Bergner" and that she had reported to the German police (together with

²⁴ Ibid., Request for discontinuation of investigation, Olkusz, 9 May 1951, p. 56.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁶ Ibid.

Józefa Guzik) that one Antonina Czajkowska was hiding Jews. This was to lead to the arrest of Czajkowska and a Jewish woman living with her.²⁷ The case was initiated on the basis of a report by Antonina Czajkowska, submitted in March 1950 to the Prosecutor's Office of the Court of Appeal in Cracow. The testimony of Maks Weissberg, who on 26 September 1950 reported to the General Consulate of Poland in Paris providing an explanation concerning the deeds of which Janina Tomczyk (*née* Gosławska)²⁸ was accused, as well as providing information about the help she had given him, was crucial in clarifying the circumstances of the case: "I stayed with citizen Janina Gosławska from 18 June 1942 until the liberation. My brother Józef stayed with her for only three weeks, after which he was arrested and deported to the Ghetto."²⁹ Gosławska was exceptionally good and caring to me"³⁰. In the survivor's testimony, we can also read about the dangers of hiding Jews and about relations with the owners of the property where they lived, namely Władysław and Antonina Czajkowski:

The Czajkowskis found out that I was a Jew and were very hostile towards me and the Gosławski family. C[itizen] Władysław Czajkowski came to our flat, took me by the collar and wanted to take me to the Gestapo. While doing so, he shouted at full volume, addressing the Gosławski family, "You are holding a Jew, I must finish you off". At the request of Janina Tomczyk *née* Gosławska,

²⁷ AIPN Kr, 502/2508, Request for discontinuation of investigation, [Cracow], 28 November 1950, p. 3.

²⁸ For more on this, see: *ibid.*, Letter of Maks Weissberg, Paris, 18 February 1950, p. 30; *ibid.*, Testimony of Maks Weissberg, Paris, 26 November 1950, p. 80–80v; *ibid.*, Notarial Declaration concerning Mrs. Gosławska and Tomczyk [Certified translation from French], Paris, 16 May 1950, pp. 70–3.

²⁹ According to a notarial declaration of 16 May 1950, Justyna Gosławska and Janina Tomczyk took in Józef Weissberg, who registered with them under a false name of Jan Wykusz [in the documentation examined, the name Wykusz was also noted – R.G.]. After some time, Weissberg brought his younger brother Maks to them. When Józef was arrested, the two women took care of his brother: "without a moment's hesitation, knowing full well that I was an Israelite [*sic*] and that they had risked their lives, they not only kept me, but their warm-heartedness steadily increased. They recognised me as their son and I bore their name and they kept me without any remuneration" (*ibid.*, Notarial Declaration concerning Mrs. Gosławska and Tomczyk [Certified translation from French], Paris, 16 May 1950, pp. 70–70v).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Testimony of Maks Weissberg, Paris, 26 September 1950, p. 80.

daughter of Justyna Gosławska, and the latter, he calmed down, but not before he beat them both.³¹

The investigation did not reveal any evidence of the suspects' guilt. The prosecutor who drew up the motion of dismissal concluded that the motive behind Czajkowska filing the denunciation was 'mutual, personal misunderstandings' and 'legal disputes' with Janina Tomczyk.³²

It was also noted that a person whose testimony was the basis for criminal proceedings came forward again after the indictment was received in order to testify in favour of one of the defendants. In the criminal case of Roman Buziak³³ and Jan Wróbel, accused of handing over two Jewish persons to the occupation authorities,³⁴ Herman Glassner testified in defence of one of them:

³¹ Ibid. In the notarial declaration of 16 May 1950 we find a detailed description of this event: "Seeing that his threats were no longer having any effect on the Gosławska ladies, one day he barged into the flat and, grabbing me by the hair, started shouting that he would undertake to end this matter by taking me on my own to the Gestapo. My carers were on their knees with tears in their eyes begging him to leave me alone, but he knocked them over and without any consideration started beating them and kicking them with the long hunting boots he was wearing. This scene was horrible to watch and both poor bruised women did not let me go and defended me fiercely and so he could not take me. Seeing this heroic resistance of the two poor and weak women, the owner finally let me go and went away, cursing and threatening them" (AIPN Kr, 502/2508, Notarial declaration concerning Mrs. Gosławska and Mrs. Tomczyk [Certified translation from French], Paris, 16 May 1950, p. 71). It is worth adding that, according to the above declaration, Justyna Gosławska and Janina Tomczyk were also oppressed for helping Józef Weissberg: "A short time later the Gestapo burst in on the Gosławski ladies and wanted to arrest them on the pretext that they had hidden an Israelite [*sic*] This concerned my brother, who had lived with them before, and they wriggled out of the matter by proving that he had been registered with them as an Aryan. In spite of all this, the two women were beaten and mistreated and the Germans [...] stole everything they owned from them" (ibid., pp. 70v–71). The issue of oppression for helping Jews, present in the August files, will be discussed in more detail in the last part of the article.

³² In the application for remission it was noted that: "the filing of the denunciation [by Czajkowska] coincides with the date of the sentence sentencing Czajkowski to 1 month's imprisonment for raiding Gosławska's house" (AIPN Kr, 502/2508, Application for discontinuance of the investigation, [Cracow], 28 September 1950, p. 3v).

³³ The Regional Court in Tarnów, in the sentence of 23 January 1947, found the defendant Roman Buziak guilty of the crimes he was accused of and sentenced him, pursuant to the article 5 § 1 and 2, to a total of 15 years of imprisonment. On February 7, 1955, he was conditionally released from prison (AIPN Kr, 502/1874, Protocol of the interrogation of a suspect, Tarnów, November 3, 1945, p. 5; ibid., Sentence of the sentence by the District Court in Tarnów, January 23, 1947, pp. 93–5; AIPN Kr, 00142/1, General Information File of the WUSW in Cracow/Nowy Sącz/Tarnów).

³⁴ It seems that this case may have been initiated and controlled by public security officers (AIPN Kr, 502/1874, Letter of Zofia Buziak to President of the Council of State of the Polish People's Republic in Warsaw, [date of receipt 21 January 1954], p. 133).

I know Jan Wróbel well, and I say that he is a very decent man, who, during the period when I was in hiding, went out of his way to help me, giving me shelter in his home, and, moreover, continually helped me with food. It is true that Wróbel went to the Polish police and informed them that my cousins were to come to Buziak's house, but in my opinion he could not have acted otherwise. Namely, the German gendarmerie, wanting to capture us, set up hostages [...] to whom they gave a deadline for our capture under threat of being shot. [...] I should add that also after the Glassners were shot, Jan Wróbel came to my aid, giving me both shelter and food, and moreover, he always warned me that the police were to come, or that it was not safe to go to a given place, etc. When I was unable to reach the place, I had to leave. When, at times, I could not get to Wróbel's house, he would bring me food to an agreed location in the bushes. I had known Jan Wróbel since before the war, and when I escaped from the Ghet[t]o, I went to him straight away, and Wróbel had already helped me by giving me accommodation and food. Wróbel was never an anti-Semite and, in my opinion, was one of the most serious and decent farmers in Porąbka Uszewska.³⁵

On 31 December 1946, Glassner testified before the court during the main hearing.³⁶ The District Court in Tarnów, in its verdict of 23 January 1947, acquitted Jan Wróbel of the charges.³⁷ It seems that Glassner's testimony concerning the defendant's attitude and actions was significant for the court. Indeed, the operative part of the judgement emphasised the fact that he had provided aid to Jews:

It follows from the case as a whole, and in particular from the testimony of Herman and Regina Glassner, that the accused Wróbel went to the aid of the Jews in hiding, hid them in his home, gave them food, and thus exposed himself and his family to the danger of losing their lives.³⁸

³⁵ Ibid., Protocol of the interrogation of the witness Herman Glassner, Tarnów, 7 February 1946, pp. 28–29.

³⁶ Ibid., Minutes of the main hearing, Tarnów, 31 December 1946, pp. 75–75v.

³⁷ Ibid., Sentence of judgement of Tarnów District Court in, Tarnów, 23 January 1947, pp. 93–95.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 95.

Sometimes surviving Jews wrote letters in defence of suspects and defendants.³⁹ Here is the content of a letter written by Zofia Nowik *née* Wolf in the criminal case of a village leader accused of a crime under Article 1, point 2 of the August decree:

I have known Władysław Trzepacz since my earliest childhood, because he was my next-door neighbour, he was already the village leader before the war, and also during the occupation; he behaved in very morally upright way towards me and my family, when already [in] 1940 the persecution of the Jewish population began, he always warned us when something bad was going to happen. In 1942 we were expelled from the village, I was forced to go into hiding and the village leader also knew about this, I often went to him at night for help, which he never refused. At the end of 1942 I changed my name, taking the birth certificate of one of my Polish friends, and left voluntarily for Germany, while the village leader knew all about this, under what name and whereabouts, but he did not betray me. I would like to point out that he never personally harmed me or my family.⁴⁰

The village leader concerned was eventually acquitted (the court found that the defendants in this case acted within the disposition of Article 6 of the August decree).⁴¹ The sentence also stressed that: “Trzepacz helped Jews in hiding”.⁴²

During the analysed proceedings, Jews were sometimes called as defence witnesses, who were to testify that the accused knew about their presence in the village, had provided aid to them and warned them of impending danger. It is worth using further examples at this point. Melchior Pomierny, the mayor of Raclawice in Olkusz poviát, accused of driving out Jews caught at a local

³⁹ “Please question us in the case of Andrzej Boduch in defence of the suspect [...] Drelich [Fuschel/ Tuschel] Salomon Goldberg” (Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie [National Archives in Cracow; hereafter: AN Kr], 29/439/1456, Letter to the Prosecutor of Tarnów District Court, [Tarnów], [date of receipt 5 November 1948], p. 57).

⁴⁰ AN Kr, 29/439/1323, vol. 2, Letter from Zofia Nowik *née* Wolf to the Prosecutor’s Office of Tarnów District Court, Oleśnica, [date of receipt 1 August 1950], p. 40.

⁴¹ Article 6 provided that the indication or surrender to the authorities of the German or and allied state of persons prosecuted for a common crime was not punishable if the perpetrator of the indication or surrender acted in the prevailing public or private interest.

⁴² AN Kr, 29/439/1323, Sentence of the verdict of the Court of Appeal in Cracow at assizes in Tarnów, Tarnów, 20 December 1950, p. 155.

farmer's property,⁴³ requested the questioning of his sisters Maria Stochel⁴⁴ and Helena Rusek (both *née* Lewkowicz), who were to testify that:

when Maria Stochel, as a Jewess, was hiding in the Raclawice area, Antoni Stochel, who was her fiancé at the time, would bring her food and inform her whether or not she was in danger. The accused Pomierny knew about this concealment, and not only did he not take advantage of it in a way that was unfavourable to the woman in hiding, but he also informed Antoni Stochel more than once about impending danger. Moreover, Maria Stochel will confirm that the place where she was hiding was the house of the accused Pomierny's neighbour, and in particular at Jan Pomierny's, who is the accused's cousin. Pomierny knew about this hiding place, and many times he sent food to the woman in hiding through his [servants], and she herself, not being afraid of the accused or his household members, came to his home.⁴⁵

⁴³ On the subject of this issue see: D. Libionka, 'Powiat miechowski', in *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski*, vol. 2, ed. B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, Warszawa 2018, p. 161; J. Grabowski, 'Społeczność wiejska, policja granatowa i ukrywający się Żydzi: powiat Dąbrowa Tarnowska 1942–1945', in *Zarys krajobrazu*, p. 151.

⁴⁴ Already in 1949, in a letter to the prosecutor's office, Maria wrote that the village leader Melchior Pomierny had helped the Jewish population during the German occupation, warned them and supplied them with food, and also asked for the release of the accused (AN Kr, 29/439/1447, vol. 1, Request of Maria Stochel [Lewkowicz] to the Court Prosecutor's Office in Warsaw, Czubrowice, [date of receipt 26 November 1949], pp. 100–100v).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, Application of the accused Melchior Pomierny to the Court of Appeal in Cracow, [date of receipt 2 June 1950], pp. 368–68v. In a separate request for evidence, Pomierny also asked to hear Perka Kenner in his case, who was to testify that the accused had helped her father in 1943: "he warned him about a search that was to take place at Wawrzyniec Wadowski's house in Raclawice, where she was hiding at the time. The search was indeed conducted the next day, and the witness avoided being arrested and saved her life by changing her place of residence. Moreover, the witness Kenner testifies that the accused Melchior Pomierny, while being searched by a German at the house of Adam Skotniczny, concealed from him the presence of four Jewish women, cousins of the witness, who were thus saved". (*ibid.*, pp. 359–59v). The accused requested the urgent questioning of Perka Kenner in connection with her planned trip to Israel. Probably due to the passage of time, he included in one request for evidence a request to question only one witness. As the Court of Appeal in Cracow decided in a closed session to refuse the request to question Kenner, we are unable to read her account (AN Kr, 29/439/1447, vol. 2, Excerpt from the minutes of a joint closed session of the Court of Appeal in Cracow, Cracow, 17 October 1950, pp. 400–400v).

In this case the accused also called a number of other non-Jewish witnesses who were to confirm the above circumstances.⁴⁶ Maria Pączek was to testify: “that she served during the occupation in the house of the accused Melchior Pomierny and that she saw more than once how Jews in hiding came to his house, whom he helped with food, and moreover that she herself carried food to the neighbouring houses where Jews were hiding”.⁴⁷ Maria Skotniczna was to testify that when the Jews “moved to Skała, she still carried butter for them on the orders of the accused Pomierny”.⁴⁸ Stanisław Stochel was to testify that “there was a Jew at his home during the occupation, Kenner’s father, who had often brought home bread, and when asked by the witness whom he had got it from, said that he had brought it from the village leader”.⁴⁹ Jozef Jaroń was to testify that: “as a gamekeeper in the village of Raclawice he was walking through the village and met the accused Melchior Pomierny, who told him to go to Wadowski’s house, where the Jewess Kenner was hiding, and to warn [her] that there was to be a search, which the witness did”.⁵⁰ Franciszek Kozub allegedly testified that “in 1944, when Jews in the village of Raclawice were moving to another locality, he witnessed how one Jew, Lewkowicz, came to the house of the accused Melchior Pomierny late in the evening and thanked the accused Pomierny for the help he had given him, and the accused drank vodka with this Jew and provided him with food for the journey”.⁵¹ In the course of the trial it was confirmed that the accused had given aid to Jewish people. For example:

One day the Germans came to the village in search of Jews in hiding. The Germans, together with the accused Pomierny, entered the house where the witness Helena Rusek was hiding and ordered the accused to go to the attic and check if anyone

⁴⁶ The witnesses Stanisław Mosur and Antonina Mosur: “will also confirm the fact that the accused, knowing that Jews were hiding in their house, never took advantage of it”. The witnesses Franciszek Skotniczny, Teodor Skotniczny, Jan Pomierny, Franciszek Kozub, Józef Tomczyk and Michał Skotniczny were to testify: “that there were Jews hiding in their houses, that the accused Melchior Pomierny knew about it, that he never took any advantage of it, on the contrary, he more than once notified them of the imminent danger, and that he helped the Jews by providing them with food” (ibid., Application of the accused Melchior Pomierny to the Court of Appeal in Cracow, [date of receipt 2 June 1950], pp. 368–70).

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 369v.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 370.

⁵¹ Ibid.

was hiding there. The accused entered the attic and found that three Jewesses, including the witness Helena Rusek, were hiding in the attic. The defendant showed the Jewesses where to hide, then came down from the attic and told the Germans that there was no one in the attic.⁵²

The Court of Appeal in Cracow, in its judgement of 16 December 1950, acquitted Melchior Pomierny of the charges against him. The justification stated:

The accused Melchior Pomierny performed the office of a village administrator in Raclawice. The defendant admitted the facts, namely that he drove the Jews captured by Pączek to Wolbrom and went with them himself, as well as that he provided a cart at the request of police officer Pelant – but he did not admit guilt. [...] The defendant often helped Jews by giving them food and showing them the place where they could hide [...] The court assumed that in the act of the defendant there are no elements of the crime according to art. 1 p. 2 of the Decree of 31 August 1944. [...] The court proceedings have found that the defendant was not present at the capture of the Jews at all – he did not give any orders. On Pelant's order, he only provided a cart, which, as the village leader, he was obliged to do.⁵³

The above case shows that, under different circumstances, some people helping Jews could also act to the detriment of others.

If in a given case the court admitted the defence witnesses indicated, then we can verify their testimony in the minutes of the court hearings. For example, in the request for evidence of the accused Władysław Kusina, we read that the witness Dawid Raber was to testify that the accused:

selflessly hid the witness's sister Janina Raberówna in his house in Siercza for a long period, that at a critical time he hid Janina Raberówna in the bushes, moving her

⁵² "On another occasion, a German policeman was passing through the village in company. At one point two Jewish women were walking along the road. The Germans asked the accused who they were. The accused declared them to be 'local women.' Thanks to this explanation of the accused, the women were saved" (AN Kr, 29/439/1447, vol. 3, Sentence of the judgement of Cracow Court of Appeal, Cracow, 16 December 1950, pp. 523v–24).

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 523–25.

personally, that he took her to his flat for the night and that the accused Kusina did not take part in the search for Jews and was very favourably disposed towards Jews, always giving them aid.⁵⁴

On 18 January 1950, Janina Raberówna testified before the prosecutor of the Court of Appeal in Cracow and confirmed the fact that she had been given aid.⁵⁵ Dawid Raber⁵⁶ also did the same. Finally, Kusina was acquitted of the charge that in 1942 or 1943 in Janowice he had taken part in capturing and leading to the German gendarmerie the Geminder brothers who were in hiding (as a result of which both brothers were shot by German gendarmes).⁵⁷ The court found, based on the testimony of the witnesses interviewed, that the accused had not come into contact with the Geminders: “he was at home and then in the field, where he was busy hiding Janina Raber”.⁵⁸

In another case, the survivor Herman Rick was called as a witness “in consideration of the fact that the accused [Jan] Zaraza kept this witness, who is Jewish, at the risk of his life and that of his family”.⁵⁹ During the trial, these circumstances were confirmed: “From the testimony of the witness Lejb Sporn, Herman Rick, it appears that the accused Jan Zaraza gave shelter to Jews in his home at the risk of his life during the occupation, fed them, and warned them about the authorities of the German occupier tracking them down”.⁶⁰ Zaraza was accused of taking part (together with two other co-defendants in the case) in the capture of a Jewish family hiding in Paweł Kajput’s house in the spring of 1943 in Pawężów (Tarnów powiat) before handing the detainees (along with the aforementioned defendants) over to officers who then shot them.⁶¹ On 18 October 1946, the Special Criminal Court in Cracow acquitted Zaraza. On 12 May 1948, the Supreme Court, at assizes held in Cracow, overturned

⁵⁴ AN Kr, 29/439/1614, vol. 2, Request for evidence by the accused Władysław Kusina to the Cracow Court of Appeal, [date of receipt 17 June 1950], p. 276.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 276v.

⁵⁶ AN Kr, 29/439/1614, vol. 2, Minutes of main hearing before Cracow Court of Appeal, Cracow, 9 November 1950, p. 355v.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Sentence of judgement of Cracow Court of Appeal, Cracow, 10 November 1950, pp. 398–99.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

⁵⁹ AN Kr, 29/439/1253, Letter of defence counsel of Jan Zaraza to the Special Criminal Court in Tarnów, (N/A), p. 57v.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Sentence of the judgement of Cracow Special Criminal Court at assizes in Tarnów, 18 December 1946, p. 76v.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

this verdict and referred the case for reconsideration.⁶² Finally, on 18 April 1950, the Appeal Court in Cracow discontinued the criminal proceedings against Jan Zaraza due to the death of the accused on 13 January 1947.⁶³

Not in all cases did the courts decide to allow the defence witnesses to testify. For example, in the case concerning the handing over of a Jew in Rzerzuśnia, Rachmiel Ickowicz was identified “in consideration of the fact that this witness was hiding in the nearest neighbourhood of the defendants during the German occupation, who knew and helped his neighbour to hide him – and in consideration of the fact of his opinion concerning both defendants”.⁶⁴ The Court of Appeal in Cracow, at a closed session, refused to examine this witness, motivated by the fact that the circumstances which he could confirm “are partly irrelevant for the assessment of guilt of the defendants, and partly can be confirmed by other witnesses admitted in this case”.⁶⁵ The same justification appeared also in other decisions of this kind.

Occasionally, in spite of the fact that the identified person was allowed to testify, we cannot learn of their testimony as by the time the main hearing was scheduled, the person concerned had left Poland. For example, in the criminal case of Stefania Sypek, accused of reporting the hiding place of five Jewish fugitives in Załuże (Dąbrowa powiat) to the Germans in the spring of 1944, “the witness Aron Pinkas was identified in consideration of the fact that the accused selflessly hid his sister and helped them for a long time, which indicates that she did not act to the detriment of the persecuted people”.⁶⁶ However, he could not testify at the hearing before the Court of Appeal in Cracow, having embarked on a journey to Palestine.⁶⁷

Other people, such as neighbours and acquaintances, who were supposed to confirm the provision of aid to persecuted Jews, were also called in evidence. For example, the accused Paweł Cwińczek called witnesses who were to testify that:

⁶² AN Kr, 29/439/1253, Judgement of the Supreme Court at assizes in Cracow, Cracow, 12 May 1948, p. 94.

⁶³ Ibid., Minutes of a closed session of Cracow Court of Appeal, Cracow, 18 April 1950, p. 124.

⁶⁴ AN Kr, 29/439/1438, vol. 2, Request for evidence by defendants Andrzej Świdziński and Jan Mirowski to the Court of Appeal in Cracow, [date of receipt 27 May 1950], pp. 238–38v.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Minutes of a closed session of Cracow Court of Appeal, Cracow, 12 July 1950, p. 261.

⁶⁶ AN Kr, 29/439/1441, Application of accused Stefania Sypek for admission of witness evidence to Cracow Court of Appeal, [date of receipt 27 May 1950], p. 32.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Minutes of the main hearing before Cracow Court of Appeal, Cracow, 30 September 1950, p. 41v.

risking his own life and that of his family, he hid the Dawidowicz family, the Fendler family and their two sisters, as well as Israel, Moszek and Roman Liebenfreund, in his home for many months, fed them and gave them all the help he could and did so completely selflessly.⁶⁸

However, the aspect of providing aid was not considered relevant by the court. The defendant was acquitted of the charge that in June 1944 in Zawada (Olkusz powiat), together with others, he had captured a Jew named Hercyk and his twelve-year-old son, who were handed over to the gendarmerie. In the justification we can read that the accused did not participate in the manhunt:

When he realised that the Germans were not there and that the accused Rojek wanted to carry out the manhunt on his own, he changed his intention and under the pretext that he would bring more people from the village, he turned back to the village and went home, where he continued to work and he only found out about the detention of the Jews later, when the Germans brought them to the village.⁶⁹

An example of another case in which we find information concerning aid given to the persecuted was the case against Jan Sroga,⁷⁰ accused of committing a crime under Article 1, point 2 of the decree of 31 August 1944. The defendant, who during the occupation was the mayor of Stogniowice, requested that Jan Ciepły⁷¹ be questioned in order for him to testify that he, Jan Sroga, had helped a Jew named Goldstein to escape, thanks to which he had survived the occupation.⁷² During

⁶⁸ AN Kr, 29/439/1446, Application of defendants Paweł Ćwięczek and Jan Jarzęcki for admission of evidence to Cracow Court of Appeal, Cracow, 30 May 1950, pp. 115–16.

⁶⁹ Ibid., Judgement of Cracow Court of Appeal, Cracow, 7 August 1950, p. 157v.

⁷⁰ See: Libionka, *Powiat miechowski*, p. 159.

⁷¹ Jan Ciepły was a member of the PPS-WRN (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna – Wolność, Równość, Niepodległość*; Polish Socialist Party – Freedom, Equality, Independence) and a participant in the Kraków ‘Żegota’ Jewish aid campaign. In 1967 he was awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations (‘Ciepły Jan’, in *Księga Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata. Ratujący Żydów podczas Holocaustu. Polska*, ed. I. Gutman, S. Bender, S. Krakowski, vol. 1, Kraków 2009, p. 97).

⁷² The accused Jan Sroga allegedly took part “in the escape of Goldstein, a Jew, who was being led by a German patrol, and he saved him by directing him to a safe place in Klimontów, from where he was taken by the witness Ciepły, who hid him until the end of the war. Goldstein, having saved his life in this way, is now in America and corresponds with the witness” (AN Kr, 29/439/1476, Application of the defence counsel of the accused Jan Sroga to the Court of Appeal in Cracow, [date of receipt 20 June 1950], unpagged).

the main hearing, Ciepły testified that: “Sroga became village leader at the request of the organisation, as we had confidence in him [...] Goldstein, who is alive today and writes to me, was hiding at Sroga’s house”.⁷³ On 20 December 1950, on the basis of the evidence gathered, the Court of Appeal in Cracow acquitted the accused, Sroga, of the charge.⁷⁴ As in the files analysed here only the judgement is provided without any detailed justification, it is difficult to answer the question whether in this case the testimony of Ciepły had any significance for the court.

To sum up, very often witnesses were called to testify that the accused had warned both those hiding Jews and those in hiding of imminent danger. Moreover, motions for evidence were submitted by witnesses who were to testify that the accused knew about Jews in hiding and did not report this to the German occupation authorities, despite the fact that, for example, they would be held responsible for this by virtue of their office at that time.⁷⁵ It seems, therefore, that such applications to the court were aimed at presenting the accused in a good light.

Information concerning repression

In some of the cases analysed here (which mainly concerned blackmail, participation in manhunts, denunciation and murder of Jews in hiding) we also find information about the repression employed against those who provided help.⁷⁶

⁷³ Ibid., Minutes of the main hearing before Cracow Court of Appeal at assizes in Tarnów, Tarnów, 5 October 1950, [p. 10].

⁷⁴ Ibid., Sentence of the verdict of Cracow Court of Appeal at assizes in Tarnów, Tarnów, 20 December 1950, [p. 3].

⁷⁵ In this way, the defendants tried to demonstrate their positive attitude towards the Jewish population. If convicted, this could also have had an impact on the sentence. The witness Eliasz Kahane, indicated as a witness by the defence, was to testify that the accused Jan Musiał (before 1939 a sergeant in the Polish Army, during the Second World War a soldier of the Home Army) knew about him and his mother hiding in Nieciecza: “The witness Eliasz Kahane and his mother N. Kahane living and residing in Tarnów, were hiding in Nieciecza at the house of a certain Tomalowa, where I saw them and met them at the house of my father-in-law Marcin Żołędź, and yet I did not report their whereabouts and did not betray them”. In the said request for evidence, the accused also stated that: “I knew about the Jews hiding at Wojciech Mendryś’ place, but not only did I not betray their whereabouts, but on the contrary, I bought and arranged errands in the shop” (AN Kr, 29/439/1442, Request of the accused Jan Musiał for calling witnesses for the trial, Cracow, 19 June 1950, pp. 67–68).

⁷⁶ Repression was defined as follows: any actions by the military and civilian authorities of the Third Reich (courts and prosecutors, police authorities and security services with the complicity of the Nazi Party and its affiliated and collaborating organisations) against persons who violated the rules of contact with the Jewish population, as defined by the German laws of occupation. See: *Represje za pomoc Żydom na okupowanych ziemiach polskich w czasie II wojny światowej*, vol. 1, ed. M. Grądzka-Rejak, A. Namysło, Warszawa 2019, pp. 72. Cf. Rączy, *Znaczenie dokumentacji*, p. 279.

The following forms of repression were noted: 1) death penalty; 2) incarceration in a prison and/or camp; 3) arrest; 4) beatings; and 5) confiscation of property. Karol Garczyński, for example, was accused of having indicated to the German gendarmerie at the end of 1944 that Jewish children were being kept in Rozalia Paśławska's house at 15 Rękawka Street in Cracow, as a result of which a German patrol arrested Paśławska and Roman Kardisch, then just a few years old, who was hiding with her.⁷⁷ They were both tortured. Rozalia Paśławska testified: "The boy begged me for help, but I could not help him with anything, because the same thing was going to happen to me". Roman Kardisch was probably murdered.⁷⁸ Paśławska was released from the Montelupich Prison after a few weeks. Although the court found that the accused, Garczyński, had contributed to finding the Jewish child and arresting the Polish woman, it acquitted him. The justification stated that:

the court had no basis for assuming that the accused acted by going along with the German occupation authorities. For the accused had neither the intention nor was he aware of his act and its consequences. It was an unfortunate coincidence that at just that time when Dudziakowa hit him in the face, a German patrol arrived and intervened in the incident between Dudziakowa and the accused. The defendant, in turn, in a drunken stupor mumbled the words "they are beating me over a Jew", which was enough for the Germans to investigate the matter further and conduct a search.⁷⁹

However, Rena Kardisch, the sister of the murdered boy, was saved. During the criminal proceedings, Paśławska testified that when "two Gestapo men entered the room where they found a six-year-old Jewish boy, Roman Kardiasz [Kardisch]

⁷⁷ According to information in 'The Righteous Among the Nations Database', when a 'Polish neighbour' [probably Garczyński] discovered that the Paśławskis were hiding two children in their house, he tried to blackmail them. The Paśławska's allegedly refused to pay and so he reported them to the German authorities, https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=Pas%C5%82awska%20Rozalia&searchType=righteous_only&language=en&itemId=4035203&ind=0, accessed 30 June 2021.

⁷⁸ AIPN Kr, 502/308, Protocol of taking oral notification of a crime, Cracow, 12 VII 1945, p. 2; *ibid.*, Protocol of the interrogation of Rozalia Paśławska, Cracow, 13 July 1945, p. 6; *ibid.*, Protocol of the interrogation of Tekla Dudziakowa, Cracow, 18 July 1945, 10; *ibid.*, Verdict of Kraków Special Court, Cracow, 14 December 1945, p. 83.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84v.

lying in bed, the girl, who was Roman's sister, was led by my daughter, Helena, out into the field".⁸⁰ In 1979, Rozalia and Bolesław Paślowski were honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.⁸¹

Occasionally, we can read about repressions for providing aid to Jews in the testimonies of direct witnesses of events and people who were accused of crimes against the Jewish population. For example, former Navy Blue Police officer Stanisław Młynarczyk testified:

In 1942, in the autumn season, I, police officer Gordziejczyk and a German policeman [Heinberger] went on a night patrol, and while we were passing through the village of Żdźary by Citizen Szkotak, whose first name I do not remember, the German policeman and officer Gordziejczyk noticed two people of the Jewish faith who were arrested. I observed the house where these people had been hidden, [Heinberger] had these [detained] people under his supervision, while Gordziejczyk went on horseback to the station to get more policemen. After 15 minutes, two Gestapo men, Guzdek and one policeman, whose name I don't remember, came to the place and after questioning the people we detained, they led two more Jewish people out of the house, which was not inhabited [...].⁸²

Młynarczyk further testified that the arrested Jews were taken to the police station and then shot. The suspect omitted in this testimony the fact that their

⁸⁰ Ibid., Protocol of the interrogation of the witness Rozalia Paślowska, Cracow, 13 July 1945, p. 6.

⁸¹ https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=paslawska&searchType=righteous_only&language=en&itemId=4035203&ind=0, accessed 9 August 2021.

⁸² AN Kr, 29/439/1457, Minutes of the interrogation of suspect Stanisław Młynarczyk, Dąbrowa Tarnowska, 22 December 1949, pp. 12–13. Młynarczyk's testimony in the context of the particular stages of the search for hiding Jews, the role of local informers and cooperation with the German military police was also quoted by Jan Grabowski. This testimony has been placed in a footnote. See: J. Grabowski, *Judenjagd. Polowanie na Żydów 1942–1945. Studium dziejów pewnego powiatu*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 106–07. Information about the murder of the Szkotaks has also appeared in studies devoted to people repressed for helping Jews. See: W. Bielawski, *Zbrodnie na Polakach dokonane przez hitlerowców za pomocą udzielaną Żydom*, Warszawa 1987, p. 75; A.K. Musiał, *Lata w ukryciu*, vol. 1, Gliwice 2002, pp. 174, 246; *Relacje o pomocy udzielanej Żydom przez Polaków w latach 1939–1945*, vol. 2: *Dystrykt krakowski Generalnego Gubernatorstwa*, ed. S. Piątkowski, Lublin–Warszawa 2020, p. 504; *Those Who Helped. Polish Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust*, vol. 3, ed. R. Walczak, H. Muszyński, J.P. Śliwczyński, I. Borowicz, T. Prekerowa, Warszawa 1997, p. 121; S. Wroński, M. Zwołak, *Polacy – Żydzi 1939–1945*, Warszawa 1971, pp. 344, 376, 427; W. Zajączkowski, *Martyrs of Charity*, Washington 1988, p. 281.

hosts, Józef and Teresa Szkotak, who were hiding them, were shot during this action for helping these Jewish people. However, this is how their son, Zygmunt, described the murder of his parents:⁸³

My sister Helena told me about the shooting of my parents, that is Józef and Teresa Szkotak and the four Jews who were hiding in my parents' house [...] on December 4th, 1942. In the evening hours, two Navy Blue Police officers and a German gendarme came to my parents' house, after they arrived, they fired several warning shots near the house, and then one of the [Navy Blue Police officers] rode on horseback to Radgoszcz police station, while the German gendarme and one of the [Navy Blue Police officers], whose name my sister did not give me, stayed at the house. After half an hour, a German gendarme named Guzdek and one of the criminal police, as well as several Navy Blue Police officers arrived [...] a Navy Blue Police officer, Stanisław Młynarczyk, abused my mother, he beat her and kicked her with his legs, the above incident was told to me by my brother Henryk Szkotak [...] After shooting my parents, the German gendarmerie and [the] Navy Blue Police officers took the above-mentioned Jews to Radgoszcz police station, where the Jews were shot the next day.⁸⁴

The Szkotaks were probably murdered by one of the gendarmes. When the war ended, Stanisław Młynarczyk was indicted for a number of acts committed during the occupation. One of the charges concerned taking part “in the capture of four Jews and Józef and Teresa Szkotak, with whom the Jews were hiding, all of whom were subsequently shot dead”.⁸⁵ For committing this crime (qualified under Article 1, paragraph 2 of the August Decree), on 13 October 1950, the Court of Appeal in Cracow sentenced Młynarczyk to “fifteen years and loss of public rights and civic honour for a period of ten years and forfeiture of all property of the accused”.⁸⁶ The court emphasised that the accused Młynarczyk showed

⁸³ Zygmunt Szkotak was not a direct witness of these events. At that time he was a forced labourer in Germany. He knew the course of the action from the accounts of his siblings.

⁸⁴ AN Kr, 29/439/1457, Minutes of the hearing of the witness Zygmunt Szkotak, Dąbrowa Tarnowska, 4 March 1950, pp. 105–6.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Sentence of the judgement of Cracow Court of Appeal, Cracow, 13 October 1950, p. 304.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 306v.

“special zeal” in carrying out German orders and that during “his police service he was particularly brutal towards the Polish population”.⁸⁷

The case files of people accused of taking part in roundups for Jews and Poles hiding them in Falkowa also provide us with information on repression used against people hiding Jews. At the end of 1942, a group of men, mainly members of the fire brigade and peasant guard, living in the village of Lipnica Wielka, was organised in order to capture Jewish fugitives who were being hidden by one of the local farmers. According to the testimonies of Stanisław Turski and Antoni Kielbasa, who during the occupation held the posts of village leader and deputy village leader of Lipnica Wielka, they received an order from the gendarme Josef Hinz – who supervised the police station of the so-called Navy Blue Police in Korzenna – to capture the Jews hiding at Jan Gad’s house.⁸⁸ Information about these Jews was meant to have reached the German authorities in the form of an anonymous denunciation. As a result of the operation, Jewish fugitives who were hiding at the farm of Ignacy and Maria Fryd,⁸⁹ as well as at that of Anna and Jan Kurzawa,⁹⁰ who lived in Falkowa, were captured. After some time, Ignacy and Jan were also arrested for providing this aid. It is worth mentioning that in the same year, Waclaw Noworol, a farmer from the village of Lipnica Wielka, was sentenced to death by the Special Civil Court in Cracow for his participation in the action

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 310–11.

⁸⁸ AIPN Kr, Regional Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (hereinafter: OKSZpNP) Kr, S 50/2014/Zn, vol. 1, Copy of Stanisław Turski’s testimony, Tarnów, 13 November 1947, pp. 77–78; *ibid.*, Copy of Antoni Kielbasa’s testimony, Tarnów, 13 April 1948, p. 79. A description of this action can also be found in Dagmara Swałtek-Niewińska’s publication. However, the author does not mention the testimonies of Turski and Kielbasa. We can read in the article that the instigators of the whole action were Kazimierz Bulanda and Waclaw Noworol (Swałtek, ‘Dla płaszczka’, pp. 424–29). Regarding this action, see also: J. Grabowski, ‘Strażacy, wiejska straż nocna i granatowa policja a zagłada Żydów na obszarach wiejskich w dystrykcie krakowskim’, in *Zagłada Żydów na polskiej prowincji*, ed. A. Sitarek, M. Trębacz, E. Wiatr, Łódź 2012, pp. 256–57.

⁸⁹ Mojżesz Baldinger was hiding on their farm (D. Swałtek, ‘Dla płaszczka’, p. 424). The story of his hiding was told by the daughter of Ignacy and Maria Fryd, Aleksandra Górczyńska. <http://pamiecitozasamosc.pl/il/ignacy-fryda-i-jan-kurzawa-ze-wsi-falkowa#UNoZNI1>, accessed 2 April 2021.

⁹⁰ In exchange for a promise of financial reward, they hid an unknown Jewish woman in her thirties from Jedlicze (AIPN Kr, 502/1913, Protocol of the testimony of the witness Anna Kurzawa, Nowy Sącz, 25 February 1945, p. 23; AN Kr, 29/439/1300, vol. 1, Protocol of the interrogation of the witness Anna Kurzawa, Bobowa, 28 May 1946, pp. 14–15).

of capturing Jews and the Poles who were hiding them.⁹¹ After the war, criminal proceedings were initiated against the other peasants who took part in this action.⁹²

Another case in which we can find information about repressions and dangers faced by those helping Jews was that taken against Aniela Piwowarczykowa, accused of indicating to German officers in August 1943 in Tymbark: “Dr Józef Süß as a Jew and Adolf and Bronisław Limanek as hiding a person of Jewish nationality in their home”⁹³ On 12 September 1950, the Court of Appeal in Cracow acquitted the accused, deciding that there was no evidence to indicate that she had made the denunciation. From witnesses’ testimonies we can establish that in 1941 Maria Limanówka’s brother brought a Jew to the house of Adolf and Maria Limanówka in Wilkowisko. It was probably Dr. Süß who had false documents in the name of Józef Kania.⁹⁴ In August 1943, the German gendarmerie in Limanowa ordered the Navy Blue Police stations in Tymbark and Dobra to have the officers serving there prepare to go into the field. The German gendarmerie went to Wilkowisko together with the police officers. There, along with the village leader, they first arrived at Kaleta’s house, where they searched for his wife (a Christian convert). Having failed to find her, they went to the Limanówkas’ house.⁹⁵ There, the officers conducted a search, as a result of which Adolf and Bronisław Limanówka, as well as the Jew who was living with them, were detained. All three were taken to Limanowa. It was probably there that Süß hanged himself.⁹⁶ Adolf recalled

⁹¹ See: D. Libionka, ‘ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu RP wobec eksterminacji Żydów polskich’, in *Polacy i Żydzi*, 123.

⁹² On the course of capturing the Jews and the repressions against those who helped them, see: AIPN Kr, 502/1913, [Files on the case against: Franciszek Głąb, Kazimierz Bulanda, accused of participating in roundups of Jews and hiding Poles in Lipnica Wielka and Falkowa, and mistreating the captives, i.e. acts under Article 1 § 1 b of the decree of 31 August 1944]; AN Kr, 29/439/1249, [Files in criminal case: Józef Janis, Józef Wrona, Jan Bulanda zam. Lipnica Wielka, accused under art. 1 pt. 1 of the Decree of 31 August 1944 (collaboration with the occupant, rendition of persons of Jewish nationality)]; AN Kr, 29/439/1300, [Files in criminal case: Melchior Łatka, Paweł Zieleń, Andrzej Wrona, Jan Bulanda, Leon Janis residing in Lipnica Wielka, accused under art. 1 pt. 2 of the decree of 31 August 1944 (co-operation with the occupant, capture of persons of Jewish nationality)].

⁹³ AN Kr, 29/439/1444, Act of indictment against Aniela Piwowarczykowa, Nowy Sącz, 21 April 1950, [unpaged].

⁹⁴ From the testimony of Adolf Limanówka we know that the Jew who lived with them worked occasionally in a fruit-processing factory in Tymbark “usually one or two days a week” (ibid., Minutes of the main hearing before Kraków Court of Appeal, Cracow, 12 September 1950, [p. 9]).

⁹⁵ Ibid., Judgement of Cracow Court of Appeal in Cracow, 12 September 1950, [unpaged].

⁹⁶ Ibid., Minutes of the main hearing before Cracow Court of Appeal, Cracow, 12 September 1950, [pp. 9–11].

that he was beaten during interrogation: “I was interrogated as to whether I had held Kaletowa the convert, and when I denied it, I was beaten and tortured”.⁹⁷ After some time, Adolf and Bronisław were taken away to a camp.⁹⁸

Conclusions

In conclusion to the analysis conducted above, it should be said that in the group of those recorded as having been provided with aid, about 40 per cent were Jews unknown by name. The cases studied have confirmed that sometimes one Jew, in order to survive, had to use the help of several or a dozen people, while sometimes one person helped many Jews. According to the author's calculations (made on the basis of references to aid appearing in the analysed materials), the recorded acts of aid involved about 600 people. It is difficult to say how many of them survived. We have information on the fate of 158 people (26 per cent), 53 of whom survived until the end of the occupation. On this basis it is impossible draw conclusions regarding the effectiveness of activities providing such aid. The data presented here may confirm the thesis that the majority of those seeking shelter did not survive the occupation, and that to save does not mean to rescue.⁹⁹ It should be emphasised that these data were compiled by analysing the files of post-war criminal proceedings whose aim was to detect and judge people accused of committing crimes against Jews, where the subject of providing aid itself was a side issue. Despite this, the analysed materials are a very useful source for research on the issue of individual help given in the countryside, especially because in rural areas people helping Jews – most often peasants, but also representatives of other social strata, e.g. landowners – left very few traces of their activity. These testimonies are all the more important because they were given relatively soon after the crimes described in the decree had been committed, at a time when many direct witnesses of these tragic events were

⁹⁷ Ibid., [p. 11].

⁹⁸ They were probably sent to KL Sachsenhausen (<https://www.straty.pl/pl/szukaj>, accessed 5 August 2021); AIPN Kr, 488/1, File of deceased prisoners made on the basis of the “Main Prisoners’ Books” of the prisons in Cracow, Montelupich Street and Senacka Street, as well as the prison in Nowy Wiśnicz and the work centre in Brzeszcze from 1945 until 1954.

⁹⁹ Urynowicz, ‘Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc’, p. 246.

still alive.¹⁰⁰ When analysing the references to providing aid that appear in this documentation, it is important to bear in mind the procedural nature and purpose of these materials. For example, during the trial, defendants accused of crimes against Jews tried to demonstrate their positive attitude towards the persecuted Jewish population, as in the case of a conviction, the jury could take this into account and apply extraordinary leniency to them when imposing the sentence (Article 5 of the August Decree).¹⁰¹ For this reason, many of these records of aid require critical evaluation and verification based on other types of sources. In the case files, we find both detailed and well-documented cases of activities providing aid (especially the testimonies of survivors), as well as brief mentions of the subject and statements by defendants that are difficult to verify.

The archives studied do not show the scale of assistance given to Jews. It is also very difficult to properly assess the actions taken on behalf of the Jewish population, including the motivation behind them or the circumstances of the events that took place. Nevertheless, the results of the research are valuable because, on the one hand, they concern people and events about which no information can be found in other sources, while, on the other hand, supplementing our knowledge about cases described in the subject literature. Thus, this article constitutes a contribution to further research on the comprehensive study of the issue of aid provided to Jews in the Cracow voivodeship during the Second World War.

¹⁰⁰ See: R. Ignatiew, 'Praktyka śledztw OKŚZPNP w Białymstoku prowadzonych w sprawie zbrodni nazistowskich popełnionych na obywatelach polskich narodowości żydowskiej', in *Zbrodnie przeszłości. Opracowania i materiały prokuratorów IPN*, vol. 3: *Nazizm*, ed. R. Ignatiew, A. Kura, Warszawa 2009, pp. 52.

¹⁰¹ Article 5 § 1 of the August Decree stated that acting or failing to act under the influence of a threat, order or injunction did not exempt one from criminal responsibility. However, § 2 stated that in this case the court could apply an extraordinary mitigation of punishment due to the person of the perpetrator or the circumstances of the act. In 1948, § 3 was added to Article 5, which provided that the provisions contained in § 2 also applied if there were special mitigating circumstances in the case referred to in Article 1(2). For more on the line of defence of persons accused of committing crimes against the Jewish population during the Second World War, see Gieron, *Półmrok*, pp. 215–45.

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SUMMARY

The aim of this article was to present the significance of criminal proceedings files initiated on the basis of the Lublin Committee decree of 31 August 1944 (the so-called 'Augustówka' or August Decrees) in the post-war Cracow voivodeship as a source for research on aid provided to the Jewish population during the period of the German occupation of Poland. The materials subject to analysis have so far been widely used mainly in relation to research on negative behaviours of the Polish population during the German occupation. The work carried out here has shown that these files are also a useful source for research into the issue of aid. The information they contain is all the more important because the testimonies were given relatively soon after the crimes described in the decree had been committed, when many direct witnesses of these dramatic events were still alive. In some case files we find both detailed and well-documented instances of activities providing aid (especially the testimonies of survivors), as well as brief mentions of the subject and statements by defendants that are difficult to verify. For this reason, many records concerning aid need to be critically evaluated and verified based on other types of sources.

KEYWORDS

'August decrees' • providing aid to Jews • Holocaust
• General Government

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THE WAR FOR THE STAGE. THE FATE OF THE JEWISH THEATRE IN WROCŁAW, 1949–68

The Zionists proclaimed that it was wrong to raise money to build a theatre while Jewish blood was being spilt in Palestine. [...] In whispered propaganda it was proclaimed that every penny spent on the theatre was a penny thrown away, because there would be no Jews in Poland anyway, and the theatre would be nationalised, and the Jews would not get anything from it.¹

One can start with the undeniable statement that the building – which had been rebuilt by Jews, with the support (at least initially and officially) from the party – from 1947 to May 1968, in most documents produced by the party (PPR/PZPR²), the local administration (MRN³), by the local social organisation (WKŻ/TSKŻ⁴) and the political police

¹ Archiwum Akt Nowych, Spuścizna Szymona Zachariasza (Central Archives of Modern Records, Legacy of Szymon Zachariasz; hereinafter: AAN, SSZ), 476/26, Report on the activity of the PPR Faction at the CKŻP in Wrocław for the period from 1 May 1948 to 15 November 1948, p. 259.

² *Polska Partia Robotnicza* (the Polish Workers' Party; hereinafter: PPR), from 1948 *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* (the Polish United Workers' Party; hereinafter: PZPR).

³ *Miejska rada narodowa* (the Municipal National Council, an administrative organ of the Communist Party; hereinafter: MRN)

⁴ *Wojewódzki Komitet Żydowski* (Provincial Jewish Committee; hereinafter: WKŻ), from 1950 *Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów* (the Social-Cultural Society for Jews; hereinafter: TSKŻ).

(UBP/SB⁵), functioned as the Estera Rachela Kamińska Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre (*Dolnośląski Teatr Żydowski im. Estery Racheli Kamińskiej*), which was renamed the Esther Rachela Kamińska House of Culture in the 1950s.

One can also treat its story as a play in three acts. Both the performance as a whole and each of the acts took place in difficult conditions. The background was the then current needs of various social groups, and the political interests of the Polish and Jewish parties,⁶ the emotions of ethnic groups and the desires of the minorities,

⁵ *Urzędy Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego* (Offices of Public Security; hereinafter: UBP), replaced in 1954 by the *Slużba Bezpieczeństwa* (the Security Service; hereinafter: SB), the 'secret police' of the Polish Communist state, operated 1956–90.

⁶ The most important Jewish institution, operating in the years 1945–50, was the Central Committee of Jews in Poland and its voivodeship, poviats and city committees. Their political face was determined by the number of Jewish members in the political parties which composed it. Almost all the political parties contained on the committees were continuations of those which had operated in the interwar period; the PPR faction was an exception. The authorities of the committees were created on the basis of the so-called party key. According to this principle, the most numerous were the representatives of the PPR faction (6 members), followed by *Ikhud* (4), the Bund (4), *Poalei Siyon-Prawica* (3), *Poalei Siyon-Lewica* (3), and *Ha-shomer Ha-tzair* (1). The main role, according to the assumptions of the PPR group, was to be played by its representatives acting in committees as the Faction of the Polish Workers' Party. The Polish Communists were favourable to the activities of Jewish organisations, most likely counting on their support. By accepting the operation of so many parties in such a small group, they saw no threat to their political interests. Apart from that section of the political scene which was officially controlled by the Communists, the Zionist movement developed from below, and in a very dynamic manner. The number of supporters of Zionist ideas was proportional to the number of members of these parties. Over time, their ranks shrank systematically; not, however, as the result of massive Communist propaganda calling on them to join the PPR, but rather because of the mass emigration of Jews. In contrast to the Zionists, the activities of the PPR neither increased the popularity of this party nor made the faction the only one with the exclusive right to represent the interests of the Jewish population. The maintenance of the Jewish community in Poland was of the greatest importance to the Communists from the PPR faction. On the one hand, the basis for this group's views was the planned political transformation, and on the other, their vision for the future of Jews in Poland, which was intended to be a counterweight to the manifestoes of the Zionist parties. The activities of the PPR faction were guided by very practical concerns, if only because its existence within the structures of the Polish Workers' Party was dependent on the presence of Jews in Poland. Hence, its efforts to rebuild the community's life went hand in hand with the creation of cultural, educational, social and economic institutions. The faction tried to oppose the influence of the Zionists, and in doing so formed the 'backbone' of the most important Jewish institution in post-war Poland – the CKŻP. The Jewish parties – the Zionists and the Bund – regardless of their political differences, both supported the systemic changes in post-war Poland, albeit to some extent for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons. This was probably the only common point among the Jewish organisations, because apart from their positive attitude to the systemic transformations, they were more divided than united – above all, regarding their views on the future of the Jews. The Zionists' political programmes spoke clearly of the need to build a Jewish state in Palestine, whereas the faction's Communists and the Bund's socialists saw a need to rebuild the Jewish diaspora in Poland after the Holocaust. For more, see B. Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku 1945–1950*, Wrocław 2000; A. Grabski, *Działalność komunistów wśród Żydów w Polsce 1944–1949*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 45, 60, 310; A. Cała, H. Węgrzynek, G. Zalewska, *Historia i kultura Żydów polskich. Słownik*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 42–44; J. Adelson, 'W Polsce zwanej ludową', in *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce*, ed. J. Tomaszewski, Warszawa 1993, pp. 433–50.

all with universal cultural ideas embedded in them. The performance had many directors on both Jewish and Polish sides, and also a particular character, because its protagonist was the building of a Jewish theatre company.

Act One

On 17 July 1945, Dzierżoniów, Lower Silesia, played host to a Conference of Jewish Committees which had been established in these areas just after the end of the war. It was attended by representatives of the Jewish communities of Dzierżoniów, Bielawa, Pieszcyce, Ludwikowice Kłodzkie, Wałbrzych and Głuszyca.⁷ At that time, a Provincial Jewish Committee was established. With the support of the Ministry of Public Administration in mind, a draft petition was prepared, in which it was postulated that 20,000 surviving Polish Jews should be resettled in Lower Silesia. The petition contained a justification for the creation of a new Jewish settlement in these areas:

The Jews, who – in a well-known, tragic and bestial way – have been deprived of their loved ones, want to forget about the tragedy they have experienced and start a new, creative life in an environment of people who are mutually friendly and able to understand each other [...]. It is not surprising, then, that the Jews are driven to form homogeneous clusters with the same spiritual interests. The transfer of Jews, who have been deprived of the chance to do productive work in other districts, to a centre offering them material and cultural survival, is an imperative of the well-understood interests of the nation and of humanity.⁸

A representative of the Red Army, Cpt. Borosov, said at the time: “You are a strange people, you Jews. I am one of those who liberated Jews from the camps. You were sick, [...] hungry, almost dead, and here you are sitting here today at this conference with beaming eyes, completely changed, talking about schools, theatre, culture. [...] A strange nation. Such a nation will never be destroyed”⁹

⁷ Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; hereinafter: AŻIH), Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce (the Central Committee of Jews in Poland; hereinafter: CKŻP), Department of Productivity, 11, Protocol of the Congress of Delegates of the Jewish Committees of Lower Silesia, 17 July 1945, unpaginated.

⁸ Ibid., Memorial on the settlement of Jews in Lower Silesia, 23 June 1945, unpaginated.

⁹ J. Egit, *Tsu a naye lebn*, Wrocław 1947, p. 15 (quoted in Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska*, p. 30).

Cultural activities were always of great importance to the Jewish people. Their rich pre-war traditions influenced the creation of Jewish life after the war. The subject of a broadly understood culture was an element that appeared many times during the meetings of Jewish committees in Lower Silesia. In stormy discussions, the idea of establishing a Jewish theatre was frequently raised.¹⁰ After the Second World War, Lower Silesia became the cradle of this idea to some extent. The first initiatives were born in these lands. As early as mid-1945, the first theatre troupe was established in Dzierżoniów; a few months later, twelve Jewish actors from this centre asked the Central Committee of Jews in Poland for financial support for their initiative: the creation of a permanent Jewish theatre.¹¹ Soon after that, Jews in Wrocław started their theatre activity.¹² In mid-1946, during the Congress of Jewish Stage Artists in Łódź, the Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre (*Dolnośląski Teatr Żydowski* [DTŻ], *Nidershlezier Yidisher Teater*) was established. The Jewish Theatre in Łódź was also established at the same congress.¹³

The DTŻ tried to reach all the places in Lower Silesia with Jewish populations. Originally, in the years 1946–48, the theatrical repertoire, the ensemble's plans and the actors' ambitions could only be realised thanks to use of trucks belonging

¹⁰ Selected literature and studies devoted to Jewish culture in post-war Poland, with particular emphasis on Lower Silesia: A. Kałużna, 'Teatr żydowski na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1945–1968', doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Prof. Marcin Wodziński, Wrocław 2015 (I would like to thank Ms. Kałużna for sharing her work, and for her valuable suggestions regarding the creation and operation of the Jewish theatre in Lower Silesia); K. Pudło, *Życie kulturalne dolnośląskiego skupiska żydowskiego (1945–1985)*, *Kultura Dolnośląska* 1985, no. 3/4; *Teatr żydowski w Polsce: materiały z międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej*, Warszawa, 18–21 października 1993, ed. A. Kuligowska-Korzeniewska, M. Leyko, Łódź 1998; Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska*, pp. 76–8, 117–21, 187–89; M. Szydysz, *Spółeczność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku w świetle działalności Towarzystwa Społeczno-Kulturalnego Żydów w Polsce w latach 1950–1989*, Warszawa 2019. For more about Jewish culture in post-war Poland, see G. Berendt, *Życie żydowskie w Polsce w latach 1950–1956*, Gdańsk 2006, pp. 214–55; Adelson, 'W Polsce zwanej ludową'; Cała, Węgrzynek, Zalewska, *Historia i kultura Żydów polskich*; J. Nalewajko-Kulikow, M. Ruta, 'Kultura jidysz po II wojnie światowej', in *Następstwa zagłady Żydów. Polska 1945–2010*, ed. F. Tych, M. Adamczyk-Garbowska, Lublin 2011, pp. 283–303; R. Piątkowska, 'Żydowskie życie artystyczne po Zagładzie', in *Następstwa zagłady Żydów*, pp. 339–58; J. Tyszkiewicz, 'Lata 1949–1955. Polityka władz wobec mniejszości narodowych', in *Dolny Śląsk. Monografia historyczna*, ed. W. Wrzesiński, Wrocław 2006; L. Ziątkowski, *Dzieje Żydów we Wrocławiu*, Wrocław 2000.

¹¹ AŻIH, Presidium of CKŻP, 303/I/7, Minutes of the 49th session of the CKŻP Plenum held on 27 December 1945, p. 190.

¹² S. Bronsztejn, *Z dziejów ludności żydowskiej na Dolnym Śląsku po II wojnie światowej*, Wrocław 1993, p. 76.

¹³ A. Kałużna, 'Teatr żydowski na Dolnym Śląsku', <http://dolnoslaskosc.pl/teatr-zydowski-na-dolnym-slasku,316.html>, accessed 11 April 2018.

to the WKŻ, which were not suitable for such purposes. The *Centrala Spółdzielni Wytwórczych 'Solidarność'*¹⁴ came forward to confront these problems, funding a bus for the DTŻ which was specially adapted to its needs.¹⁵ However, these were only temporary attempts to solve the difficulties that the theatre company had to deal with: the lack of a permanent seat in the form of a theatre building. In addition, there was a shortage of housing for actors. That is probably why Jakub Egit, chairman of the Provincial Jewish Committee in Wrocław,¹⁶ who was aware that half-measures could not resolve the existing problems, demanded in the pages of *Nowe Życie* at the beginning of 1947: "The Jewish Theatre in Lower Silesia must be strengthened. A Jewish theatre studio must absolutely be created".¹⁷ Seeking support, the Wrocław branch of the WKŻ described the aim of building the theatre in a letter to the CKŻP¹⁸ of July 1947: "Apart from the theatre hall, this building will also house rooms intended for a studio for sculptors and artists, painters, a rehearsal room for artists and others. In a word, the building in question will host all cultural associations, such as writers, artists, painters, etc. The theatre hall will also be adapted to cinema screenings".¹⁹

It was during this period that the WKŻ made efforts to obtain the use of a building in which the team of the Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre could operate and fulfil its mission. Initially these measures were ineffective, because due to the destruction that had affected Wrocław – a city that was slowly becoming the centre of the Jewish population in Lower Silesia – the authorities were unwilling to assign undamaged buildings. That is probably why, when the WKŻ asked the Wrocław Municipal National Council in the first half of 1947 for the use of a property located at 28 Świdnicka Street, the council considered this request

¹⁴ The 'Solidarity' Manufacturing Cooperatives Head Office, a Communist-founded association of Jewish organisations operating between 1946 and 1949, intended to counteract negative stereotypes of Jews in Poland.

¹⁵ Kałużna, 'Teatr żydowski', pp. 80–81.

¹⁶ Until mid-1946, when the resettlement of the German population began (including German citizens of Jewish nationality), the WKŻ had its seat in Dzierżoniów.

¹⁷ J. Egit, *O nową kulturę żydowską*, *Nowe Życie* 1947, no. 10, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce* (Central Committee of Jews in Poland), a body giving political representation to Jews in Poland, operated 1944–50.

¹⁹ AŻIH, General correspondence (outgoing and incoming) from WKŻ in Wrocław (July–October 1947), 303/I/122, Letter from the WKŻ in Wrocław to the CKŻP in Warsaw, 31 July 1947, pp. 160–61.

justified and assigned them the site, because the building of the former German *Kammer Lichtspiele* cinema located there was in ruins.

Other factors also had a significant impact on the WKŻ/DTŻ's aspirations. Perhaps the WKŻ made the effort to get this building in the belief that lifting it from the ruins would be a kind of psychotherapy, a remedy for trauma after the Holocaust, while at the same time serving as an element uniting the Jewish community in Lower Silesia. It would also become a symbol of the reconstruction of the Jewish nation. Jakub Egit, the WKŻ's chairman, justified the existence of the theatre during a meeting: "The majority of Polish Jewry is in Lower Silesia, most of the Jewish institutions are located there. Jews work together with Poles in mines, factories and state institutions. It is imperative that the word of our nation, the word of Jewish culture, reaches them. Who better than the theatre can fulfil this?"²⁰ The words about the most important tasks facing the Wrocław branch of the PPR in the field of cultural life also alluded to this. It was considered necessary to create "a high-level Jewish dramatic theatre in the near future".²¹ This probably, at least to some extent, explains the great activity of the PPR's Wrocław branch in its efforts to construct a theatre building in the capital of Lower Silesia. This necessity was also to be justified by economic reasons. It was assessed that the costs of the DTŻ's activities carried out so far (endless travels and performances, renting space, maintaining the team supporting the theatre company) were too high, and the benefits would primarily, if not exclusively, be of a spiritual dimension.

Renovation and construction work was scheduled to begin almost immediately after the rights to the plot in the very centre of Wrocław were obtained, in September 1947. Work was expected to be finished by December of that year. However, the WKŻ's ambitious plans came into conflict with the post-war realities: legal, organisational and financial problems, as well as the shortage of building materials (at that time not only criminal looters, but also the state administration treated Lower Silesia – a region whose Polishness could not be guaranteed – as an excellent

²⁰ AŻIH, CKŻP, 61, Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of WKŻ in Wrocław, 1 February 1947, unpagged.

²¹ AAN, SSZ, 476/22, Information on the situation of the Jewish population in Poland and the activities of the Polish Workers' Party, 1947, p. 10.

repository of materials for the reconstruction of the capital). This is evidenced by the 'theatrical' documentation from that period.

The cost estimate prepared for the renovation and construction provided for their completion and the furnishing of the theatre building to the amount of around 15 million zloty. The Lower Silesian WKŻ was to some extent prepared for such expenses. In the summer of 1947, it was reported in a letter to the CKŻP that the WKŻ had about 20 per cent of the financial resources provided for in the estimated expenses at its disposal. It asked the Central Committee for support, arguing that the help was necessary to "carry out such important and necessary work for our society as obtaining the theatre building".²² So much for the official version (which was more in line with the hopes than the actual capabilities of the WKŻ). Very quickly, as soon as the renovation works started, it appeared that there was not enough money. They needed to be very determined to complete the project, since Jakub Egit allowed himself to manage the activities 'manually', including direct interference in financial matters: money which the CKŻP had granted to help orphaned children was instead allocated – without the knowledge or consent of the headquarters – to the needs of the theatre.²³ This revealed the organisational weakness of the CKŻP/WKŻ, which was the most important Jewish institution in Poland. The money was not returned to the orphans, and Egit did not suffer any consequences, but the problem remained. The confrontation of the plans with the realities forced the Jewish organisations to alter the former.

The decision-making power was in Warsaw. During a single CKŻP meeting – in mid-1948, a time when the issue of the theatre building was left open – many of the participants were inclined to look for a different solution to their troubles. Dawid Sfar²⁴ proposed abandoning the construction works altogether, explaining that from the economic point of view "instead of a large theatre building" it would

²² AŻIH, General correspondence (outgoing and incoming) from WKŻ in Wrocław (July–October 1947), 303/I/122, Letter of the WKŻ in Wrocław to the CKŻP in Warsaw, 31 July 1947, pp. 160–61.

²³ Kałużna, 'Teatr żydowski', p. 93.

²⁴ Dawid Sfar (1903–81), poet, writer and critic writing in Yiddish, publisher, translator. Activist in various left-wing parties: the KPP, the PPR (PPR faction), the PZPR. During the Second World War, he stayed in the USSR, where he served as secretary of the Organising Committee of Polish Jews in the USSR. In 1946 he returned to Poland. Until 1950, he was a member of the CKŻP and chairman of the Jewish Society of Culture and Art. In 1950–56 he was a member of the TSKŻ's Board of Directors. After 1956, he was involved in cultural activities. In 1969, he emigrated to Israel (http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Sfar_Dawid, accessed 13 October 2018).

more profitable to use “a series of small, well-equipped theatre buildings in Lower Silesia that could be rented”.²⁵ Others (Grzegorz [Hersz] Smolar²⁶ and Anatol Wertheim²⁷) argued that the best solution for the needs of actors would be to create a Cooperative ‘Jewish Theatre’, which, moreover, would function on the same basis as before, that is as a travelling theatre. Salo Fiszgrund²⁸ thought that the best alternative was to establish a Society of Friends of the Jewish Theatre, which would financially support the traveling theatre. Ida Kamińska’s view was different;²⁹ she consistently held the position that a theatre company must have its own building.³⁰

Meanwhile, the WKŻ found another solution, namely a collection campaign initiated at the beginning of 1948 by the local PPR, but conducted under the banner of the WKŻ. At first, it did not bring the expected results. A second approach to the same activities, with more *élan* and conducted on a larger scale, took place in the second half of the year.³¹ Jewish Communists organised “dozens of meetings,

²⁵ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium of the CKŻP (7 April-29 May 1948), 303/I/27, Minutes of the Presidium’s session with the Theatre Council and representatives of the Union of Jewish Stage Artists, 10 May 1948, p. 104.

²⁶ Grzegorz (Hersz) Smolar (1905–93), journalist, writer, Communist activist. During the Second World War, he took part in the resistance movement in the German-occupied territories. In 1946 he returned to Poland. In the years 1946–50, on behalf of the Polish United Workers’ Party faction (then the PZPR group), he was the head of the Culture and Propaganda Department at the CKŻP and a member of the Presidium of the CKŻP. Chairman of the TSKŻ (1950–62), editor-in-chief of *Folks Shtime* (1950–67). In 1971, he emigrated to France, and from there to Israel ([http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Smolar_Grzegorz_\[Hersz_Hirsz\]](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Smolar_Grzegorz_[Hersz_Hirsz]), accessed 13 October 2018).

²⁷ Anatol Wertheim (1910–96), lawyer, Communist and social activist. He fought as a partisan during the war. After the war, secretary of the WKŻ in Łódź, member of the CKŻP, activist of the PPR/PZPR. From 1960 in Israel, from 1979 in Canada (Grabski, *Działalność komunistów*, p. 108; see also <https://www.geni.com/people/Anatol-Wertheim/6000000003014867751>, accessed 14 October 2018).

²⁸ Solo Fiszgrund (1893–1971), politician, activist in the Bund, then the PZPR; during the Second World War, he was a participant in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Warsaw Rising. After the war, a notable activist, first in the CKŻP and then the TSKŻ. After 1968, he emigrated to Israel (<https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/biogramy/2591-fiszgrund-salo>, accessed 14 October 2018).

²⁹ Ida Kamińska (1899–1980), actress and theatre director. During the Second World War, she was in the USSR. After returning to Poland in 1947, she worked in Jewish theatres in Łódź and Wrocław. From 1955, she headed the State Jewish Theatre in Warsaw. She appeared in several films; in 1967, she was nominated for the Oscar Award for best actress in a leading role in the Czechoslovak film *The Shop on Main Street*. In 1968, after the anti-Jewish campaign, she emigrated to the US (http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Kaminska_Ida, accessed 14 October 2018).

³⁰ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium of the CKŻP (7 April – 29 May 1948), 303/I/27, Minutes of the Presidium session with the Theatre Council and representatives of the Union of Jewish Stage Artists, 10 May 1948, pp. 103, 105.

³¹ ‘Akcja zbiorkowa na budowę gmachu teatru żydowskiego’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 3 September 1948, no. 73/488, p. 4; see also ‘Osiągnięcia ludności żydowskiej na Dolnym Śląsku’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 13 July 1948, no. 58/433, p. 1.

rallies, councils, conferences, press propaganda, individual actions (visiting apartments), posters³²,³² under the influence of the changes taking place throughout the country and events on the international arena; this meant that these actions had a primarily political dimension, while culture was – unofficially, of course – treated as a secondary thing.³³ The image of a Jewish society united by the ‘theatrical’ idea was brought to function in public circulation. The WKŻ’s announcement was: “We have decided to start a broad fundraising campaign. We are convinced that no one will shirk the noble duty of enabling the normal development of our cultural life, by creating a Jewish Community Centre in Lower Silesia.”³⁴

For outsiders, such a statement could indeed appear as proof of the internal unity of the Jewish community. How confusing these appearances could be is indicated by documents produced by the Wrocław PPR for the internal circulation

³² AAN, SSZ, 476/21, Report from the PZPR group of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, 25 April 1949, p. 74.

³³ The years 1947–49 were a period of changes taking place in the country (elections to the Sejm in 1947, ‘unification’ of the party) and important events on the international arena (including the UN declaration, and then the establishment of the state of Israel). The activity of the Jewish political parties was dependent on the Polish Workers’ Party, which resulted in the changes in the balance of political forces taking place in 1947–49. The following groups were competing on the national stage: the PPR, the PPS and the PSL. On the Jewish scene, the number of political parties (including the Bund, Ikhud, Poalei Siyon -*Lewica*, Poalei Siyon-*Prawica*, *Hitakhdut*, *Ha-shomer Ha-tzair*, *Mizrachi*) was disproportionately large in relation to the small number of Jews, especially after the mass emigration of Jews from the second half of 1946 to January 1947. In 1947, activists from the PPR Faction simulated cooperation with other Jewish groups, although in reality they considered the existence of so many Jewish parties an anomaly. They explained that neither the social structure nor the economic state of affairs in the country provided a basis for this. The priority in the faction’s activities was to be the changes in the state, the transition from temporary and makeshift arrangements to the restructuring of the committees. Although officially there was talk of cooperation with the Zionists, in practice the Communists’ overriding goal was to take full power over the committees, and thus bring the entire Jewish society under their control (for more, see AAN, SSZ, 476/22, Information on the Jewish situation in Poland and the activities of PPR, pp. 8–9). All the Zionist parties declared their support for the political changes in Poland. This was evidenced by their participation in the referendum, and in the elections to the Sejm. This activity did not pose an obstacle to them carrying out their mission, namely preparing Jews for emigration and building the state of Israel. Although Jewish committees and political parties operated until 1950, the actual end of this apparent autonomy came at the end of 1948. The full subordination and subsequent liquidation of the Jewish institutions was only a consequence of the program implemented by the PPR, which made the Polish state more similar to the USSR (for more, see the State Archives in Wrocław [hereinafter: AP Wr], KW PPR, 48, Resolution of the National Meeting of PPR activists among the working Jewish population, pp. 114–23; Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska*, pp. 170–82).

³⁴ The National Library, Department of Documents on Social Life, Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre, Appeal of the Building Committee (Kałużna, ‘Teatr żydowski’, p. 94).

of the party. Popularity – as the Communists reported – would come from their activities among “workers, poor craftsmen and partly small merchants”.³⁵ On the opposite side were ‘them’ – their alleged ‘opponents’ and ‘enemies’. So they went on to write: “The action to build the theatre revealed the hostile class face of Jewish merchants and factory owners”.³⁶ In another report, they not only admitted that such actions “were purely political class actions”, but also singled out those who did not contribute to them. They pointed to the enemy – the Zionist movement – stressing that “there is class struggle within the Jewish community”.³⁷ This is what the words quoted in the introduction allude to.

Jewish Communists had to work hard to sustain this narrative. The ‘theatrical action’ coincided with fundraising for ‘fighting Palestine’.³⁸ In this way, it can be treated as another chapter in the political struggle for Jewish souls. This conflict saw

³⁵ AAN, SSZ, 476/26, Report on the activities of the Polish Workers’ Party Faction at the CKŻP in Wrocław for the period from 1 May 1948 to 15 November 1948, pp. 258–59.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

³⁷ AAN, SSZ, 476/21, Information from the PZPR group of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, 25 April 1949, p. 74.

³⁸ At the turn of 1948, all Jewish parties organised demonstrations by Jews in support of the creation of the state of Israel. The ‘Fund for Aid to Fighting Palestine’ (*Giyus*), conducted under the aegis of the CKŻP, was particularly wide-ranging. The CKŻP’s chairman, Dr. Adolf Berman, emphasised the importance of these activities: “The action to help Palestine will be a political test for the CKŻP, and we must not compromise ourselves”. Jews were called upon to help the Yishuv, and public collections were organised. There were some misunderstandings in Lower Silesia. Stefan Grajek, who was present at a meeting of the WKŻ in Wrocław, stated that instead of preparing action for Fighting Palestine, the local committee collected money for the Jewish theatre in Wrocław. Szymon Zachariasz then stated that the Wrocław JCC should “immediately withdraw from its false position on the postponement of action in favour of Fighting Palestine. The month from 15 February to 15 March is being devoted to this action throughout the country, and Lower Silesia cannot be an exception”. (AŻIH, CKŻP, 303/IX, Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 16 February 1948, p. 108; see also AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium of CKŻP, 5 January – 31 March 1948, 303/I/26, Minutes of the 13th session of the Presidium of 9 February 1948, p. 108; ‘Akcja pomocy walczącej Palestynie na Dolnym Śląsku’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 11 March 1948, no. 25/401, p. 2). Circumstances forced the PPR faction to both support the *Giyus* action and actively participate in it (L. Głuchowski, A. Polonsky, ‘Forty Years After’, *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 1968, vol. 21 (after *Plotkies* 2008, no. 38); J. Orlicki, *Szkice z dziejów stosunków polsko-żydowskich. 1918–1949*, Szczecin 1983, p. 203). The reason for this was the awareness that this action was universal, and that most Jews considered it a duty to their people. Reluctance or passivity threatened the faction’s activists with a loss of influence in the Jewish community and marginalisation from it. In a report from that period, Jewish Communists proudly wrote: “Our solidarity with anti-imperialist Palestine was expressed not only in declarations at rallies. [...] It found its expression in the action for Fighting Palestine. At all workplaces, the PPR workers were the first to take up the collection campaign and duly managed it”. (AAN, SSN, 26/476, Report on the activities of the PPR faction at the CKŻP for the period 1 October 1947 – 1 May 1948, p. 224).

a clash between the concepts of the Jewish Communists on one side and the Zionists on the other. They concerned a fundamental issue: whether the future of the Jewish population was to be built in Poland or in the Middle East (Palestine/Israel). For the Jewish Communists it was also a test of strength: they wanted to confirm their influence and popularity in the Jewish community, while at the same time strengthening their credibility in the eyes of the Polish Communists, because they were supposed to act as a 'conveyor belt' linking the Jewish population with the new, Polish, Communist reality.

Almost a year after the start of renovation and construction work, and after a series of meetings organised throughout Lower Silesia, Aleksander Wulfowicz³⁹ wrote to Szymon Zachariasz:⁴⁰ "We believe that we will complete the campaign with full success, that the sum of 15 million złoty will be exceeded".⁴¹ A few months later it was already a *fait accompli*. At a meeting of the PZPR unit⁴² at the WKŻ in Wrocław, Szymon Intrator⁴³ proudly reported that he had managed to collect a total of 16 million zloty, up to a third of which had come from Wrocław itself.⁴⁴

³⁹ Aleksander Wulfowicz, activist of the PPR faction, member of the Polish United Workers' Party, in 1946–50 member of the WKŻ in Wrocław, from 1950 the ZG TSKŻ in Warsaw, from 1953 an instructor of the ZG TSKŻ in Lower Silesia. In the 1950s, he was a councillor in the Provincial National Council (Berendt, *Życie żydowskie w Polsce*, pp. 121, 144, 146; also Szydzisz, *Spółeczność żydowska*, pp. 66, 96).

⁴⁰ Szymon Zachariasz (1900–1970), Communist activist, member of the KPP, PPR and PZPR. During the Second World War in the USSR. After returning to Poland in 1945, he became a representative of the PPR faction in the Presidium of the CKŻP, while at the same time being an employee of the Organisational Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (thereafter the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party) and the chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Solidarity Cooperative Headquarters. In 1950–6 he was employed in the Department of Party History; from 1956 he was a researcher and member of the Management Board of the Jewish Historical Institute. From 1964, a member of the Central Party Control Committee ([http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Zachariasz_Szymon_\(Noach\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Zachariasz_Szymon_(Noach)), accessed 15 October 2018).

⁴¹ AAN, SSZ, 476/22, Wulfowicz's letter to Zachariasz, 14 July 1948, p. 107.

⁴² As a result of the unification and centralisation of political and social movements in Poland (see the unification of the Polish Workers' Party and the Polish Socialist Party), the former Jewish Faction of the Polish Workers' Party, which had been associated with the PPR and operated within the structures of the CKŻP and its subordinate Jewish committees, began to function in January 1949 as the PZPR group at the CKŻP (WKŻ and KŻ).

⁴³ Szymon Intrator, an activist of the PPR faction/PZPR group, in 1946–50 was at the WKŻ in Wrocław; he represented the CKŻP in concluding contracts with the contractors renovating the Jewish theatre building (AŻIH, CKŻP, Department of Culture and Propaganda, 303/XIII, Summary of construction costs of the E.R. Kamińska theatre in Wrocław on 7 May 1949, unpagged).

⁴⁴ AAN, SSZ, 476/26, Protocol no. 3 from the meeting of the PZPR-WKŻ group in Wrocław on 3 February 1949, p. 280.

In addition, part of the money for the renovated and reconstructed building was to be granted by the CKŻP.⁴⁵

Despite the struggle with the lack of funds, there was no shortage of people to work and believe in carrying out the plans. However, this meant that their implementation began with a false start, because before the head of Construction Supervision in Wrocław had issued a permit to start the work, it had in fact already started.⁴⁶ The WKŻ had acted in too much haste. This is probably why the contractors warned from the beginning that meeting the deadline would be a problem, citing the careless nature of the plans as the reason. It soon turned out that the construction work was being supervised by a person without the appropriate permissions. It was only a matter of time before the administrative suspension of the work.⁴⁷ This problem was presented in the following way at a meeting of the Presidium of the CKŻ: “[Engineer Feliks] has apparently come to the conclusion that he is not the right man to conduct this construction, and so he has not been interested in the construction for several days”.⁴⁸ In the meantime, it turned out that the same contractors (Feliks, Koliński, Rowiński), although so powerless in the face of the projects themselves and their implementation, had had no such trouble demolishing some of the former cinema buildings – perhaps because they had already found some rubble collectors.⁴⁹ The representative of the WKŻ, Lewi, made an unambiguous assessment of the situation: “The matter of the theatre”, he stated at the meeting of the Presidium of the WKŻ, “is on a very bad path”.⁵⁰ This was partly also because all activities were decided by the Warsaw headquarters (CKŻP), and the Wrocław branch of the WKŻ was only acting as an intermediary. The agreements with the existing contractors were terminated,

⁴⁵ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium of CKŻP (5 January-31 March 1949), 303/I/31, Protocol 7 of the meeting of the Presidium of the CKŻP of 1 February 1949, p. 55.

⁴⁶ Kałużna, ‘Teatr żydowski’, p. 85.

⁴⁷ AŻIH, General correspondence (outgoing and incoming) from the WKŻ in Wrocław (October-December 1947, January 1948), 303/I/123, Extract from the minutes of Presidium meeting no. 86 of 20 October 1947, p. 142.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Extract from minutes no. 88 of the Presidium meeting of 23 October 1947, p. 143.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Journal of the WKŻ in Wrocław to engineer Jan Feliks, 30 October 1947, p. 148.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Extract from minutes no. 87 of the Presidium meeting of 22 October 1947, p. 140.

and the search for companies that would implement the planned reconstruction of the building on Świdnicka Street took a few more months.⁵¹

The deadline for putting the theatre building into service was postponed several times.⁵² This was, at least in part, because of the desire to use the opening ceremony in the political struggle, a consequence of the decisions taken at the end of February 1949 during the National Congress of Jewish Committees and social organisations to thoroughly reorganise the composition of the CKŻP and its subordinate regional centres. Thus, in preparation for the inauguration of the theatre, special conferences with the Jewish community were held in Lower Silesia. The Jewish Press Agency (ŻAP) reported then that all these meetings “were characterised by the clarity of the wording contained in the papers, criticism and self-criticism, and a strict specification of the tasks of the reorganised Committees”.⁵³ Finally, the opening date was set for the start of April 1949. A provincial conference of the Lower Silesian Jewish committees was scheduled for this time in the theatre building.⁵⁴ On the eve of the inauguration, the *Biuletyn ŻAP* summarised the completion of renovation and construction works as follows: “The Jewish community in Lower Silesia has, at great effort, expenditure and dedication, under the favourable conditions of people’s democracy, achieved a feat which the three-million-plus-strong Jewish population had been unable to do in interwar Poland [*w Polsce sanacyjnej*]”.⁵⁵ This message was a nod to the new reality, clearly expressing his faith in the strength, future and durability of the Jewish diaspora in Lower Silesia. The theatre building was supposed to be irrefutable proof of this.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*; see also *ibid.*, Extract from minutes no. 89 of the Presidium meeting of 27 October 1947, p. 142.

⁵² ‘Wkrótce otwarcie teatru żydowskiego w nowym gmachu’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 7 January 1949, no. 2; ‘Przewodniczący wrocławskiej Rady Narodowej zwiedza instytucje i spółdzielnie żydowskie’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 28 January 1949, no. 8/488, p. 3.

⁵³ ‘Komitety Żydowskie realizują uchwały Krajowego Zjazdu’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 23 March 1949, no. 27/507, p. 1; Grabski, *Działalność komunistów*, pp. 307–10; ‘Rezolucja Krajowego Zjazdu Komitetów Żydowskich i organizacji społecznych’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 11 March 1949, no. 23/503 (supplement), pp. 190–94.

⁵⁴ ‘Konferencje wojewódzkie we Wrocławiu, Katowicach i Szczecinie’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 5 April 1949, no. 31/511, p. 3.

⁵⁵ ‘Otwarcie Teatru Żydowskiego we Wrocławiu nastąpi 2 kwietnia br.’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 30 March 1949, no. 29/509, p. 6.

Act Two

The official opening of the theatre building, after an eighteen-month delay, was finally held on 2 April 1949. As reported by the Jewish Press Agency, “The ceremony was attended by representatives of the government, scientific and artistic spheres, and labour leaders”.⁵⁶ A special ceremonial meeting of the convention was held that evening, during which a resolution was adopted to give the newly built building the name of Estera Rachela Kamińska.⁵⁷ All the reports emphasised that the opening of a Jewish cultural institution in Wrocław was “evidence of the development of progressive Jewish national culture”.⁵⁸ Jakub Egit reported live from the scene: “From its opening, the theatre was filled to the brim every day for nine days. On one day we gave a performance for the Polish community. We owe all this to the new reorganisation of the Committees”.⁵⁹ Legally and definitively, the building was put into use in December this year, because only then was the construction work assessed and, in the last resort, accepted by the inspection committee. The pre-war cinema, which had been rebuilt and thoroughly reconstructed, became not only the seat of the theatre, but also a House of Culture and the centre of Jewish cultural life in the Recovered Territories.

The Jewish theatre building in Wrocław began to live its own life, literally, because from the moment when it was put into use, the Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre functioned as an independent administrative body. This was the result of the efforts of the Jewish Communists involved in building the Jewish Theatre

⁵⁶ AAN, SSZ, 476/21, Information from the PZPR team of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, 25 April, 1949, pp. 73–4; ‘Komitety Żydowskie realizują uchwał Krajowego Zjazdu’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 5 April 1949, no. 31/510, p. 3.

⁵⁷ AAN, SSZ, 476/26, Report on the activities of the PZPR group at the WKŻ in Wrocław for the period from 15 January 1949 to 20 April 1949, p. 288. Estera Rachela Kamińska (1870–1925) was an outstanding theatrical actress, and founder of the Jewish theatre in Warsaw, called the ‘mother of Jewish theatre’. She performed on stages in Europe and the US. In the years 1949–56, her name was given to the Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre in Wrocław (from 1956 the House of Culture) and from 1955 the State Jewish Theatre in Warsaw ([http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Kaminska_Ester_Rachel_z_domu_Halpern_\(Helpern_Hailpern\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Kaminska_Ester_Rachel_z_domu_Halpern_(Helpern_Hailpern)), accessed 16 October 2018).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Protocol no. 8 from the meeting of the PZPR group at the WKŻ on 12 April 1949; also AAN, SSZ, 476/21, pp. 73–74. Report from the PZPR group of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, 25 April 1949.

⁵⁹ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium, Plenum and Executive Office of the CKŻP (5 April – 30 June 1949), 303/I/32, Protocol of the 21st session of the CKŻP Presidium of 13 April 1949, p. 13.

in the capital of Lower Silesia. It was they who justified the theatre building's creation at the initiative of Jews, as a result of their actions, with money donated by Jewish institutions and collected in the Jewish community. This was at least partly due to the awareness that the CKŻP, as a social institution, could not own real estate or derive any benefits from it. This was probably the reason why the DTŻ was created as an independent institution – an enterprise managing a building built by the Jewish community. This was to protect the building from being taken over by the municipal authorities.

Simultaneously, as soon as the renovation and construction work began in Wrocław, more or less open disputes began to arise between the actors' associations of the Jewish theatres in Wrocław and Łódź. The strength of the former resulted from the size of the Lower Silesian diaspora, the latter from its traditions, and partly also from the conviction that the proximity of the capital would exert a gravitational pull on Jewish artists. At the same time, the Jewish New Theatre was being constructed in Łódź. The management, actors and 'socio-political activists' involved in the matter posed fundamental questions about which of the theatres had a greater right to represent Jewish culture in socialist Poland, which of them deserved state support, and which should be self-sufficient. Although the representatives of these centres expressed their views on the basis of various positions (supporters of having the 'headquarters' in Wrocław or in Łódź), they agreed on one thing: they believed that Jewish theatre must be nationalised, judging it as a condition for support from the authorities.⁶⁰ They were aware that the handful of survivors could not afford to ensure the theatre's self-determination and self-sufficiency. Jewish artists saw nationalisation as the only means of enabling their continued work.

The justification for the relationship between the Jewish theatre and the people's government was pragmatism. For the theatre, the government was to serve as a guarantor of its existence. For the authorities, theatre – seen more objectively than subjectively – was intended to be a testimony of its openness to the problems of the Jewish national minority in post-war Poland, and thus improve its image in the eyes of international public opinion. Thus, when *Biuletyn ŻAP* published a short report on the nationalisation of Jewish theatres in Poland, all the interested

⁶⁰ AAN, SSZ, 476/26, Protocol no. 1 from the meeting of the PZPR-WKŻ group in Wrocław of 20 January 1949, pp. 274–75.

parties – both directors and actors – recognised it as the fruit of their previous labours. The terse item was limited to a statement of facts: “The Ministry of Culture and Art informed the CKŻP that in connection with the ongoing nationalisation of theatres, they would be included in the state system as of 1 January 1950”.⁶¹ The Central Committee of the CKŻP summed up the results of the efforts made so far: “We have finally solved the problem of Jewish institutions. All [...] will be transferred to the state budget from 1950”. It also emphasised that in “ideological and political [terms, they are] managed by the State”.⁶² These words were repeated to the Lower Silesian voivode Józef Szłapczyński, who earlier, during a conference convened on the occasion of the upcoming Congress of the Jewish Cultural Society (in fact, in the building of the theatre that had just been commissioned), said on 5 October 1949: “An ideal example of how the People’s Government is responding to the Jewish population in Poland and its cultural needs is the nationalisation of Jewish schools and theatres”.⁶³ Thereafter, the CKŻP began to reorganise the theatre groups’ activities.

Under the influence of ongoing Stalinisation in Poland, with its derivative in the form of the Communist authorities’ centralisation and control of all areas of life, the process of ‘unifying’ the Jewish theatre groups was initiated. This was to serve as proof that the Jewish artists were joining the movement of revolutionary political and social changes in post-war Poland. However, in practice, the theatre companies had a serious problem with achieving that – and not just because of ideology, as they were made up of many people with leftist views. The problem was rather one of particularism. The centralisation process was definitely not suited to them. Originally, the team of actors from Wrocław was more open to the path leading to ‘unification’, at least at the end of the 1940s. The initiative had come from the CKŻP: the Lower Silesian troupe was to perform temporarily in Łódź, and the Łódź troupe in Wrocław. The purpose of such

⁶¹ ‘W sprawie upaństwowienia teatrów żydowskich w Polsce’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 18 May 1949, no. 42/522, p. 1.

⁶² AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium and Executive Office of the CKŻP (7–31 October 1949), 303/I/34, Protocol of the 54th Plenary session of the CKŻP Presidium of 18 November 1949, p. 25.

⁶³ ‘Przygotowania do Krajowego Zjazdu Żydowskiego Towarzystwa Kultury’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 10 October 1949, no. 77/557, pp. 1–2.

a reorganisation (which the Wrocław actors had proposed much earlier, back in 1947) was very practical: the enriched repertoire was intended to entice viewers back to the theatre. “The Wrocław theatrical group, despite having the prospect of its new building, has agreed to the proposed change”, as it was explained at the time.⁶⁴ However, the Łódź artists’ unwillingness to participate in the exchange meant that the idea was abandoned, so it was necessary to keep both troupes in their current locations. It was also stipulated that more funds should be allocated to the theatre in Wrocław⁶⁵ – Dawid Sfarid supported this solution in 1949. Like all those interested in the issue of the theatre, he spoke of the necessity of its nationalisation, emphasising: “[The theatre] should act as a centralised organism with a uniform artistic direction”.⁶⁶ He saw no contradiction in the functioning of two separate institutions “in Łódź and in Lower Silesia”, calling them ‘branches’. However, soon after, in the summer of 1949, the Presidium of the CKŻP revised its ideas about the future of the theatre. They proposed the creation of special commissions, one for ‘unification’ and one for ‘repertoire’. As well as representatives of actors from the theatres in Lower Silesia and Łódź, these bodies were to be composed of representatives of the CKŻP, and the aim of their activity was (apart from the terms used in the names) to avoid further conflicts. Meir Melman⁶⁷ emphasised that “both collectives [would be] unified” in the near future, with common administrations, bookkeeping and transport: “There cannot be two separate groups, we must be united”.⁶⁸ Julian Łazebnik,

⁶⁴ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium of CKŻP (1 September – 22 December 1947), 303/I/22, Protocol of the 82nd meetings of the Presidium of 16 October 1947, p. 71.

⁶⁵ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium of the CKŻP (7 April – 29 May 1948), 303/I/27, Minutes of the Presidium session with the Theatre Council and representatives of the Union of Jewish Stage Artists, 10 May 1948, p. 105.

⁶⁶ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium, Plenum and Executive Office of the CKŻP (5 April–30 June 1949), 303/I/32, Report of the Presidium of the CKŻP for the period March–May 1949, p. 88.

⁶⁷ Meir Melman (1900–78), actor, lawyer, husband of Ida Kamińska. He spent the Second World War in the USSR. After returning to Poland in 1946, he joined Jewish theatres in Łódź and Warsaw. He was *inter alia* the second chairman of the professional association of Jewish actors in Poland and the administrative director of the State Jewish Theatre in Warsaw. In 1968 he emigrated to the US ([http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Melman_Marian_\(Meir\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Melman_Marian_(Meir)), accessed 16 October 2018).

⁶⁸ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium and Executive Office of the CKŻP (5 July – 23 September 1949), 303/I/33, Protocol of the 42nd meeting of the CKŻP Presidium of 25 August 1949, p. 33.

who was present at the meeting, saw the matter differently.⁶⁹ He considered the ‘conciliatory’ proposals made by his comrades as half-measures, and summed up the discussion thus: “The friction between the teams must end. There will be a state theatre now, and these things must stop.”⁷⁰

The fact that the nationalisation and merger of the two theatres would not solve the problems they faced became obvious from the very beginning in January 1950. “Our situation is specific”, said Julian Łazebnik at the time: “There is one theatre and two workshops. There is little understanding of the collective work of these two divisions. We imagined that citizen Melman and citizen Szafer would cooperate with each other, that they would take care of the theatre together as if it were a uniform organism.”⁷¹ How fragile this system was is evidenced by the recurring organisational problems. The meaning of ‘unification’ was undermined by Ida Kamińska. She knew about the independence of the DTŻ, and assessed it very critically. During a CKŻP meeting, she expressed indignation at the news that a team of actors from Łódź had to pay for access to a theatre stage in Wrocław. Less than two weeks after its launch, she stated: “We are not making the situation difficult, if you have to travel to see performances, we will do so gladly. We pay for journeys and we go. It is an abnormal phenomenon that when we perform in Wrocław, we pay more for the theatre than we would pay for the city theatres”. The source of these problems was the independence of the theatre building in Wrocław. However, it turned out that the matter had another underlying cause when Ida Kamińska summed up her speech as follows: “We are against leaving Łódź. [...] We are constructing a large theatre building in Łódź, and this circumstance should be taken into account.”⁷²

⁶⁹ Julian Łazebnik (1904–81), Communist activist. In 1939, he took part in the September campaign. During the Second World War he was in the USSR and was active in the Union of Polish Artists and Designers. In 1946 he returned to Poland. General Secretary of the CKŻP. In the 1950s, a member of the ZG TSKŻ, he worked as a censor (Grabski, *Działalność komunistów*, p. 308).

⁷⁰ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium and Executive Office of the CKŻP (5 July – 23 September 1949), 303/I/33, Protocol of the 42nd meeting of the CKŻP Presidium of 25 August 1949, p. 34.

⁷¹ Archiwum Towarzystwa Społeczno-Kulturalnego Żydów w Warszawie (Archives of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Warsaw; hereinafter: ATSKŻ Wa), Minutes from 9 January 1950 to 29 December 1950, 8/12, Minutes of the CKŻP meeting with representatives of the PTŻ on 18 January 1950, unpagged.

⁷² AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium, Plenum and Executive Office of the CKŻP (5 April – 30 June 1949), 303/I/32, p. 62, Minutes of the second session of the CKŻP plenum of 16 May 1949.

In the context of all the disputes around the issue of theatre at the turn of the 1950s, one fundamental decision remained untaken: where the centre of Jewish cultural life should be located. On 1 January 1950, the Jewish theatres in Poland (i.e. the Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre and the Łódź Jewish Theatre) were nationalised and (at least by definition) merged, by the decision of the Minister of Culture Stefan Dybowski. From then on, they functioned as the State Jewish Theatres (PTŻ). This event changed the status of Jewish theatre in Poland. From that moment on, it was in a state of legal unification with the Polish theatre. From then on, it was provided with state financing for its activities, and all its employees acquired equal rights with the employees of the Polish theatre.⁷³ Ida Kamińska became the director of PTŻ; its artistic director was Meir Melman, and the main director was Jakub Rotbaum.⁷⁴

The nationalisation of Jewish theatres became a *fait accompli*, but the following years (1951–55) did not see the desired results: improving relations between the theatre centres in Łódź and Wrocław, transforming actors into a so-called collective, or an a decision on where the PTŻ would permanently operate. The opposite was true, in fact. Even at the end of 1950, the question of settling the seat of the PTŻ remained unresolved.⁷⁵ It is true that Melman treated the Wrocław theatre centre as an unnecessary ballast, but he also had to take into account the opinion of his comrades from the CKŻP/TSKŻ.⁷⁶ For their part, they

⁷³ Kałużna, 'Teatr żydowski', p. 174.

⁷⁴ Jakub Rotbaum (1901–94), film and theatre director, visual artist. During the Second World War he was in the US. In 1949 he returned to Poland, joined the Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre in Wrocław, and from 1952 to 1962 he was artistic director of the State Dramatic Theatres in Wrocław. In 1968 he left the Polish Theatre in Wrocław. From then on, he directed at the Estera Rachela Kamińska State Jewish Theatre in Warsaw ([http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Rotbaum_\[Rotbojm\]_Jakub_\[Jankew\]](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Rotbaum_[Rotbojm]_Jakub_[Jankew]), accessed 16 October 2018); see also *25 years of the Jewish state theatre in the Polish People's Republic*, Wrocław 1975, pp. 15–16.

⁷⁵ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes from 9 January 1950 to 29 December 1950, 8/12, Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 23 December 1950; see also *ibid.*, Minutes of the meeting of the TSKŻ Presidium of 29 December 1950, unpagged.

⁷⁶ At the turn of 1949, the independence of the CKŻP and its subordinate regional committees became more and more illusory. Even during the Congress of the Jewish Cultural Society in Wrocław in October 1949, Jewish activists of the PZPR had put forward the idea of uniting the existing Jewish organisations, and a year later (29 October 1950) they carried it out. The CKŻP was merged with the ŻTK, and a new organisation, the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (*Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce*), began to function. The establishment of the TSKŻ completed the liquidation of all the Jewish community's independent initiatives. It was in the party's interest to create a centre that would serve to consolidate 'socialist values' among the Jewish population; the TSKŻ was assigned this role. For more, see Szydzisz, *Spoleczność żydowska*, pp. 53–55.

said: “In view of the specific Jewish conditions, one should focus on two stages, because on one stage small Jewish groups will be overlooked”.⁷⁷ This argument persisted for a few more months. In 1951, thanks to the efforts of the PTŻ’s management, the main seat was moved to Łódź. That year, the State Jewish Theatres changed their name to ‘the State Jewish Theatre with its seat in Łódź’.⁷⁸ Officially, the Wrocław troupe was now subordinate to the management of PTŻ in Łódź, although in practice it functioned as an autonomous unit.

Perhaps the conflicts were a permanent element in the ‘rhythm of life’ of the Jewish theatres at the time. Both troupes, Wrocław and Łódź, revealed yet more determination during the two-day session of the Presidium of the TSKŻ and the PTŻ in January 1952. Members of the TSKŻ’s Board of Directors tried to tone down the atmosphere and express their dissatisfaction with the situation in the PTŻ with more general comments. Smolar treated the matter ideologically. He stated that it had not yet been possible to create a “cemented collective”, and Michał Mirski⁷⁹ stressed that there were “symptoms of internal decay” within the PTŻ.⁸⁰ The wave of real criticism, however, came from representatives of the Wrocław theatre. Actor Majzler “accused Kamińska and Melman of keeping the theatre to themselves”; director Izaak Turkow⁸¹ believed that instead of consolidating the Jewish team, they were “flirting with the Polish theatre”,⁸² and Jakub Rotbaum openly accused the theatre management of manipulation and taking actions aimed at creating a camp for its supporters.⁸³

⁷⁷ ATSKŻ Wa, Protocols from 9 January 1950 to 29 December 1950, 8/12, Minutes of the meeting of the TSKŻ Presidium of 29 December 1950, unpagued.

⁷⁸ Kałużna, ‘Teatr żydowski’, p. 196.

⁷⁹ Michał Mirski (1902–94), Communist activist, member of the KPP, prisoner in Bereza Kartuska; during the Second World War he was in the USSR; in 1945–9 chairman of the Provincial Jewish Committee in Łódź; in the fifties and sixties, worked in the editorial office of *Nowe Drogi*; an émigré from 1968 (Grabski, *Działalność komunistów*, p. 68).

⁸⁰ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes from 2 January 1952 to 29 December 1952, 8/14, Minutes of the Presidium meeting with the participation of representatives of the Polish Society of Jews on 28 January 1952, unpagued.

⁸¹ Izaak Turkow (1906–70), actor, writer, journalist, theatre historian. In 1946–50, he published the weekly *Nidershlezje* in Yiddish. Until the mid-1950s, he was associated with the State Jewish Theatre; in 1957, he emigrated to Israel ([http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Turkow_Icchak_\(Izaak\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Turkow_Icchak_(Izaak)), accessed 16 October 2018).

⁸² ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes from 2 January 1952 to 29 December 1952, 8/14, Minutes of the Presidium meeting with the participation of the PTŻ group of 29 January 1952, unpagued.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium, with the participation of representatives of the PTŻ group of 28 January 1952.

Of all the unknowns, one thing was obvious: that the conflict was ongoing, and was now moving into a new stage. The threats from the TSKŻ's Board of Directors could do little to help: "If there are indeed symptoms of cliques [arising] in the theatre, administrative measures will have to be taken against them".⁸⁴ Only Hersz Smolar tried to see something positive in such a complicated situation: "These statements indicate the high level of the speakers, and so the crisis that the theatre is experiencing is a crisis of growth".⁸⁵ Ida Kamińska herself did not hold back, probably deciding that the best form of defence was attack. Contrary to the opinion of the majority, she stated that the situation was coming back under control.⁸⁶ At that time, from the position of the PTŻ management, she was able to say this because the PTŻ had just won the battle of the theatre's seat; the 'headquarters' was established in Łódź, as a result of the decision taken by the General Directorate of Theatres (GDT). However, as the future showed, this was only a short-term victory. The PTŻ management was satisfied with this state of affairs, but the actors associated with the Wrocław theatre centre and the representatives of the TSKŻ's Board of Directors who were willing to support Wrocław's aspirations felt differently. This is indicated by the topic of the headquarters, which is repeated many times in the discussions. The Jewish directors, Izaak Turkow⁸⁷ and Jakub Rotbaum, still treated the question of the seat as an open one.⁸⁸

Since the inception of the theatres in Wrocław and Łódź, some activists realised that the real problem lay not in the repertoire, personal antagonisms or conflicts over the location of the so-called base, but simply in the threat of losing the building. That is why, from the moment of nationalisation and unification of the PTŻ, the need to keep the theatre building in Wrocław in the possession of CKZP/TSKŻ recurred so often in the discussions.⁸⁹ The argument over the seat of the Wrocław theatre was a derivative of the disputes between the Łódź theatre

⁸⁴ Ibid., Minutes of the Theatre Council meeting of 17 June 1952.

⁸⁵ Ibid., Minutes of the Presidium meeting with the participation of the PTŻ team of 29 January 1952.

⁸⁶ Ibid., Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium with the participation of representatives of the PTŻ group of 28 January 1952.

⁸⁷ Ibid., A similar interpretation in the speech by M. Mirski; see *ibid.*, Minutes of the Theatre Council meeting of 13 June, 1952.

⁸⁸ Ibid., Minutes from 5 January 1953 to 9 June 1953. First half of the year, 8/14, Protocol of the National Congress of TSKŻ on 21 & 22 March 1953, unpaginated.

⁸⁹ Ibid., Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of 23 August 1951.

group and the local TSKŻ branch with the authorities in the first half of the 1950s. The theatre building in Łódź was managed by PTŻ/TSKŻ. The problem, however, was that from the very beginning – from the moment it was put into use in 1949 – the theatrical stage in the New Theatre building was also being used by a Polish group called Teatr Nowy. This is probably why the representatives of the ZG TSKŻ were concerned about the future of the building, and from the first months of 1951 they tried to find a ‘judgement of Solomon’ for the situation, that is one that would allow the Jewish organisations (PTŻ/TSKŻ) to administer the building in Łódź, which had been built with Jewish funds, while at the same time maintaining good relations with the Polish cultural institutions (by renting the stage to the Teatr Nowy troupe).⁹⁰

A few months later it turned out that neither the pressure from the PTŻ/TSKŻ nor Łazebnik’s suggestions had contributed much to the matter: the situation of the Jewish stage in Łódź was not resolved in favour of the Jewish organisations; in fact, quite the opposite happened. This was indicated by an unequivocal order from the General Directorate of Theatres “to move the PTŻ base from Łódź to Wrocław”.⁹¹ The GDT representative, Dobrowolski, who was present at a specially organised meeting on this matter, justified the decision as follows: “The issue of the theatre’s base is related to the issue of the place where the most people are, and in this respect the most places to be served are in Lower Silesia”.⁹² In return, he promised financial assistance from the ‘higher authorities’ for the creation of the main PTŻ centre in Wrocław, and guaranteed that there would always be a place for PTŻ to perform at the Teatr Nowy in Łódź. At the end, he recalled that “the theatre in Wrocław was also built by the Jewish community”⁹³ and was still being used by Jewish institutions.

The headquarters of the Jewish theatre was relocated from Łódź to Wrocław in the second half of 1953. The PTŻ director, Ida Kamińska, suggested, probably with some exaggeration, that the blame for this was borne by ‘the Wrocław conspirators’.

⁹⁰ Ibid., Meeting of the Presidium of 19 February 1951.

⁹¹ Ibid., Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of 29 November 1951.

⁹² Ibid., Minutes of the Presidium meeting with the participation of representatives of the PTŻ and the General Directorate of 11 December 1951.

⁹³ Ibid., Minutes of the Presidium meeting with the participation of representatives of the PTŻ and the General Directorate of 11 December 1951.

Supported by the Polish Communists and TSKŻ ZG, their goal was not only to move the headquarters to Wrocław, but above all to deprive Kamińska and Melman of any influence on the theatre.⁹⁴ Her conspiracy theories, at least in part, confirm the content of the discussions devoted to the theatre at the TSKŻ Presidium which were repeated in the first half of the 1950s. The activists from Wrocław admitted at that time that they did not have such an extensive workshop as their colleagues in Łódź. Jakub Wasserstrum⁹⁵ agreed with this statement, but he believed that regardless of this, it was necessary and necessary to maintain the “base of the creative work of the PTŻ in Wrocław”.⁹⁶ If any problems arose – as he himself admitted – the matter could reach the Council of Ministers. The last idea was confirmed by Ida Kamińska herself, who in her memoirs described the subject of locating the theatre’s base in Wrocław as follows: “The Ministry of Culture picked up on this idea because they wanted to make room for the Teatr Nowy team in the building in Łódź, as it had had great artistic achievements. TSKŻ wanted to do the ministry a favour, and presented the argument that more Jews live in Lower Silesia (whose capital is Wrocław)”.⁹⁷ The move was unplanned, and that is why the theatre significantly exceeded its budget that year, despite the thorough implementation of the plan. The transport of equipment, decor, costumes, and so on consumed a large sum, and blew a hole in the PTŻ’s budget.

At least some of the people involved in the Jewish theatre issue gave an accurate diagnosis, claiming that the PTŻ’s move to Wrocław, as forced through by the GDT, should be treated as the first step on the way to ‘Polish forces’ taking over the Teatr Nowy building in Łódź. This was indicated by further moves and pressure from the government. In mid-1954, the Łódź Municipal National Council made ‘a request’ of the PTŻ/TSKŻ to make the building of the Teatr Nowy available to another Polish ensemble, the Opera Studio.⁹⁸ Soon after, GDT ordered the PTŻ management to “hand

⁹⁴ Kamińska, *Moje życie, mój teatr*, Warszawa 1995, p. 211.

⁹⁵ Jakub Wasserstrum (1905–93), an activist of the KPP in the interwar period. During the Second World War in the USSR. In 1946 he returned to Poland. Head of the Propaganda Department at WKŻ in Wrocław. PPR/PZPR instructor. In 1950–3 he headed the TSKŻ in Wrocław, from 1953 he was a member of the TSKŻ Board. In 1969, he emigrated to Israel, and in 1976 to Sweden (A. Grabski, *Działalność komunistów*, p. 70).

⁹⁶ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes from 8 January 1951 to 31 December 1951, 8/13, Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 23 August 1951, unpagged.

⁹⁷ I. Kamińska, *Moje życie*, p. 211.

⁹⁸ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes from 4 January 1954 to 28 December 1954, 8/16, Protocol no. 46 of the Presidium meeting of 19 June 1954, unpagged.

over the administration of the theatre in Łódź to the Teatr Nowy”.⁹⁹ The takeover of the facility was complemented by a frontal attack by representatives of the Łódź RN and the head of the GDT on the PTŻ/TSKŻ during a meeting of the Presidium of TSKŻ in January 1955. Apart from all the arguments presented earlier (a small Jewish community, financial problems, the low number of performances by the Jewish theatre company), their demand was also supported – as they explained – by the central authorities (both party and government). The Polish side recognised that the Teatr Nowy issue was ‘of a delicate nature’. It was argued, therefore, that taking over a building ‘built with funds from the Jewish community’ could ‘provoke unwanted comments’. That is why it was suggested to the Jewish interlocutors that any initiative explaining withdrawal from the ‘New Theatre’ should officially come from their side: “The conclusion [...] must be understood by the Society, and there must be help in implementing it”.¹⁰⁰ On this occasion, and certainly not by chance, it was once again reminded that the Jews already had ‘their own’ theatre building in Wrocław. The overwhelming majority of Jewish interlocutors were against any ‘surrender’, though, especially in this form and under such pressure. In practice, this did not change much, as the conclusion closing the meeting stated that the PTŻ would eventually “abandon the Teatr Nowy stage”. All the members of the ZG TSKŻ attending the meeting signed it. In return, the Łódź Municipal National Council promised to help the local branch of the TSKŻ to obtain some club rooms, and the GDT to implement the plans made by Kamińska and Melman:¹⁰¹ namely, the final merger of the theatre companies from Lower Silesia and Łódź, and the transfer of the PTŻ to Warsaw.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Ibid., Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 31 August 1954.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Minutes of meetings from 7 January 1955 to 13 December 1955, 8/17, Protocol no. 6 of the Presidium meeting of 26 January 1955, unpaginated.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Minutes of meetings from 7 January 1955 to 13 December 1955, 8/17, Protocol no. 6 of the Presidium meeting of 26 January 1955. The members of the Management Board of TSKŻ were present at the meeting: Smolar, Sfar, Zachariasz, Wasserstrum, Gurwicz, Łazebnik, Cieszyński, Felhendler, Fiszgrund, Heller, Goldfinger, Olicki, Korman. Representatives of the Łódź branch of TSKŻ: Web i Kramarz.

¹⁰² K. Pudło, ‘Zarys życia zbiorowego ludności żydowskiej na Dolnym Śląsku (1950–1989)’, *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 1989, no. 1 (4), p. 102. Several months later, in 1956, the TSKŻ’s representatives in Łódź, Libo and Rogoziński, explained the loss of the New Theatre building as follows: “We do not need this building for our work, but due to its commissioning, certain nationalistic moods have arisen. We cannot separate ourselves from the general population of the city, and refuse to donate the building to the theatre and opera just because we paid for its construction” (ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings for the period from 2 January 1956 to 27 December 1956, 8/18, Minutes of the TSKŻ’s 3rd National Congress on 15–16 April 1956, unpaginated).

The change of seat of the PTŻ was at least in part a proof of the commitment – and more importantly – the effectiveness of Ida Kamińska. She pointed out that the PTŻ under her was more independent than the TSKŻ under the government – a body which, moreover, was still seen by some members of the latter as abusive. It was stated that things were still going wrong in the theatre: “The theatre has its own policy, it is detached from the Society. We have no influence on its travels or its repertoire”.¹⁰³ Dawid Sfarid assessed the situation differently: “Recognising the merits of the Jewish theatre and its high ideological and artistic level, our government has decided to move its base to the capital. This is a promotion that makes all Jewish society proud”. Aware that this was the beginning of the road leading from the unification of the PTŻ, he added: “The more clearly we put the matter in place, at the beginning, the more correctly we will be able to resolve it in the future”.¹⁰⁴ Kamińska once again did not hold back during this discussion: “The theatre has the impression that the Society is treating it with a certain envy”.¹⁰⁵ And then she listed the mistakes – financial, organisational and programmatic – made by ‘authoritative individuals’ from the TSKŻ. This discussion only lacked... a rational assessment of the situation. And although everyone knew about it, it was only behind the scenes of the TSKŻ’s final Plenum in Wrocław that one of the delegates dared to say: “Many things are being done in our propaganda for purely representational purposes. One example of this is the relocation of the seat of the Jewish theatre to Warsaw, while the Jewish population is mostly concentrated in Lower Silesia”.¹⁰⁶

The case of the building in Wrocław arose in parallel with the loss of the building of the Teatr Nowy in Łódź and the relocation of the PTŻ to Warsaw. This combination of events forced the TSKŻ to initiate efforts to do more than just administer or use the building for its statutory activities. As Smolar put it at the end of 1955: “We have no proof that we are the owners of the theatre building, so we must become them in reality”.¹⁰⁷ In practice, the activists of the Society – both those from Warsaw and those

¹⁰³ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings for the period from 2 January 1956 to 27 December 1956, 8/18, Protocol no. 15 of the Presidium meeting of 14 April 1956, unpagged.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the TSKŻ’s 3rd National Congress on 15–16 April 1956.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*; also *ibid.*, Protocol no. 18 of the Presidium meeting of 24 April 1956.

¹⁰⁶ AŻIH, TSKŻ, 285, Protocol from the extended Plenum of the TSKŻ in Wrocław of 6–7 May 1956, unpagged.

¹⁰⁷ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings from 7 January 1955 to 13 December 1955, 8/17, Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 26 November 1955.

from Wrocław – did not know the formal and legal status of the Wrocław building; or they had perhaps forgotten that as of July 1953, by the decision of the Ministry of Culture (that is, when the PTŻ was formally based in Wrocław), the building had officially been taken over by the Central Management of Theatres.¹⁰⁸ It was reported unofficially that it was still operating as an independent artistic enterprise, not subject to any higher authority or external supervision.¹⁰⁹

The changes in the PTŻ's operation ran parallel to the systemic transformations in Poland from the second half of the 1950s. The programme of social indoctrination weakened, and the general public felt a sense that the ideological straitjacket was loosening. The attitude of the Party and society towards the Jewish national minority began to change. Phobias and aversion towards the Jews, which had hitherto been inhibited by the ruling apparatus, began to emerge.¹¹⁰ To some extent, these factors forced the TSKŻ to be open to the needs and problems of the community it represented. One such was the case of the Estera Rachela Kamińska DTŻ. At the end of 1955 Fiszgrund suggested changing the previous name of this centre to the Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture; this was to be the first step on the way to taking over the building and using it for the needs of the Society. At this point, the plan was to take over the previously unused rooms and place the club and all the TSKŻ troupes and associations operating in Wrocław in the building on Dubois Street. In addition, the offices presently on Włodkowska Street were to be moved to the administration building. The Society should return the premises it had been using so far back to the municipal authorities. In its contacts with the Wrocław authorities, it was decided to “make it clear [...] We

¹⁰⁸ AŻIH, TSKŻ, 1, Decision of the Ministry of Culture and Art addressed to the ZG TSKŻ, 8 May 1953, unpagued.

¹⁰⁹ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings from 7 January 1955 to 13 December 1955, 8/17, Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 26 November 1955.

¹¹⁰ Within the government, as within society as a whole after 1956, two tendencies in the approach to nationality issues clashed. One of them aimed at marginalising the problem of minorities and drew upon the pre-1956 policy. The second, related to the circles inclined to liberalise the system, emphasised the need for the free development of the individual national groups. Whereas at the beginning the latter concept held a clear advantage, then by the late 1950s the former became much more prominent. This was expressed in pressure from the state to promote the current ideology in minority circles, to emphasise the supremacy of the party, and to limit all forms of independence. For more see Szydzisz, *Spolecznosc zydowska*, pp. 62–65; also: Berendt, *Zycie zydowskie w Polsce*, pp. 291–314; P. Machcewicz, *Polski rok 1956*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 56–58.

want to carry out our work in these buildings”.¹¹¹ And in the event that the Wrocław Municipal National Council refused to hear the TSKŻ’s case, it was intended to immediately “turn to the superior authorities”, that is, the Voivodship Office (*Urząd Wojewódzki*).¹¹²

The TSKŻ’s Wrocław activists hoped that in a few weeks it would be possible to renovate and put into use the building of the House of Culture and its administrative rooms. But these plans all came to nothing. As had already happened in the 1940s, it quickly turned out that the Society had neither the financial resources nor the support from the city: “The delegation of the [TSKŻ] branch went to the Municipal National Council [in Wrocław] for subsidies to this end. [...] [The Municipal National Council] ordered them to sell the piano and allocate the amount received to renovation”.¹¹³ Support was still sought from the Office of the Council of Ministers – but unsuccessfully.¹¹⁴ The only option left was to reduce costs and carry out renovation in the so-called economic system.¹¹⁵ Therefore, some of the planned work was abandoned, some was not completed, and the rooms which were put into use were equipped with equipment transferred from the premises which the TSKŻ had previously used. Despite all the troubles – after a delay of 18 months (September 1957) – the TSKŻ club was opened at a specially organised ceremony in the building of the Estery Rachela Kamińska House of Culture. The ceremony was summarised as follows: “We can see a new willingness to work [in the Wrocław branch of the TSKŻ]”.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of the sessions for the period from 2 January 1956 to 27 December 1956, 8/18, Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 1 February 1956; also Protocol no. 18 of the Presidium meeting of 24 April 1956, unpagged.

¹¹² AAN, SSZ, 476/26, Information of the Committee of the Propaganda Department of the KW on the activities of the TSKŻ in the Wrocław voivodship, 1955, p. 294; also ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings for the period from 2 January 1956 to 27 December 1956, 8/18, Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of 1 February 1956.

¹¹³ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings for the period from 2 January 1956 to 27 December 1956, 8/18, Protocol no. 22 of the Presidium meeting of 26 May 1956, unpagged.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Minutes of meetings for the period from 3 January 1957 to 23 December 1957, 8/19, Protocol no. 17 of the Presidium meeting of 25 March 1957.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Minutes of meetings for the period from 2 January 1956 to 27 December 1956, 8/18, Protocol no. 35 of the Presidium meeting of 18 September 1956; also Protocol no. 35 of the Presidium meeting of 18 September 1956, unpagged.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Minutes of meetings for the period from 3 January 1957 to 23 December 1957, 8/19, Protocol no. 44 of the Presidium meeting of 19 September 1957.

It quickly turned out that this was just the beginning of the TSKŻ's struggles with the Wrocław authorities. The problem of the theatre building returned quite regularly, at intervals of several years. And so in the first days of 1960, the Board of Directors of the TSKŻ's Wrocław branch submitted a request to the Presidium of the District National Council Wrocław-Old Town "for consent to be granted to the permanent management and use" of the building at 28 Świdnicka Street.¹¹⁷ Such actions were partly forced by the memory of the circumstances in which the theatre building in Łódź was lost, and partly in reaction to the 1958 Act 'On the rules and procedure for the expropriation of real estate'.¹¹⁸ The TSKŻ was not the owner of the building, but rather an institution using it to implement its statutory activity, and which was making efforts to implement the provision on the right of perpetual usufruct. Until this point (since 1953), the GDT had been the legal owner. Therefore, it was very likely that the subject of the dispute – the building of the Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture – would be able to change its user.

A few months later, but still in the same year of 1960, the head of the Social and Administrative Department of the Office of Internal Affairs in Wrocław conducted a thorough inspection of the local branch of the TSKŻ. In his final assessment, the assessor – while maintaining a neutral tone – emphasised the commitment and good organisation of the Society's work. He probably did not know the legal status of the Jewish Cultural Centre, as he stated in his report: "The TSKŻ is

¹¹⁷ Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw (hereinafter: AIPN), the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland: legal status of the real estate in Wrocław, 5/7/9 Włodkowica Street and 28 Świdnicka Street, handed over for management and use, Protocol, decisions, appeal, resolution, contract, ciphertext, official notes, correspondence, 1961–69, 1585/7212, Letter from the Wrocław USW to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw, 21 May 1966, p. 18. The correspondence between the Wrocław branch of TSKŻ and the Wrocław-Old Town District National Council mentioned the properties on Włodkowica and Świdnicka Streets. The TSKŻ allegedly stated that "it has been using the above-mentioned properties since 1945, and before the last war the Jewish Community was the owner". It is not known whether this argument was used directly by TSKŻ, or whether it was a secondary report, interpreted and processed by the USW in Wrocław. While the property on Włodkowica Street did actually belong to the Jewish Community during the interwar period, this was certainly not the case with the Kammer Lichtspiele cinema.

¹¹⁸ The Act of 12 March 1958 on the rules and procedure for the expropriation of real estate, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland; hereinafter: Dz.U.) 1958, no. 17, item 70 (<http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19580170070>, accessed 2 February 2018).

the owner of the building of the Jewish Theatre on 28 Świdnicka Street”.¹¹⁹ There are many indications that this inspection served not only to assess the TSKŻ itself, but also its assets. The ‘Jewish Community Centre’ – in the opinion of the head of the Department – was the most valuable element of the society’s inventory. Its value was estimated at over 1.6 million złoty, which was almost 85 per cent of the Wrocław branch of the TSKŻ’s entire assets.¹²⁰ These claims by the representative of the administrative authority (about ‘the owner’ and ‘ownership’) were true, but only partially so. In another letter from that period, albeit from a higher authority (the Ministry of Municipal Economy [*Ministerstwo Gospodarki Komunalnej*]), it was clear that the ‘Jewish’ real estate in Wrocław (including the House of Culture) was owned by the State Treasury and directly subordinate to the GDT. It was not until the decision by the Minister of Municipal Economy of 12 August 1961 that the facility was handed over to the management and use of the TSKŻ. In addition, “financial conditions for the use of the property” were to be established.¹²¹ On 1 October 1961, on behalf of the ministry, the Presidium of the District National Council of Wrocław-Old Town awarded the TSKŻ Wrocław branch the disputed buildings “free of charge [...] for their permanent management and use”.¹²²

In 1963, the conviction prevailing within ZG TSKŻ was that the fate of the Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture (referred to interchangeably in Polish and

¹¹⁹ AIPN, Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, orders, reports, information, official notes, 1960–84, 1585/7197, Protocol from the inspection carried out in the TSKŻ’s municipal branch in Wrocław at 28 Świdnicka Street, from 23 June to 14 July 1960, pp. 8–9.

¹²⁰ Ibid., Protocol from the inspection carried out in the municipal branch of TSKŻ in Wrocław at 28 Świdnicka Street, from 23 June to 14 July 1960, p. 13.

¹²¹ AIPN, Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland: legal status of the property in Wrocław, 5/7/9 Włodkowska Street and 28 Świdnicka Street handed over for management and use, Protocol, decisions, appeal, resolution, contract, ciphertext, official notes, correspondence, 1961–69, 1585/7212, Letter of the Minister of Municipal Economy to ZG TSKŻ in Warsaw, 12 August 1961, p. 1. The legal basis for the decision taken by the Minister of Municipal Economy was as follows: Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 2 August 1949 on the transfer of real estate necessary for the implementation of national economic plans, Dz.U. 1949, no. 47, item 354, and the Act of 12 March 1958 on the principles and procedure of expropriation of real estate, Dz.U. 1958, no. 17, item 70.

¹²² Ibid., Protocol on the handover to permanent management and use of a property located in Wrocław, f. 44. District Management of Wrocław-Old Town Residential Buildings was represented by director Michał Lewicki and legal counsel Juliusz Jablecki. The TSKŻ branch in Wrocław was represented by Mozes Szafranek and Leon Dratewka.

Jewish documentation as the Jewish Theatre) was a foregone conclusion. Perhaps this is why, when the ZG TSKŻ chairman Leopold Domb spoke about the theatre at the end of that year, his speech lacked even a hint of anxiety. The part of his statement devoted to theatre was definitely in the spiritual sphere: “The Jewish theatre has become one of those cultural factors that determine our Jewish life. [...] It teaches love for the Jewish nation, for its past”.¹²³ The speaker was only a little regretful that theatre, as a culture-creating institution, was too weakly linked to the socialist system and the ideology of so-called stabilisation in the 1960s, that the theatre lacked young actors, and that Jewish theatre only rarely gave performances in small centres.¹²⁴ This statement lacked only the information that there was a special place in the country where the State Jewish Theatre performed most often: in the very *Dom Kultury im. Estery Racheli Kamińskiej* in Wrocław. At that time, the building fulfilled a very important mission: it served to uphold Jewish culture and its development. An official of the Wrocław USW wrote to the Presidium of the Municipal National Council (PMRN) after an inspection in mid-1964: “The tradition of this division (of the Wrocław TSKŻ) may also include the well-known artistic Friday evenings held at the E. R. Kamińska House of Culture. Indeed, larger events are organised in the House of Culture”.¹²⁵ The building was also treated as a common good. It served not only the TSKŻ, Jewish artists, music and theatre groups (both professional and amateur), but the stage and rooms were rented to Polish theatres (the Dramatic and the Chochlik puppet theatre), minority organisations (Germans, Lithuanians, Greeks, Ukrainians) and Polish institutions and organisations (the building hosted, among others, district workshops for the Polish Post and Telecommunications, the Festival of Military Song and training sessions for the Fire Service Provincial Headquarters).¹²⁶ The guests, however, were from Wrocław. Perhaps this openness posed a real problem in the future for the TSKŻ and the Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture.

¹²³ Summary of L. Domba’s lecture.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, ordinances, reports, information, official notes, 1960–84, 1585/7197, p. 42. Report on the inspection carried out on 29 June to 3 July 1964 at TSKŻ, Wrocław branch.

¹²⁶ Kałużna, ‘Teatr żydowski’, p. 247.

It can be assumed that the activists of the Wrocław TSKŻ treated the steps taken by the Wrocław-Old Town District National Council as a pure formality, which brought to an end the proceedings concerning the theatre initiated back in January 1960. However, as the future was to show, the effectiveness of the Society's efforts and activities to date lay in the sphere of faith and hope. Less than (or perhaps as much as) four years passed from the official takeover of the building, when in February 1965 the Presidium of the Wrocław-Old Town District National Council initiated the next phase of disputes. Over the next several months, the TSKŻ was flooded with reports which all led to only one conclusion: the Society should be deprived of the theatre building. At this stage, the conflict was also a test of strength.¹²⁷

The Wrocław authorities, speaking openly against the TSKŻ, based their attacks on the 'Regulation on the change of certain rights to land into the right of perpetual usufruct or the usufruct of the Minister of Municipal Economy' of January 1962.¹²⁸ The Provincial National Council did not challenge the ministerial decision taken less than five months beforehand (12 August 1961), but it stated that the TSKŻ had not complied with the formalities. Here is a sample of the official party meticulousness: "The TSKŻ has not yet submitted an application for perpetual usufruct, so [...] there is no basis for the free use of the above-mentioned real estate". There was also a warning: "If the TSKŻ does not submit such an application, we will believe that it will therefore give up further use of the property".¹²⁹ There is no doubt that

¹²⁷ In the 1960s, the party withdrew from its more liberal nationalities policy, and the government's approach to the TSKŻ changed along with this trend. This could have been related to the ongoing 'nationalisation' of the personnel at the Ministry of the Interior. The model in which societies represented the interests of minorities was rejected, and they were ordered to implement the demands of the authorities. The positions of the party representatives operating in their ranks were strengthened, and proper 'ideological development' was taken care of. The TSKŻ was also subject to these processes. On the one hand, the activists of the society were quickly forced to return to the role of representing the party's interests in the Jewish community and ordered to combat all 'negative tendencies' (Zionism, nationalism, religiosity); and on the other hand, efforts were made to control the Jewish population to a greater extent than before. The stage of trust in the Jewish party activists had come to an end. For more see Szydzisz, *Spoleczność żydowska*, pp. 65–70.

¹²⁸ Regulation of the Minister of Municipal Economy of 26 January 1962 on the change of certain rights to land into the right of perpetual usufruct or usufruct, Dz.U. 1962, no. 15, item 67 (<http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19620150067>, accessed 2 February 2018).

¹²⁹ AIPN, Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland: legal status of the property in Wrocław, 5/7/9 Włodkowska Street and 28 Świdnicka Street, handed over for management and use, Protocol, decisions, appeal, resolution, contract, ciphertext, official notes, correspondence, 1961–69, 1585/7212, Letter of the Department of Communal and Housing Economy of the PRN in Wrocław to ZG TSKŻ in Warsaw, 24 February 1965, p. 5.

these top-down actions should have been taken in the TSKŻ's own interest. In practice, however, the Municipal National Council, as an institution operating within the law and working in the interests of its citizens, also failed to meet its obligations. The law and regulation issued by the head of the Ministry of Municipal Economy was recalled after a delay of only four years.

Meanwhile, the TSKŻ did everything to make up the shortcomings. Thus, letters on this case were sent, but the Department of Municipal and Housing Economy of the Ministry of National Education refused, using the key sentences: 'on [the TSKŻ's] failure to take over [the property] into perpetual usufruct', 'expiry of the right of use',¹³⁰ 'payment of rent [by the TSKŻ] in accordance with the applicable rates' and 'initiation of enforcement proceedings'.¹³¹ Regardless of this, the Wrocław authorities started looking for other arguments that would help close the case of the Jewish Cultural Centre. It was perhaps coincidence that the problem began to worsen, and that the attacks on TSKŻ went hand in hand with claims against the building from other Wrocław theatres. Other institutions became involved in the dispute: directly, the Cultural Department of the PMRN, and indirectly the Dramatic theatre and the Chochlik puppet theatre, which had previously rented rooms from the TSKŻ. The predominant view at that time was that of the PMRN departments that the TSKŻ was not using "the theatre building[...] as intended"¹³² because there was no theatre: the city should take the building over and hand it over to Polish cultural institutions.

There are also other threads in the inter-administrative correspondence from the mid-1960s. In a letter from the Wrocław-based WGKiM¹³³ to its counterpart in Warsaw, the question was asked: was the building granted to the State Jewish Theatre in Warsaw treated as compensation for the Wrocław theatre building?¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Ibid., Letter from the Department of Communal and Housing Economy of the Wrocław PRN to the ZG TSKŻ in Warsaw, 23 March 1965, p. 6.

¹³¹ Ibid., Letter from the Department of Municipal and Housing Economy of the Wrocław PRN to the Wrocław-Old Town District Board of Residential Buildings, 27 April 1965, p. 8.

¹³² Ibid., Letter from the Department of Municipal and Housing Economy of the Wrocław PRN to the ZG TSKŻ in Warsaw, 10 June 1965, p. 9.

¹³³ *Wydział Gospodarki Komunalnej i Mieszkaniowej* (Department of Municipal and Housing Economy).

¹³⁴ Ibid., Letter of the Presidium of the Capital City Council, Department of Municipal and Housing Economy in Warsaw to the Presidium of the National Council of the city of Wrocław, Internal Affairs Office, 10 August 1965, p. 11.

Most of the WGKiM's correspondence contained more or less critical assessments of the TSKŻ for charging (too high) fees from Polish theatres for renting the theatre rooms of the Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture. But there was a contradiction in this documentation. The top-line statement was: "The building is not being used as intended". Proof was demanded from the TSKŻ that the DTŻ/DK "had been built at the expense of all the resources and resources of the Jewish community": construction cost estimates, documentation of collection campaigns, cadastral maps, estimated data of the building's value.¹³⁵

In different, though equally critical terms, the position of the government in the Department of Culture of the National Heritage Board of Poland was justified: "The takeover of this building is important [...] in order to protect it against further decapitalisation. [...] The TSKŻ will never have sufficient funds to carry out a major renovation, but after this facility has been taken over, the appropriate amounts can be included in the [city] budget".¹³⁶ The opinion was rather subjective; that is, it was true to the extent that it met the expectations and needs of the client – the administrative authority. Undoubtedly, for several years the building had been heavily exploited by the artistic communities, both Jewish and Polish. As a public utility site, it had to be kept in proper condition. In the era of 'real socialism', this was a difficult undertaking. There was a shortage not only of funds, but also the necessary materials. Regardless of all the nuances, in 1965 there could be only one effect of the activities carried out by the Wrocław authorities: "They decided to take over the hall for the cultural needs of the city".¹³⁷

By the end of 1965, the PMRN in Wrocław might have felt as if it had finally closed the issue of the 'Jewish theatre' – under the influence of actions supported by appropriate argumentation – if not for the prosaic reality of political life, that is, the fact that the party had participated in this conflict. Officially, the PZPR was an impartial observer, but in practice (and behind the scenes) it was the arbiter and decision maker in the disputes which took place in 1960–66. Thanks to party pressure (and perhaps, back then, the Jewish activists' faith in internationalist

¹³⁵ Ibid., Letter of the Internal Affairs Office at the PRN of Wrocław to the Ministry of the Interior, Social and Administrative Department, 15 January 1966, pp. 12–14.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 11–14, Letter from the Office of the Interior of the Wrocław PRN to the Ministry of the Interior, Social and Administrative Department, 15 January 1966.

¹³⁷ Ibid., Note on the building of the Jewish theatre in Wrocław, January 1966, p. 16.

ideas), in January 1966 the Wrocław authorities took the TSKŻ's earlier efforts into account (starting in January 1960), and established a new legal status for the building at 28 Świdnicka Street in favour of the TSKŻ's Wrocław branch.¹³⁸ In March that year, its chairman, Brafman, officially thanked the Polish comrades during the Society's 5th Congress: "The local party and government bodies have evaluated the work of the Wrocław branch positively, and, especially recently, have provided a great deal of attention and help to the Society".¹³⁹

By the way, it is worth recalling again that the disputes in Wrocław between the PMRN and the TSKŻ had their source (at least initially) in an improper flow of information between them. The officials did not admit their guilt, although it turned out that it was their fault that the main addressees (the Municipal and Housing Economy Department in Wrocław and the Wrocław-Old Town District National Council) had no evidence in the case, specifically the documentation produced by the TSKŻ in 1960. It was only in mid-1966 that it turned out that the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw was aware of the subject, and that the documentation was in the possession of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Wrocław.¹⁴⁰ Even if the negligence on the part of the Ministry of the Interior/the Office of Internal Affairs was not deliberate, just as the failure by the TSKŻ's Wrocław branch to take appropriate actions was a consequence of the organisational mess, the protracted conflict was still a derivative of it. Leopold Domb aptly summarised this part of the theatre disputes. In 1966, during a meeting of the Wrocław branch of TSKŻ and the local secretary of the PZPR Provincial Committee, he said: "If the theatre is taken away from the Jews in Wrocław, it will be demolished. I am aware that there was no political ground for this, and that economic considerations prevailed. If the government were to measure its activity in financial measures, then we too are in deficit. The nationality policy cannot be counted with money".¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of the sessions for the period from 12 January 1966 to 21 December 1966, 8/28, Minutes of the 5th Congress of the TSKŻ held on 5 and 6 March 1966.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., Letter from the USW in Wrocław to the Ministry of the Interior in Warsaw, 21 May 1966, p. 18; also *ibid.*, Letter from the USW at Wrocław PRN to the Ministry of the Interior, Social and Administrative Department, 15 January 1966, p. 12.

¹⁴¹ AP Wr, KW PZPR, 74/XIV/35, Note from the meeting of the TSKŻ City Board in Wrocław with the Secretary of the KW PZPR, comrade J. Faleńczyk, 26 February 1966, pp. 25–26.

It is not known how the comrade secretary received these words, or how he responded to the manifestations of anti-Semitism mentioned during this meeting by Jewish comrades from Wrocław.¹⁴² It soon turned out, however, that the case of the Kamińska House of Culture in Wrocław had become associated with the ‘national policy’ of the Polish ‘patriots’.

Act Three

For the Jewish diaspora in Poland, the so-called stabilisation came to an end in mid-1967. This was due to factors including the outbreak of the Six-Day War (also known as the Third Israeli-Arab War or the June War), the Polish government’s announcement of its position (7 June), and in consequence (following the position of the USSR) the severing of diplomatic relations with Israel (12 June). This sequence of events was closed by Władysław Gomułka’s speech at the 6th Congress of Trade Unions (19 June), during which he demanded that Polish citizens of Jewish nationality adopt an unequivocal attitude towards the Middle East conflict.¹⁴³ The position of the PZPR’s general secretary was treated by many party comrades as a permission to take a harsher line (‘tighten the course’) in relation to the Jewish national minority in the People’s Republic of Poland.¹⁴⁴ The authorities returned to the practices used in 1949–53. In the UB’s reports about the current situation in the Wrocław voivodeship, there were words about Zionist propaganda being directed against the party, socialism and the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁵ At the turn of July

¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 23–24, 26–27; also: *ibid.*, Note from the meeting of the TSKŻ Party Group in Wrocław on 21 February 1966, p. 29.

¹⁴³ D. Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce. 1967–1968*, Warszawa 2000, p. 274.

¹⁴⁴ Selected literature on the events of 1967–8 include: J. Eisler, *Marzec 1968. Geneza, przebieg, konsekwencje*, Warszawa 1991; *id.*, *Polski rok 1968*, Warszawa 2006; Ł. Kamiński, ‘Sytuacja polityczna w latach 1957–1967’, in *Dolny Śląsk. Monografia historyczna*, ed. W. Wrzesiński, Wrocław 2006; *Marzec 1968. Trzydzieści lat później*, ed. M. Kula, P. Osęka, M. Zaremba, Warszawa 1968; P. Osęka, *Syjonisci, inspiratorzy, wicherzyciele. Obraz wroga w propagandzie marca 1968*, Warszawa 1999; W. Sęczyk, ‘Obraz Marca ’68 na Dolnym Śląsku w prasie lokalnej’, *Sobótka* 2001, no. 1; *id.*, *Marzec ’68 w publicystyce PRL. Studium z dziejów propagandy*, Wałbrzych 2009; *Spółeczność żydowska w PRL przed kampanią antysemitką lat 1967–1968 i po niej*, ed. G. Berendt, Warszawa 2009; W. Suleja, ‘Wrocław’, in *Oblicza Marca 1968*, ed. K. Rokicki, S. Stępień, Warszawa 2004; W. Suleja, *Dolnośląski marzec ’68*, Warszawa 2006; W. Suleja, ‘Dolnośląscy “syjonisci”’ [The Lower Silesian ‘Zionists’], *Plotkies Spring*, 2011, no. 47; J.Z. Wiszniewicz, *Z Polski do Izraela: rozmowy z pokoleniem ’68*, Warszawa 1992; *ead.*, *Życie przecięte. Opowieści pokolenia marca*, Wołowiec 2009.

¹⁴⁵ For more, see Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance Branch in Wrocław

1967, a wave of demands emerged from a low-ranking official from Wrocław's USW, (effectively) extorting the members of the TSKŻ's presidium of Wrocław to express 'full solidarity' with the position of the party and the Polish government on the assessment of the situation in the Middle East: "It is high time for [them] to make a clear and decisive statement, especially since most of them are members of the Polish United Workers' Party, and the position taken by the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, Comrade Gomułka, should be duly implemented by them".¹⁴⁶ It soon turned out that this was only a prelude to what was to happen in the first months of 1968.

Back in mid-September 1967, the chairman of the TSKŻ, Leopold Domb, hoped that the situation was under control. He was probably looking for the period of pressure to come to an end when he said: "In their talks with us, the party and state institutions have constantly emphasised their positive attitude towards the Society, towards its further existence and activities. This gives us faith that we will overcome all difficulties and hold onto all our achievements so far".¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, a few days before Domb's speech, the Wrocław-based USW had begun activities related to the issue of the 'Jewish theatre'. This started with a quarrel between TSKŻ activists and Zygmunt Spangilet, the 'director of the Jewish Theatre in Wrocław'.¹⁴⁸ A USW official urged the latter to cooperate more closely with the KW MO and collect materials incriminating Samuel Brafman (the TSKŻ's secretary in Wrocław) and Sznycer (the TSKŻ's chief accountant in Wrocław). He suggested that they were deriving material benefits from each event organised

(hereinafter: AIPN Wr), Reports on the activities of the 2nd Department, 053/1373, Report on the work of the 2nd Department of the Security Service of the KWMO in Wrocław for 1968 (secret special significance), pp. 91-93; also: Suleja, 'Dolnośląscy "syjoniści"'.
¹⁴⁶ AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, ordinances, reports, information, official notes, 1960-84, 1585/7197, Memo from an interview conducted by the head of the USW, M.Sc. J. Orzeszyna, with the chairman and secretary of the municipal branch of TSKŻ in Wrocław, comrades M. Szafranek and S. Brafman, on the Branch Board's adoption of a resolution condemning Israel's aggression against Arab countries, p. 53.

¹⁴⁷ AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland, meetings of divisional secretaries and party activists. Minutes, theses, information, official notes, 1585/7168, Report on the meeting of TSKŻ divisional secretaries on 18 September 1967, p. 6.

¹⁴⁸ AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, ordinances, reports, information, official notes, 1960-84, 1585/7197, Memo on the research carried out at the TSKŻ Branch in Wrocław, 13 September 1967, pp. 70-2.

in the 'theatre'. Applying such methods to the head of the Kamińska House of Culture was probably not very effective, since during a meeting with the case officer he said: "Obtaining up-to-date evidence [...] poses some difficulties, because the secretary and the accountant have extensive experience in this field, and formally they have maintained the documentation well".¹⁴⁹ Such activities were indirectly related to the increased surveillance of the Jewish community by the SB.¹⁵⁰

The fact that the authorities would soon launch a frontal attack on the Jewish community was best evidenced by a note which, at the same time, very unambiguously presented its position on the building at 28 Świdnicka Street, "[...] on the acquisition of real estate located in the city of Wrocław, allegedly owned by a social organisation, for your benefit".¹⁵¹ The author of the document, A. Szebeko, pointed out that the issue of the TSKŻ's 'alleged ownership' could be resolved on the basis of the 1962 regulation of the Council of Ministers on the transfer of land in cities and settlements.¹⁵² This is how he justified the purposefulness and effectiveness of the proceedings: "The transfer of real estate on the basis of [these] regulations is a very convenient way for the State to take over this real estate, as it ensures speed of action. The effectiveness of this action – in the event of disagreement on the part of the social organisation which owns the property – is assured".¹⁵³ He emphasised: "The rules for settling the value of real estate are also simple: compensation for land is determined as in the case of expropriation

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Official note from the survey carried out at the TSKŻ Branch in Wrocław, 13 September 1967, p. 71.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 70–72; see also: AIPN, Operational documentation on the People's Club at TSKŻ in Wrocław, 053/1480, Official note, Wrocław, 23 September 1966; AIPN Wr, Operational correspondence regarding Zionism, 053/1481, vol. 2, vol. 5, p. 30.

¹⁵¹ AIPN, Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland: legal status of the property in Wrocław, 5/7/9 Włodkowska Street and 28 Świdnicka Street, handed over for management and use, Protocol, decisions, appeal, resolution, contract, ciphertext, official notes, correspondence, 1961–69, 1585/7212, p. 20, 'Note to comrade director Z. Orłowski on the takeover of your real estate located in the city of Wrocław, allegedly owned by a social organisation', Warsaw, 16 November 1967.

¹⁵² Regulation of the Council of Ministers on the transfer of land in cities and housing estates, Dz.U. 1962, no. 35, item 159 (<http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19620350159>, accessed 2 February 2018).

¹⁵³ AIPN, Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland: legal status of the property in Wrocław, 5/7/9 Włodkowska Street and 28 Świdnicka Street, handed over for management and use. Protocol, decisions, appeal, resolution, contract, ciphertext, official notes, correspondence, 1961–69, 1585/7212, 'Note to comrade director Z. Orłowski on the takeover of your real estate located in the city of Wrocław, allegedly owned by a social organisation', Warsaw, 16 November 1967, p. 20.

of real estate, compensation for buildings is determined on the basis of their technical value minus the degree of wear. Both of these elements can be determined on the basis of the opinion of the voivodeship's experts for expropriation".¹⁵⁴ If these arguments could be treated as a plan of action, then only a pretext was needed to start the procedure of taking over the property. The reasons, methods and means of action were irrelevant: what mattered was their effect.

At the end of 1967, the Wrocław Municipal National Council did not remain passive either. More and more boldly, it demanded the transfer of other properties managed by the TSKŻ to the city, including the Jewish school, the boarding school, and the premises on Dubois Street.¹⁵⁵ Jakub Wasserstrum assessed the situation in which the Society found itself very clearly during the January meeting of the Wrocław branch's board: "The state is taking over a number of functions that the Society had previously performed".¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, he probably did not anticipate how this 'taking over' would end.

Meanwhile, against the background of the conflicts within the PZPR itself, between supporters of the liberalisation of social and political relations and their opponents, referred to as 'moczarowcy'¹⁵⁷ (who favoured the 'nationalisation' of the government), there was a radicalisation of attitudes. It soon turned out that a series of speeches made by students in Warsaw in March 1968 would form the pretext for an open fight between the party 'liberals' on one side and the 'moczarowcy' on the other. An article published in *Słowo Powszechne* and reprinted by *Wieczór Wrocławia* was another blow to the Jewish community. This publication clearly stated that the leaders of the events at the University of Warsaw came from the Babel Club.¹⁵⁸ The attack on Jewish students became a pretext to attack the entire Jewish community, known as the 'anti-Zionist campaign'.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings for the period from 2 January 1968 to November 1968, 8/30, Protocol no. 1 of the Presidium meeting of 2 January 1968; also: *ibid.*, Protocol no. 2 of the meeting of the Presidium of the TSKŻ Board of Directors of 9 and 10 January, 1968.

¹⁵⁶ AP Wr, KW PZPR, 74/XIV/35, Memo from a meeting held on 27 January 1968 at the TSKŻ branch in Wrocław, f. 39.

¹⁵⁷ A reference to Mieczysław Moczar (1913–86), a wartime partisan leader and subsequent senior Communist politician, who led an anti-Semitic campaign in March 1968 to weaken the authority of then First Secretary Władysław Gomułka.

¹⁵⁸ 'Do studentów Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego', *Wieczór Wrocławia* 12 March 1968, no. 61 (reprinted from *Słowo Powszechne*).

¹⁵⁹ For more see Stola, *Kampania antyżydowska*, pp. 145–88.

At that time, the sense of the continued existence of the TSKŻ was called into question many times, and as the Society looked for support in the party, it was forced to become more and more submissive to the authorities.¹⁶⁰ The latter (including the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party) avoided contacts with the Jewish community, and treated the TSKŻ itself in an instrumental fashion.¹⁶¹ Meetings only took place in exceptional circumstances. At that time, the representatives of the PZPR and the USW (Deputy Head of the Administrative Department of the Voivodship Committee (KW) of the PZPR K. Jaśnikowski, Senior Instructor of the Administrative Department of the PZPR KW A. Żelazny, and the head of the Social and Administrative Department of the USW E. Zadrożny) at the TSKŻ's meetings were not merely present, but also extremely active. However, their main, if not their only task, was to accuse the Society's representatives of insubordination: of not fulfilling its tasks, and thus of adopting a hostile attitude towards the party and the Polish state.¹⁶²

Such actions by the authorities, together with the atmosphere created at the same time, motivated the Polish side to participate in the fight for the Kamińska House of Culture. Party activists disavowed the 'unfavourable Jewish claims' that they were influencing the course of events in 1968.¹⁶³ On every occasion, they emphasised

¹⁶⁰ AP Wr, KW PZPR, 74/XIV/35, Resolution of the TSKŻ's Board of Directors in Wrocław, adopted on 30 March 1968, p. 73.

¹⁶¹ AP Wr, KW PZPR. Administrative Department, 74/XIV/18, Official note from the meeting of the Presidium of the Board of the TSKŻ's Wrocław Branch, 15 March 1968, pp. 41–45.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, Note on the meeting with the TSKŻ delegation in Wrocław, 25 March 1968, pp. 46–49. One accusation was that the Wrocław branch did not react properly to the protests by the students in Warsaw, and did not adopt a resolution in which it definitively disassociated itself 'from the Zionists and their troubling activities'. On 30 March 1968, the Board of the Wrocław Branch adopted such a resolution. In it, they sympathised with the position of the PZPR leadership, condemned Israel's aggressive policy, and emphasised that from the very beginning the Society had opposed nationalism and fought against Zionism (AP Wr, KW PZPR, 74/XIV/35, Copy of the resolution of the TSKŻ Board in Wrocław adopted on 30 March 1968, pp. 34–35; also *ibid.*, Letter from the Administrative Department of the Provincial Committee to the Administrative Department of the Central Committee of the PZPR, 6 April 1968; p. 33; AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, ordinances, reports, information, official notes, 1960–84, 1585/7197, Resolution of the Management Board of the TSKŻ in Wrocław adopted on 30 March 1968, p. 73.

¹⁶³ AIPN Wr, Reports on the activities of the 2nd Division, 053/1373, pp. 91–93, Report on the activities of the 2nd Division of the Security Service of the KWMO in Wrocław for 1968 (secret special significance); also W. Rozenbaum, 'Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce, 1967–1968', in *Plotkies*, January 2004, no. 18; Suleja, 'Dolnośląscy "syjoniści"'.

that the events related to this case had nothing to do with anti-Semitism. As in previous such skirmishes, the party representatives officially demonstrated their impartiality. However, it may be suspected that each side had already been allotted its role. The representatives of the administration from the first half of the 1960s were replaced by the party press in 1968. The party comrades treated the reports by investigative journalists from Wrocław's *Wiadomości* (Jerzy Drużycki), *Słowo Polskie* (Zofia Frąckiewicz) and *Wieczor Wrocławia* (Tadeusz Emerling) as the voice of the people's tribunes speaking on behalf of the Wrocław public. This may come as a surprise, because the actual source of all the press sensations, reports and discoveries of the 'deeper truth' were people either originating from the party or subordinate to it: PZPR activists and officials.

The editors of Wrocław's newspapers dressed the history of the theatre building in clothing tailored to the current needs. So they wrote that the takeover (and not the reconstruction) of the theatre building by Jewish organisations in the second half of the 1940s was unfounded. They treated it as a desire to appear in public life forced through by the Jews, and an expression of that community's megalomania, as if they were completely unaware of the enthusiasm with which the regional newspapers had originally reported the creation of something new in multicultural Wrocław – a Jewish theatre – and as if they were unaware of the support with which the Wrocław authorities and political parties had supported the Jewish activities; in addition, they rejected the idea that the Lower Silesian public, including many Poles, had participated in these activities. They emphasised that for years the building had been administered (deliberately omitting the term 'used') by the TSKŻ, and expressed regret that the society had been its legal owner since 1966, which was perhaps the only objective formulation. The others were rather subjective. Like a mantra, it was repeated that TSKŻ had not run a theatre company for years, so continuing to own a theatre building was at least debatable. The authors were outraged that the building had not been renovated for several years: "At 28 Świdnicka Street you can hear the constant creaking of old, uncomfortable chairs. This theatre is an old, unmodernised room. The equipment of the room and its backstage are even worse".¹⁶⁴ In addition, the

¹⁶⁴ Z. Frąckiewicz, 'Kamienicznik', *Słowo Polskie* 1968, no. 96, p. 2.

information about the incredible benefits had TSKŻ derived from subletting theatrical rooms was always provided in the form of an accusation, while at the same time the Society was blamed for not undertaking renovation work: “The TSKŻ itself, despite having millions of funds in the recent past, has never tried; the building, without renovation, will soon turn into a ruin”.¹⁶⁵ In this stream of words, the authors showed no ability to assess the TSKŻ’s activities regarding the Kamińska House of Culture more objectively.

The administrative authorities were also accused of cancelling TSKŻ’s debt for the period before obtaining the right of perpetual usufruct, as well as failing to fight for a proper place for Polish theatres in Wrocław. Sometimes the authors of these articles allowed themselves to be exceptionally independent – in all cases they used the word ‘*kamienicznik*’ [a pejorative expression for a tenement house], which in the era of real socialism functioned as an offensive epithet. All these negative clichés allowed the Polish audience to get to know the enemy: the rich, Jewish institution of the TSKŻ. The conclusions of the editorial teams were intended to be indisputable for Polish readers: “The city’s explanations are too obvious for anyone to refute them with the most hypocritical attacks and accusations of anti-Semitism”.¹⁶⁶

In the turbulent period from March to May 1968, the topic of the ‘Jewish theatre’ was often a topic for discussion at the meetings of the TSKŻ’s Presidia in both Warsaw and Wrocław.¹⁶⁷ By a strange coincidence (?), on the same day, 9 May 1968, all the parties to the dispute independently adopted a position or took binding decisions. The TSKŻ’s Board of Directors of the Wrocław branch sent a letter to its sister body in Warsaw: “Due to the numerous articles in the Wrocław press, stating that the TSKŻ’s Board of Directors in Wrocław should transfer the ownership title to the building of the E.R. Kamińska House of Culture in Wrocław to the city [...] we ask [you] to adopt a quick position on this matter”.¹⁶⁸ At the same time, the Presidium of the TSKŻ’s Board of Directors in Warsaw sent

¹⁶⁵ ‘Teatr odzyskany dla miasta’ [Theatre regained for the city], *Wiadomości* 1968, no. 16, p. 4.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ ATSKŻ Wa, ZG TSKŻ, 8/30.

¹⁶⁸ AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, orders, reports, information, official notes, 1960–84, 1585/7197, Letter from the TSKŻ branch in Wrocław to the TSKŻ ZG in Warsaw, 9 May 1968, p. 83.

a letter to the Wrocław PMRN informing about the “waiver of the ownership right to E.R. Kamińska House of Culture in Wrocław, for the benefit of the city”.¹⁶⁹ On the same day, at a meeting of the Wrocław-Old Town PDRN, resolution no. 145/159/68 was adopted: “The perpetual usufructuary is not using the property in a manner consistent with its intended use, and so there is no basis for maintaining the existing condition, and in accordance with the above-mentioned regulations, the perpetual usufruct contract should be dissolved in this case”.¹⁷⁰ A month later, another discreet participant in the previous struggle – the SB – joined in. One of its Wrocław employees, Capt. Stanisław Newel, proudly wrote in his report: “As a result of the inspiration of the press, and the reports of party-administrative factors about the irregularities in the management by the TSKŻ of the building of the Jewish Theatre at 28 Świdnicka Street, a resolution of the Wrocław-Old Town DRN was adopted, as a result of which the TSKŻ has been deprived of its perpetual usufruct, and the building handed over to the city”.¹⁷¹

Conclusion

Who played their part best in this nineteen-year-old show? Who turned out to be the winner, and who was the loser? Certainly, the party and its tame press showed their strength. But did their victory also prove the weakness of the Jewish community? Probably not. It was proof that the idea of internationalism had been

¹⁶⁹ ATSKŻ Wa, ZG TSKŻ, 8/30, Protocol no. 13 from the meeting of the Presidium of the ZG TSKŻ of 9 May 1968, unpaginated.

¹⁷⁰ AIPN, Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland, legal status of the property in Wrocław, 5/7/9 Włodkowica Street and 28 Świdnicka Street handed over for management and use. Protocol, decisions, appeal, resolution, agreement, ciphertext, official notes, correspondence, 1961–69, 1585/7212, Resolution no. 145/159/68, Wrocław-Old Town PDRN of 9 May 1968, p. 27; also AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, ordinances, reports, information, official notes, 1960–84, 1585/7197, p. 74, Letter from the Wrocław PRN USW to the Social and Administrative Department at the Interior Ministry in Warsaw, 18 May 1968.

¹⁷¹ AIPN, Materials on the March events in Wrocław and the actions taken in connection with them by the Security Service, 53/565, vol. 2, Assessment of some aspects of the security situation in the Wrocław voivodship and the countermeasures undertaken for the period 1 March – 6 June 1968 by the group to combat Zionism, 6 June 1968, p. 11; see also *ibid.*, Operational assessment of creative circles and mass media institutions, 6 June 1968, p. 15. The latter document indicates how the SB guided the work of the *Wiadomości* weekly: “[The periodical] portrayed the attitudes and activities of specific people and institutions. The repercussions of these articles found a response in a wide range of public opinion as well as among the relevant authorities; one of their effects was to restore the building previously occupied by the TSKŻ to the city”.

sacrificed on the altar of party interests and in the name of national values. A few weeks after this total victory, in June 1968, the PMRN handed over the buildings of the Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture to the Wrocław drama theatres. Since then, the theatre building at 28 Świdnicka Street has been home to the Chamber Stage (*Scena Kameralna*). Since the end of 1990, the *Teatr Polski* has been its perpetual user. In 2005, a memorial plaque was unveiled to remind the people of Ida Kamińska. There is no mention of the Esther Rachela Kamińska Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre, nor about the Cultural Centre under the same patronage. Therefore, the question of whether this is tangible evidence of historical justice will probably remain unresolved.

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SUMMARY

The fate of the Jewish theatre building was very turbulent. From the very beginning, its existence depended on the authorities' nationality policy and the current interests of the Polish United Workers' Party. The building – which was reconstructed on the ruins of a former German cinema in the late 1940s, thanks to the efforts of Jewish political and social organisations, as well as Jewish financial resources – not only served to maintain Jewish culture. At the same time, it was treated as a meeting place for acquaintances and friends, so in a sense it maintained a communal, Jewish identity. This does not mean that the Jews treated it as a bastion or as proof of their separateness. On the contrary, Poles also used this centre. As a result, it fulfilled universal functions: it was intended to unite, not divide. However, in the second half of the 1960s, during the deepening socio-political and economic crisis, the case of the Jewish theatre building was used as a pretext to fight for the interests of Poles against an imaginary enemy – the assimilated Jewish population. The authorities wanted to show their strength and distract society from real problems. They took away the theatre – but the crisis continued.

KEYWORDS

anti-Semitism • politics • culture • theatre • Polish and Jewish institutions
in Wrocław • KW PZPR • WKŻ • TSKŻ • MRN • Estera Rachela Kamińska
Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre • Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture



REVIEWS
POLEMICS

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JOSHUA D. ZIMMERMAN, *POLSKIE PAŃSTWO PODZIEMNE
I ŻYDZI W CZASIE II WOJNY ŚWIATOWEJ*
BY WYDAWNICTWO NAUKOWE PWN SA, WARSZAWA 2018,
ISBN: 9788301196868, PP. 623*

After numerous announcements and a very long wait, the Polish version¹ of a book that Cambridge University Press published in English three years ago² has finally arrived. This publication has been issued under the patronage of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Let us add at once that the title of the Polish edition – *Polskie Państwo Podziemne i Żydzi w czasie II wojny światowej* [The Polish Underground State and the Jews during World War II] – differs significantly from the English original. The Polish Underground State is a narrower concept than ‘the Polish Underground’, something which probably has not been given the attention it deserves.

The book’s author is presented to the Polish reader as “a specialist in relations between Jews and other nationalities in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe

* J.D. Zimmerman, *Polskie Państwo Podziemne i Żydzi w czasie II wojny światowej*, trans. M. Macińska, academic editor M. Rusiniak-Karwat, reviewer Prof. Dr. hab. J. Żyndul, Warszawa: PWN, 2018.

¹ As the author maintains, the Polish version is ‘improved and updated’ in relation to the English edition (‘Od autora’, p. 7).

² J.D. Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945*, Cambridge University Press 2015.

at the end of the 19th and 20th centuries”, and a professor of history and a lecturer at Yeshiva University in New York.

The work under review consists of an introduction, fourteen chapters and an ending. The goals that the author set himself when writing the book are laid out as early as page 7 (of the Polish edition; the further mentions are referring to the Polish edition as well): “I wrote this work with the intention of presenting an impartial and thoroughly documented picture of the relations between the Polish Underground State and the Jews during World War II. I wanted the conclusions to arise only from the analysis of the documents cited”.³ Let us keep this statement about ‘the analysis of the documents’ in mind, because it is crucial to any evaluation of Joshua D. Zimmerman’s book.

In the Introduction (pp. 13–25), the author reviews the ‘historiography’ (pp. 17–25), focusing the reader’s attention on the publications of a selected group of historians. The ‘nationalist school historians’ mentioned in footnote 33 on page 22⁴ are only referred to by their names. In order to learn more about their views, the reader is referred to an article by Joanna B. Michlic from 2007. Rhetorically, one might ask: have these ‘historians of the nationalist school’ not written anything since then? Have they not published at all? Prof. Zimmerman discusses the achievements of other historians and journalists in great detail.

Unfortunately, neither the ‘Introduction’ nor the rest of the book (see below) are free from errors. As early as page 15 we learn that “The Polish Underground’s military wing – the Home Army – was the largest resistance movement in German-occupied Poland”. No! The Home Army was not a ‘resistance movement’: it was part of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland. Further (p. 22, fn. 32), the author writes that the Commander of the Home Army, General Tadeusz Komorowski, “allowed the Nowogródek District of the Home Army to exclude Jews from its ranks”. This is untrue. It is one thing to ‘exclude’ (ban, remove) someone from the ranks, and quite another not to accept new people into, for example, a partisan unit.

³ The translator of this article wishes to note that this version has been prepared with the aid of a copy of Zimmerman’s English-language original; however, it has not been possible to locate direct quotations therein of every citation given in this essay.

⁴ This group includes Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, Bogdan Musiał, Tomasz Strzembosz, and Marek Wierzbicki. Let us also add that apart from three publications by Prof. Strzembosz (the last from 2000), no studies by the other three historians can be found in the ‘Selective Bibliography’.

Considering the above, it is difficult to take seriously the author's proclamation on page 25, where he baldly states: "This publication's historical sources have been subject to critical analysis, including: normative documents from the ZWZ-AK [*Związek Walki Zbrojnej-Armia Krajowa*, the Union for Armed Struggle – Home Army], the press published by the Polish Underground State, as well as the accounts and memories of Holocaust survivors".

After the introduction, in the first chapter⁵ the author discusses the 'Jewish question' in Polish politics in the years 1936–39 (pp. 27–58). In the 'Summary' of this chapter, he also presents his admittedly quite original concept of the events of September 1939. He writes as follows: "In September 1939, the Polish president, the commander-in-chief of the Polish Armed Forces, and government ministers fled the country. [*sic*] For the remainder of World War II, the official Polish authorities abroad and in the underground would be drawn almost entirely from the leaders of the prewar opposition" (p. 58).

The body of Zimmerman's study consists of two parts. The first (pp. 59–134), entitled in the Polish edition 'The Polish Underground and the Jews during the German-Soviet Occupation⁶ (1939–1941)' consists of two chapters. The second⁷ is devoted to discussing the creation of the 'Polish resistance movement' from September 1939 to June 1941 (pp. 61–107).⁸ The author's acceptance of this timeframe raises doubts. The formation of the Polish Underground State's structures was completed by early December 1940. Judging by the title of the entire first part, we can guess that Prof. Zimmerman wanted to present the 'Polish resistance movement' – that is, in fact, the Polish underground ('the Polish Resistance Movement' in the English edition) from the beginning of its existence until the outbreak of the German-Soviet war in June 1941 (when the entire

⁵ In the English edition, this chapter was placed in the first part of the book, but it was excluded from this part in the Polish edition. As a result of this, the Polish version follows this order: Introduction, Chapter I, Part I (including chapters 2 and 3), Part II with 11 chapters (from 4 to 14), Conclusion. This construction is really strange.

⁶ In the English-language original, this part is entitled 'The Polish Underground and the Jews during the German-Soviet Partition, 1939–1941'.

⁷ The book chapters are numbered in continuity, so although this is the first chapter in this section, it appears numerically as the second.

⁸ Let us add that the title of Chapter 2 on page 61 reads: 'September 1936!' There are many more similar mistakes: it is enough to mention that in the Polish edition of the book by Prof. Zimmerman gives January 1944 as the moment of dissolution of the Home Army. See p. 6 in the Table of Contents.

territory of the Second Polish Republic came under German occupation). In chapter 3, entitled ‘The Polish Underground State and the Jews (October 1939 – June 1941)’ (pp. 108–34), the author outlines the process of how the attitude of the leaders of the Polish underground towards the situation of the Jews changed during the war’s initial phase.

Part II of Prof. Zimmerman’s book (pp. 135–522), entitled ‘The Polish Underground State and the Jews Under Nazi Rule (1941–1945)’, consists of eleven chapters, each of which is presented chronologically covering the period of 1941–45, from the ghettoisation process to the dissolution of the Home Army in January 1945. The author made an exception to his chronological approach for three chapters bearing the following titles: ‘The Home Army Turns Its Guns on the Jews’ (pp. 377–420), ‘Institutional Aid of the Polish Underground to the Jews’ (pp. 421–45) and ‘Individual Aid of the Polish Underground to the Jews’ (pp. 446–78).

As mentioned earlier, Zimmerman’s work unfortunately contains a significant number of errors. These are of varying natures, as they include both factual errors of a schoolboy level as well as distortions and serious substantive and interpretational errors resulting from an incorrect analysis of the sources. On the sidelines of this statement, a fundamental question arises: how many errors in a supposedly academic work does it take for this work to cease being academic? Several obvious mistakes regarding, for example, the date of Poland’s rejection of the German demands, the organisation of the Polish government in France, and the function of General Stefan Rowecki in 1940–41 are included in Chapter 2.

These detailed remarks pale in relation to what the author, translator, academic editor and the Polish academic (as it seems) publisher PWN have included on page 67!

| English edition: <i>The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945</i> , p. 40: | Polish edition: <i>The Polish Underground State and Jews during World War II</i> , p. 67: |
|---|--|
| Polish military losses amounted to 71,500 dead and 133,700 wounded. [...] In addition, German forces took 420,000 Polish soldiers as prisoners. | 7150 Polish soldiers were killed and 133,700 were wounded. [...] Moreover, the Germans took 420 Polish prisoners of war. |

Reading the above passages gives a depressing impression. Neither the translator nor the academic editor seem to have bothered to check anything.

A particular number of errors, of various kinds, concern the territorial organisation of the ZWZ-AK, the armed wing of the Polish Underground State. This mass of shortcomings leads to the quite simple conclusion that Prof. Zimmerman does not have any broader knowledge of the Home Army structures whose activities he discusses.

There are several factual errors in Chapter 3, which is less than 30 pages long. These concern both the organisation of the ZWZ (pp. 123–24) and the *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (Information Bulletin) (pp. 128–29), as well as the commander of the ZWZ's Vilnius District (p. 126). Regarding the first point, it should be emphasised that this organisation was made up of six Areas (and not districts, as the author writes on page 123⁹), then a dozen or so Districts (a District was more or less equivalent to a pre-war province – voivodeship), and finally over 200 counties [*obwód* = powiat]. The Home Army was headed by a Commander [*Dowódca*], and not the 'Commander-in-Chief [*Główny Komendant*] of the Home Army'. This description is all the more surprising as the author states that the deputy of the 'Commander-in-Chief' was indeed 'Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff' [*Zastępca dowódcy i szef sztabu*]. Another of the author's claims, including political parties in a strictly military organisation, appears equally incomprehensible. We must point out that – contrary to Zimmerman's claims – the National Party [*Stronnictwo Narodowe*] was not the 'nationalist wing' of the ZWZ.

I must also highlight the author's reprehensible practice of untruthfully assigning high positions in the underground to various people. Let us mention such figures as Franciszek Jusiel (allegedly the commander of the Home Army's Vilnius District) and Michał Borwicz (allegedly the commander of the Home Army's Miechów county). Borwicz never held any such position. This is an incomprehensible mistake. After all, in the publication *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* [Night without End: The Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland] it is clearly written (vol. 2, p. 17) that Borwicz was active in the structures of the PPS-WRN [*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna – Wolność, Równość, Niepodległość*; the Polish Socialist

⁹ Interestingly, in the English-language edition (p. 81) the author uses the terms 'six geographical regions' and 'four regions'. It should therefore be assumed that these 'districts' only appear in the Polish translation. This again casts both the translator and the academic editor in a bad light.

Party – Freedom, Equality, Independence]; it then adds (p. 125) that at the end of 1943 he appeared in the Miechów *powiat* and... led the combat unit of the PPS-WRN People's Guard. Subsequently, it can be mentioned that Abraham Melezin (Adam Melżyński [Melzynski?]) was allegedly responsible for the 'area of western Lida' in the Home Army, and his direct commander was Capt Eustachy Chrzanowski. All that is known about this officer is that he was the head of the Military District Court in Lida in the years 1926–32.

The above-mentioned 'mistakes' pale in significance in relation to what the author has written on page 126. He stated that in January 1941 the commander of the ZWZ District Vilnius was 'Anna'! Every Polish historian¹⁰ who has at least a little interest in the period of World War II and the Polish underground knows well that 'Anna' was the codename of the ZWZ communications base in Stockholm! It was through the 'Anna' base that, at least for a time, the reports from the Polish underground structures in the north-eastern borderlands of what had been the Second Polish Republic were conveyed. We should clarify here that the claim that this 'Anna' was commander of the ZWZ District in Vilnius is not found in the English edition (p. 83).

In the subchapter on the creation of a Jewish office in the Home Army's Headquarters, and more specifically at its Information and Propaganda Office [*Biuro Informacji i Propagandy*, hereinafter: BIP] (pp. 178–82), there is a diagram entitled 'The Home Army's main structure, including the department for Jewish aid, 1944'. This diagram demonstrates Prof. Zimmerman's failure to grasp the nature of how the Polish Underground State was organised. The diagram shows that the Department of Press and Information was subordinate to Division VI of the BIP of the Home Army HQ. The author is in substantial error here. The Department of Information and Press was one of the dozen or so departments of the Office of the Government Delegate for Poland, and was at no time subordinate to Division VI of the BIP of the Home Army HQ.¹¹ Further errors in this diagram can be listed. There was no 'Subsection Z', but there was a 'Subdivision Z'. This included the 'Z 3' section, which dealt with national minority issues (Lithuanian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Jewish, Russian issues). It was

¹⁰ With the exceptions of Dr. Martyna Rusiniak-Karwat and Prof. Jolanta Żyndul.

¹¹ It is difficult to understand where such an error came from: after all, the author included the Information and Press Department in his diagram of the Government Delegate (p. 253). One explanation comes to mind: Prof. Zimmerman has no control over the material.

within this department that the sub-department of Jewish affairs functioned from February 1942. There was no 'Military-Historical Office' [*Biuro Wojskowo-Historyczne*] in the BIP, but there was a Military Historical Office [*Wojskowe Biuro Historyczne*]. In his Summary of Part I of the book, the author states (p. 133): "ZWZ-AK intelligence reported accurate descriptions of the deteriorating conditions of the Jews in the period under examination". The problem is that the vast majority of the information quoted did not come from 'ZWZ-AK intelligence', but was contained in analyses of the information (press) services of both the ZWZ (BIP) and the civilian division of the Polish Underground State. This strange fascination with 'ZWZ intelligence' is present throughout the work under discussion.

There are also discernible lacunae in Prof. Zimmerman's book in understanding (and then scholarly describing) the principles underlying the production and circulation of documentation within the Home Army and the Underground State's structures. The researcher does not distinguish between the various types of documents: *sprawozdanie* (account), *raport* (report), *meldunek organizacyjny* (organisational dispatch), *instrukcja* (instruction), or *rozkaz* (order). These are all as one to him – but the differences between them are fundamental. For example, he writes (p. 162) that "the London government's Council of Ministers received a report from the Polish ambassador to Soviet Russia, Stanisław Kot, dated November 25, 1941, entitled 'News from the Homeland'"! At the same time, in footnote 97, he refers to a specific document from the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London (PRM 45c, pp. 53–56). One needs only refer to this document to see that it was produced by the Ministry of Information and Documentation in London on 25 November 1941, and is clearly entitled 'From the Roman-Vatican office of the Min. of Inf. and Doc.' [*Z placówki rzymsko-watykańskiej Min. Inf. i Dok.*] – not from Ambassador Kot in the USSR, but from the local Polish mission in Rome. Such an error leads to the conclusion that the author has no control over the material he has collected. Nor does he display any knowledge of the organisation of the Polish authorities in London, or their subordinate Polish institutions in Europe and around the world more broadly. In turn, on pages 189–90 he writes about the report from the BIP of the Home Army HQ from January 1942. The most interesting are the findings that the author has made regarding the statement that the above 'report' was drawn up in sub-department 'P' of the BIP: here in footnote 72, the reader is referred to Marek Ney-Krwawicz's publication on the Home Army HQ,

and not to Grzegorz Mazur's book on the BIP. In addition, the monograph on the BIP by Prof. G. Mazur is mentioned by the author in the 'Selective Bibliography', but I dare say that he has not read it.

Another serious breach is the repeated invocation of an alleged order by the Home Army Commander General Komorowski of 26 August 1943: let us add that the author does not indicate here any archive in which this order might be located.

Another problem is the Professor's lack of knowledge about the organisation and functioning of radio communications between the Polish Underground State and the Polish authorities in London. Hence, in the text of the book, we encounter such 'mistakes' as alleged dispatches from Tadeusz Myśliński¹² or Wanda Kraszewska-Anczewicz, while in fact these were dispatches from Stefan Korboński ('Nowak'), sent from the Government Delegate's radio station codenamed 'Lena'. In footnote 49 on page 270, Prof. Zimmerman refers to a dispatch from Warsaw of 18 March 1943 to Stanisław Mikołajczyk, whose author he names as... Wanda Kraszewska-Anczewicz! He writes on page 284, both in the body of the text and in footnote 114, about an alleged message from Myśliński to London of 29 January 1943. To explain these fundamental errors, we must refer to the original English-language edition, where with regard to the first case it was explained (on page 189 in footnote 45) that this was a dispatch from 'Lena'. In this particular situation, 'Lena' is not a pseudonym for Kraszewska-Anczewicz; it is the code name of radio station 46, which was the radio station of the Government Delegate for Poland. Regarding the second case, the answer is to be found on page 200 (English-language edition) in footnote 107. It is a message signed 'N' – that is, 'Nowak'. So it is referring to Korboński, the head of the Directorate of Civil Resistance [*Kierownictwo Walki Cywilnej*, hereinafter: KWC]. This is dispatch 8 of 29 January 1943, which was read at the Ministry of the Interior in London on 5 February. The dispatch was actually sent on 4 February by station 43 (KWC), and received in London at 17.40 via station 39 (of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych*, hereinafter: MSW). Such mistakes indicate a kind of 'carelessness' on the author's part.

The same type of error recurs on page 262, both in the body of the text and in footnote 20. According to the author, on 1 January 1943, the Jewish National Committee

¹² As an aside, the author does not mention Myśliński's arrest by the Germans on 13 May 1943. He also fails to mention that between March and May 1943 at least six employees of the Security Cell in the Government Delegate's Department of Internal Affairs were arrested.

[*Żydowski Komitet Narodowy*, hereinafter: ŻKN] sent a dispatch (?) to Kraszewska-Ancerewicz! Nothing raised the Professor's curiosity here: why should the ŻKN's leadership, located in Warsaw, send a telegram to Kraszewska-Ancerewicz – who was also in Warsaw at the same time? From the ending of this message as cited by the author, it is clear that it is referring to 'spark (*iskrówka*) no. 15' (dispatch 15) – which was already published years before.¹³ And it is easy to establish that it is a dispatch from the ŻKN addressed through the Government Delegate and Mikołajczyk to Stephen Wise, Goldman and others in New York.¹⁴ The text of the dispatch is kept *inter alia* in the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw (*Archiwum Akt Nowych*; AAN, 202/I-7, p. 4). As it is published, there is no need to send the reader to the archives, either in Warsaw or in London.

Also on page 262 in footnote 19 the author states, wrongly, that this is a letter or a dispatch (?), from the ŻKN to Piekalkiewicz! By the way, the Government Delegate Jan Piekalkiewicz had the pseudonym 'Wernic'. Therefore, footnote 17 on page 262 should read 'to Wernic' (*do Wernica*) – and not as written, 'to Wernica' (*do Wernicy*) – an error in Polish grammar.

On page 309, the author writes about the first dispatches from the underground about the beginning of the uprising in the ghetto, and highlights dispatches 70 (of 20 April) and 71 (of 21 April) from Korboński. At the same time, he makes a very strange distinction: dispatch 70 was to be addressed "to the Prime Minister's office", while dispatch 71 was "to the radio station 'Świt' [Dawn]". Stefan Korboński had no direct radio communication either with the 'Prime Minister's office' or with 'Świt'. Korboński's dispatches, as well as those of the Government Delegate, were sent to those radio stations controlled by the Radio Centre of the Ministry of the Interior; and only from there, after decryption (not after reading, as the author writes on p. 314) were they passed on to the Prime Minister or other institutions, organisational units, etc. Neither of the two dispatches mentions the addressees.

¹³ *Ten jest z Ojczyzny mojej. Polacyz pomocą Żydom 1939–1945*, ed. W. Bartoszewski, Z. Lewinówna, Warszawa 2007, p. 715.

¹⁴ Prof. Zimmerman's claim that the ŻKN "strongly rebuked the Polish Underground State" in this message, is scandalous. The dispatch was directed to Jewish leaders in the USA (the Arbeter Ring and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) and it was to them that the words in the message applied: "You have not helped us. Speak up. This is our last appeal to you".

On page 318, the author writes incorrectly that allegedly the Government Delegate, in a dispatch of 28 April, estimated the German losses at 1000 killed and wounded. But this estimate of the German losses came not from the Government Delegate, but from Leon Fajner ('Berezowski') and Adolf Berman ('Borowski'). This dispatch was published in the second volume of the 'Home Army's 1939–1945 documents' (*Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945*), which Zimmerman writes about in footnote 94. So why this mistake?

As long as we are already considering the issue of radio communications from the Polish Underground State, it is worth submitting a request to those historians who write about the Holocaust and the Polish reactions to it. A comparison of the dispatches sent by the Government Delegate, the Commander of the Home Army, Korboński (KWC) and the Jewish organisations should be made. The dispatches of the Jewish organisations (the Bund, ŻKN, etc.) were sent by radio stations of the Polish Underground State, and it was not necessary to repeat the same information in additional messages. The content of the Jewish organisations' dispatches was known to both the Government Delegate and the Home Army Commander in Poland, and to the Polish authorities in London.

We must also remember that the radio operators were among the soldiers and employees of the Polish Underground State who were most assiduously hunted by the Germans. It is enough to quote here, following a dispatch sent to London on 1 December 1943, some figures on the losses suffered by civilian radio stations: on 10 November, the radio operator of station 50 (KWC) was arrested; on 11 November, the radio-telegraphist of station 58 (KWC) was shot; on 30 November, a radio operator from the People's Party (*Stronnictwo Ludowe, SL*) station was discovered. It should be added that in all these cases the radio stations devices themselves were also lost. The Home Army also suffered similar losses. It is enough to quote the data provided by General Stefan Rowecki in June 1942. According to them, eight people and four radio stations were lost, which resulted in a significant reduction in the number of dispatches broadcast.

The author's lack of familiarity with the structures and personnel of the Home Army makes it difficult for him to describe events properly. On page 385 we have a description based on Melezin's account of "a grouping of county commanders and junior commanders" in Lida in spring 1943. Ludwikowski was apparently

the commander of this 'grouping' (?), writes Prof. Zimmerman, and despite referring a few pages earlier to the book by the Commander of the Home Army District, he did not bother to try to at least identify this 'Ludwikowski'. In this case, he is most likely referring to Capt Józef Lubikowski, who in the years 1942–4 was chief of sappers at the District Command of the Home Army. On page 399, the author quotes an excerpt from Karolina Kremer's account from the spring of 1944: "Once I went out into the field [...] I was met by someone in a Home Army uniform..."; without calling the account into question, one may nevertheless ask: what did this 'Home Army uniform' look like?

Aside from the considerations on the structures of the Underground State and the Home Army, it is necessary to mention how Prof. Zimmerman describes the history of the Polish Workers' Party [*Polska Partia Robotnicza*, PPR] and its subsidiary, the People's Guard [*Gwardia Ludowa*, GL]. As early as page 16, the Professor of the Yeshiva University in New York states revealingly that "the underground forces of the Communist Polish Workers' Party (PPR) remained independent throughout the war": yes, the Professor really did write something like that. He only forgot to add that the PPR was independent of the Polish Underground State, but had been called into existence by the Kremlin, and for the whole time, including after the war, was completely dependent on it.

As an introduction to the main part of chapter five ("The Polish Underground's Initial Response to the Nazi Final Solution [of the Jewish Question], pp. 171–216), the author writes about the establishment of the Polish Workers' Party (p. 172). He titles the first subsection 'Rise of the Polish Worker's Party (PPR), January 1942', although the main text speaks of January 1941 which is a significant difference. Most importantly and most sadly, Zimmerman falsely presented the process of this party's creation. He showed a lack of elementary knowledge about the aims and circumstances behind the creation of this political formation. The scale of the simplifications here is shocking, and it is difficult to comment properly on the statement that "The establishment of the PPR is associated with two Polish Communists who were parachuted from the Soviet Union into occupied Poland on the night of 27/28 December 1941", (p. 172). In this fragment of Zimmerman's book there is not a word about Stalin's actions and intentions towards Poland, nor about these 'two Communists' dependence on Moscow (I omit the occurrence that in fact – as is common knowledge in Poland – there were not just two of them), or about the so-called 'initiative

group' [*grupa inicjatywna*].¹⁵ The description of the events was presented in this way, and no other, perhaps because Prof. Zimmerman did not take the effort to research the rich literature on the history of the Polish Workers' Party (see below).

There are more errors in the text about the PPR. Here is another example. On page 172 the author states that the Polish Workers' Party created 'its own armed wing' – the People's Guard [*Gwardia Ludowa*, GL] – in March 1942, while on the next page (p. 173) we can read that in May 1940 (sic!) about 50 soldiers of the GL were living in the ghetto. Of course, the author does not write about the fact that the PPR had stolen the name 'People's Guard' from the formation created much earlier by the PPS-WRN. Perhaps he is referring to the GL created by the PPS; unfortunately, he did not explain this inconsistency, thus introducing a great deal of confusion and erroneous information.

The book also abounds in examples of over-interpretation and manipulation of sources. One of the most important issues concerns the 'Instruction on ensuring the security of the terrain' issued by General Tadeusz Komorowski to Area and District commanders in letter 116/I of 15 September 1943. This document is incorrectly referred to by numerous Holocaust researchers as 'Organisational dispatch [*Meldunek organizacyjny*] 116'. This instruction has been compiled by Holocaust historians together with 'Organisational dispatch 220'. For some reason, these historians insistently and erroneously emphasise that this Instruction (in their opinion, Dispatch 116) was passed on to District commanders, while Dispatch 220 "was prepared for London alone"! True, the Commander of the Home Army gave instructions and orders to the districts' commanders subordinate to him, while he sent accounts and reports to the Commander-in-Chief and the Polish government in London. Zimmerman returns to the matter of these instructions later in the book. On pages 377–78 at the start of chapter 10, entitled 'Home Army Turns Its Guns on the Jews', he writes without reference to any documents that "The emphasis of the new Home Army commander – Gen. Komorowski – on combating banditry in the second half of 1943 was interpreted by some district and subdistrict commanders as permission to attack Jewish partisans". There is definitely no presentation of a broader context here. This chapter describes neither the attitude of the Home Army towards the Jews, nor the participation of Jewish

¹⁵ See P. Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia Robotnicza. Droga do władzy (1941–1944)*, Warszawa 2006, pp. 91 ff.

fighters in the Polish Underground State, as the author decided that in this case he will confine his analysis “to those testimonies that recorded fear, threats, and physical assault” (as the Polish translation reads).

Prof. Zimmerman has indulged in further over-interpretations in his discussion of the relationship between the Polish Underground State, the Soviet authorities and the Communist partisans (spring 1943). On page 300, writing about the Soviet air raid on Warsaw, he states: “Rowecki reported that Poles suspected that the Soviet bombers deliberately targeted civilians”. He paints the state of Polish-Soviet relations as much worse than the documents might suggest. There are no words attributed to Rowecki in the ‘Collective report (*Meldunek zbiorowy*) 194’ he refers to there. The extract he analyses sounds completely different: “The indignation and bitterness of the population is great for this reason”. The cause of indignation and bitterness was, of course, the suffering of the civilian population and the relative lack of damage done to the Germans.

On the other hand, Prof. Zimmerman includes a sensational statement in footnote 23 (p. 302) (in the English edition p. 213, fn. 23). According to the American researcher, as Polish translation reads: “about as many as 12,000 German policemen and militiamen” fled to the Soviet partisan units after hearing of the German defeat at Stalingrad (Polish: “około 12 tysięcy niemieckich policjantów i milicjantów”). (!) The English edition in this part reads as follows: “It has been estimated that as many as 12.000 Germans soldiers deserted the army in Eastern Europe after hearing of the German defeat at Stalingrad in February 1943”. (!) In addition, the author refers in this footnote to a publication by Timothy Snyder (*Skrwawione ziemie. Europa między Hitlerem a Stalinem*, Warsaw 2011, p. 268; *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, New York: Basic Books, 2010). If the truth had been as the Polish translation of Prof. Zimmerman’s words reads, the occupation authorities would have been deprived of a large part of their own (German) police forces, and the occupation system would have trembled on its foundations. The Professor apparently did not read the paragraph from Snyder’s book to the end, as he would have easily noticed the following passage: “This meant [i.e. the desertion of policemen] that some Belarusians who had killed Jews in the service of Nazis in 1941 and 1942 joined the Soviet partisans in 1943”.

Let us cite a few more similar examples of Prof. Zimmerman’s manipulation of the documents’ content. On page 254 we read about the ‘communiqué from the

Government Delegate to the Deputy Prime Minister' in 1942. In that 'communiqué', the Government Delegate expressed the hope that the establishment of the Council to Aid Jews (*Rada Pomocy Żydom*) would help to counter the unfair opinions about prejudices against Jews within the underground. At this point, the author refers the reader to the Central Archives of Modern Records (*Archiwum Akt Nowych*) ref. no. 202/I-6, p. 30; however, in the content of Dispatch no. 148 the word 'hope' is not found. The situation is similar with another cited document, the above-mentioned 'Instruction for the Country' of 26 October 1943. On page 385, Prof. Zimmerman claims unfoundedly that it requested "an additional number of Home Army partisans as reinforcements for eastern Poland"; but there is no such text in the 'Instruction'!¹⁶ We find a similar example on pages 318-9, where the author writes about a dispatch from representatives of the *CKRŻwP* and *ŻKN* of 20 April 1943. He claims incorrectly that this dispatch never reached London! But it did arrive, and was even published in the third volume of the first edition of the *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945* (as document no. 436).¹⁷ On the same pages (318–19), the author writes twice about the same message. In addition, he cites two different publications when discussing it. In one footnote (no. 94) he mentions '*Armia Krajowa w dokumentach*, second volume', while in the other (no. 97) he mentions the book *Ten jest z Ojczyzny mojej*. In both cases he is referring to the very same dispatch 81 from the Government Delegate for Poland of 28 April 1943, in which there was inserted a message from 'Berezowski' and 'Borowski'. This dispatch was entered in the logbook of the Social Department of the Ministry of Interior under the number 2517. This is not the number of the dispatch, as Prof. Zimmerman states in footnote 94 on page 318.

If the reader tries to follow the quotes published by the author, they will have a real problem determining the sources of his knowledge, as an analysis of footnote 30 (p. 144) also confirms. Zimmerman unreasonably claims: "In September 1941, the Delegate

¹⁶ At this point, Prof. Zimmerman cites a publication by Dariusz Stola from 1995. In historical research, 20 years is a lot of time, so the professor should have analysed the documents himself, instead of using literature that contains glaring mistakes.

¹⁷ At this point it is worth explaining some complications with the above message. It was given the number 74 and was broadcast in two parts. Message 74/I was sent for the first time on 1 May 1943 from station 50 (KWC), and received in London at 11.30 by station 39 (MSW). It was broadcast for the second time on 21 May 1943 from station 58 (KWC), and received at 23.00 by station 39 (MSW). Message 74/II was sent on 3 May 1943 from station 50 (KWC), and received in London at 10.30 by station 39 (MSW). See *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945*, vol. 2, 2nd edn, Warszawa 2019, pp. 972–73.

published a report on the situation in occupied Poland [...]”. First of all, it should be stressed that the Government Delegate did not publish the ‘Pro memoria’ reports, as these were intended for the highest authorities of the Republic of Poland in London and were sent by couriers. Secondly, the researcher refers in a footnote to the document ‘*Pro memoria w sprawie sytuacji politycznej w kraju w okresie 22 VI – 30 IX 1941*’ (“Pro memoria study on the political situation in the country in the period June 22 – September 30, 1941”). In addition, he cites an extract of the document from the 1995 publication by Dariusz Stola! The author knows, then, that the ‘Pro memoria’ reports were published ten years later.¹⁸ If Prof. Zimmerman had reached for the document he ‘quoted’, he would have known that the extracts he gives are not present in this particular document. After all, Stola clearly writes in footnote 20 of his publication: “Depesza nr 126/2, 22 XII 1942, AAN, 202/I-2, s. 46” (Dispatch no. 126/2, December 22, 1942, AAN, ref. no. 202/I-2, p. 46).

Interestingly – and unfortunately, typically for some Holocaust historians – Prof. Zimmerman omitted a few sentences in the quote from the first part of this dispatch, marking only one such omission. This marked omission contained the sentence “Sewer outlets plugged up and surrounded by German posts”.¹⁹ On the other hand, the author did not mention at all the fact that the last three sentences from the first part of this dispatch were omitted: “Losses of Germans about a thousand killed and wounded. The attitude of the defenders arouses admiration among the people of the country, and embarrassment and rage among the Germans. The appeal of the Jewish Combat Organisation [*Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa*, ŻOB] to the population of the capital was published, Polish workers’ parties pay tribute to the ghetto fighters”.²⁰ The manner in which the message is presented in Zimmerman’s work suggests that it has been quoted in its entirety. Unfortunately, the reader will not learn anything about the clearly described attitude of Polish society towards the fight between the Jews and the Germans.

Further on, Prof. Zimmerman reports on successive documents produced by various structures of the Polish state (chapter 4, pp. 137–170); but contrary to his claims, not all of them were the work of the Polish Underground State. As an example

¹⁸ *Pro memoria (1941–1944). Raporty Departamentu Informacji Delegatury Rządu RP na Kraj o zbrodniach na narodzie polskim*, ed. J. Gmitruk, A. Indraszczyk, A. Koseski, Warszawa 2005.

¹⁹ *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach*, vol. 2, p. 983.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

of the freedom Prof. Zimmerman in dealing with documents, we should consider the extracts he has highlighted from the report entitled ‘Two Years of German Occupation in Poland’ [*Dwa lata okupacji niemieckiej w Polsce*]. The author points to page 99 in the archival collection kept at the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London (ref. no. PRM 45c), and quotes two sentences from the final part of the report on the Warsaw ghetto. Significantly, the author omits the preceding sentence, which reads as follows: “There is more and more talk about cooperation between the Israelites and the Gestapo”. In the next sentence, Prof. Zimmerman goes so far as to insinuate that the author of the report “maintained that several pogroms were initiated by Poles”. There is nothing like that in the quoted report. In fact, it says: “During this period, the Jews in Chełm behaved in a completely provocative manner towards the Poles, so no wonder that after the Bolsheviks left, and before the Germans came, a pogrom almost happened. Naturally a few shops were looted”. There is no word about ‘several pogroms’.

In some places, the omissions the author has made are more than merely symptomatic. At the same time, they confirm that Zimmerman lacks a broader understanding of the tasks that were performed by individual cells of the Home Army. While writing about the uprising in the ghetto, he somewhat shortened the content of a dispatch by omitting opinions about the positive perception of the uprising among Poles; while in mentioning the report from the Home Army’s Warsaw Area, he does express his surprise at the lack of condemnation of the anti-Jewish policy pursued by the Germans. He writes: “In a monthly report for the period ending August 31, 1943, [...] However, no protest at all was voiced to the German round-ups and murders of Jews in hiding”. (!). According to Prof. Zimmerman, the leadership of the secret militarised administration (Division VII) in the Home Army’s Warsaw Area, while writing a ‘Situation account...’ to the Home Army Headquarters, expressed “protest to German round-ups and murders”?! Such tasks were not fulfilled by this unit. The purpose of such reports was to inform superiors about the actual situation in a given area, and not to express judgments, opinions, and so on, something which the Professor fails to understand.

We observe a similar practice where the author disregards the source basis for his own judgements when he discusses the situation of Jews in the north-eastern borderlands of the Second Polish Republic. These parts of Zimmerman’s work (pp. 383–97) are based on the accounts of Abraham Melezin. In footnote 22 on page 384,

the author refers to an extract from a book by Janusz Prawdzcic-Szlaski (p. 194), although he abandons the quotation in favour of discussing what Prawdzcic-Szlaski wrote. Here is an exact quote from Zimmerman's book (English edition, p. 272):

The language of the Nowogródek District Home Army commander and his chief of staff is extraordinarily revealing. Here, Jews were described unqualifiedly as enemies along with Germans, Russians, and collaborators. It also marked the growing divide between the Polish Underground authorities in Warsaw and the provincial field commanders in northeastern Poland. It is thus no surprise that when Col Szlaski [the Polish translation, p. 384, reads: "major Sędziak"] survived the war and published his own account of the Nowogródek Home Army, he displayed no understanding for the fate of the Jews as targets of genocide. He only remarked that the local population had little sympathy for the Jews during the Nazi Final Solution in Nowogródek due to Jewish behavior during the Soviet occupation.

The answer to the question of why Zimmerman departed from the citation in favour of its discussion seems very simple: the quote does not match the author's arguments. Let us quote an exact excerpt from Prawdzcic-Szlaski:

The regular German army was used not for these murders, and the German soldiers were not even allowed to watch these scenes. But again, I have not heard of any case where Christian feelings were awakened in a German so he would help – in the name of that Christ whom he professed – the murdered victims. The Jews were isolated and left to their own fate. They generally harassed the local population a lot with their behaviour during the Soviet occupation.²¹

Zimmerman takes equal liberties with the document from the Ministry of Information he quoted (pp. 162–63), wrongly attributing it to Stanisław Kot.²²

²¹ J. Prawdzcic-Szlaski, *Nowogródzczyzna w walce 1940–1945*, London 1976, p. 194.

²² It is worth noting that this document is signed: MINISTER (typewritten) and handwritten: S[tanisław] S[troński], which Prof. Zimmerman read as a 'K', and creatively turned into 'Kot ?!' By the way, in the entire book, Stroński is only mentioned once (p. 71), as minister of social welfare – which he was not. For some reason, the author has not read the publication: S. Stroński, *Polityka rządu polskiego na uchodźstwie w latach 1939–1942*, vols 1–3, ed. J. Piotrowski, Nowy Sącz 2007.

In addition, he interweaves the quotes with his own original comments containing untruths. For example, he says that Kot stated that the Jews did not get involved “in the Polish cause” (!). There is nothing like that in the document he cites and discusses. However, he finds differences in the attitudes of the two peoples: the Poles proceed “with their heads held high”, whereas the Jews “break down most often”. These over-interpretations undermine the author’s academic reliability, a feature which should characterise every historian, especially those dealing with such a difficult topic.

At times, the author’s failure to make an in-depth archival and bibliographic query means that his expressive theses turn out to have no basis in reality. For example, on page 150 Prof. Zimmerman cites an excerpt from the declaration of the Polish government from July 1941, and states authoritatively “No similar declaration was made by any of the wings of the Polish underground” (!). This scandalous statement proves the Professor’s profound ignorance about the activities of the Polish Underground State. It is enough to refer to the repeatedly published Declaration of the Council of National Unity [*Rada Jedności Narodowej*] of 15 March 1944, where we read:

This parliament²³ will amend the constitution, which will formulate the principles of universal civil freedom, freedom of religion, conscience, political beliefs, speech, print, assembly and associations, and the principles of equality of civil rights with equality of the duties and independence of the judiciary.²⁴ [...] The Polish nation will take full consideration of the interests of other nationalities living within the state. By requiring them to be loyal and faithful to the Polish State and to have a benevolent attitude to the rights and interests of the Polish nation, Poland will base its attitude towards these nationalities on the principles of political equality and of providing them with conditions for full cultural, economic and social development within the framework of state unity and the common good of all citizens.²⁵

²³ This refers to a parliament which would be elected ‘as soon as possible’ on the basis of a new, democratic electoral law.

²⁴ *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945*, vol. 3: *Kwiecień 1943 – lipiec 1944*, London 1976, p. 364.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 364–65.

The failure to conduct research correctly also results in Zimmerman repeating the false report that Marian Sołtysiak ('Barabas'), one of the Home Army's most famous commanders in the Radom-Kielce district, gave orders to murder Jews. On pages 409–17, the author describes quite broadly (considering the size of the entire book) the activities of the 'Chosen Ones' unit commanded by Sołtysiak. He largely relies on the text by Alina Skibińska and Joanna Tokarska-Bakir and on the published by them post-war testimonies of both Home Army soldiers and Jewish survivors.²⁶ Unfortunately, he did not read the trial files, let alone the article written by Tomasz Domański who, without denying the criminal activities of some Home Army soldiers, shows the various problems resulting from relying on the materials of the Communist-era Security Department (*Urząd Bezpieczeństwa*, UB). Domański called into question the basic thesis of Skibińska and Tokarska-Bakir's text about the criminal instructions issued by Sołtysiak.²⁷

Prof. Zimmerman is also making a fundamental error when he analyses the underground authorities' formal declarations warning Poles against cooperating with the Germans in persecuting the Jews. According to the author, referring to the 'Information Bulletin' (*Biuletyn Informacyjny*; hereinafter: *BI*) of 6 March 1941 (and he claims – for some reason – that it was published on 6 February 1941), it was only then that the underground press warned Poles against cooperating with the Germans in persecuting Jews. The author does not seem to know about the publication from 19 January 1940 in the same *BI* where it was clearly written: "We declare than any direct or indirect cooperation with the Germans in persecuting the Jews is as much an act of sabotage as any other cooperation with Poland's deadly enemy". Equally important, Zimmerman, again quoting *BI* (allegedly from February 1941), supports the thesis that there was a 'new direction in government policy' towards the Jewish question. The analysis of the documents shows that the sequence of events Zimmerman sets up at this point is simply not true.

²⁶ A. Skibińska, "Dostał 10 lat, ale za co?". Analiza motywacji sprawców zbrodni na Żydach na wsi kieleckiej w latach 1942–1944, in *Zarys Krajobrazu. Wieś polska wobec zagłady Żydów 1942–1945*, ed. B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, intr. K. Persak, Warszawa 2011; A. Skibińska, J. Tokarska-Bakir, "Barabas" i Żydzi. Z historii oddziału AK "Wybraniec", *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2011, no. 7.

²⁷ T. Domański, 'Z historii oddziału "Wybranieckich" czyli o wiarygodności materiałów śledczych i operacyjnych UB', part 1, *Arcana* 2012, no. 4–5, pp. 253–79, part 2, *Arcana* 2013, no. 1, pp. 120–44.

A little further on (p. 129), with another reference to the *BI* of 6 March 1941, the researcher includes the following (alleged) quote: “The sick lie on the floor without dressings. Infectious diseases are spreading among the patients”. (!) But this is what this extract from the *Bulletin* really looks like: “The only Jewish hospital – has makeshift equipment: the sick are lying on the floor, there are no dressings, the infectious ward is overcrowded. Sanitary conditions throughout the ghetto – terrible”. Considering the context of the description – the reactions of the ZWZ press to the deteriorating situation in the ghetto – it is hard to suppose that this kind of procedure was aimed at ‘colouring’ the report in order to achieve a better effect. The situation of the Jews was growing worse every day, and it was becoming more and more difficult to put into words. It is difficult to understand what the basis was for Prof. Zimmerman to modify the quotes. Nevertheless, this lack of diligence results in undermining trust in the author of the text, who is freely distorting the documents he cites.

In the same section, we have examples of what is at the very least a lack of critical analysis of the content of the documents cited, not to mention the manipulation of their content. First, on pages 176–7, the author describes the alleged ‘Report by General Rowecki of May 1942’, and in footnote 23 gives information about its publication in the second volume of the *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945*. In this place the document number (265) and the page number in the second volume are identical. On pages 265–6 of the second volume, General Rowecki’s dispatch no. 419 containing a ‘Dispatch on the political situation #1’ (*Meldunek o sytuacji politycznej 1*) is published. But this text does not contain any proposal to ‘resolve the problem’ of influence by the PPR as Prof. Zimmerman sees it. We are dealing here with a simple inability to read the document.²⁸ On the other hand, document no. 265 contains dispatch 424 from General Rowecki of 25 November 1941, which concerns the liaison officer between the Commander-in-Chief of the ZWZ and the Government Delegate.

At the end of this thread, it is worth devoting a little more space to the analysis of one of the documents included in Zimmerman’s book, and more specifically the alleged ‘Order no. 152’ from General Władysław Sikorski of 25 January 1942. In a footnote, the author indicates a document in the Central Archives of Modern Records (AAN, ref. no. 203/I-4, p. 1). There is indeed a photocopy (not the original) of this document (or

²⁸ The ‘Task’ contained in General Rowecki’s dispatch does not concern the actions of the Home Army, but the actions of the Communist party in Poland as identified by the Home Army!

actually a photocopy of its transcript) – a very strange document, significantly different from all other dispatches and letters from the Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief, addressed to the Home Army Commander (*Dowódca*, and not: *Komendant* – i.e. ‘the Commandant’ – as the translator of Prof. Zimmerman’s book stubbornly insists on writing erroneously) or the Delegate of the Polish Government in the country.

In presenting the document, Prof. Zimmerman departs completely from its content – the title reads as follows:

London, January 25, 1942

Order no. 152/42

TO: Government Delegate of the Republic of Poland

FROM: Sikorski, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces

On the other hand, the photocopy of the document from the AAN shows:

C-in-C

London, 25.I.42

Forces Armed Polish.

Order no. 152/42

First of all, no addressee is given on the photocopy! Secondly, General Sikorski (and his office) were never in the habit of writing ‘*Nacz[elny] Wódz Sił Zbrojnych Polskich*’ (C-in-C, Forces Armed Polish – not in line with used order of the official name)! The same strange record is found in the caption ‘*Nacz[elny] Sił Zbrojn[ych] Pol[skich]*’ (in-C[hief], Forces Armed Pol[ish]) – the Professor’s attention should have been drawn by the lack of the key word *Wódz* (Commander).

But an even more interesting note is below the alleged signature of General Sikorski. It reads as follows:

For the veracity and compliance

of the above order

/... signature/

on behalf of the Pol[ish] Government Del[egate].

So the Government Delegate was not the addressee of the alleged 'Order no. 152/42'; he could at most certify the compliance of the transcript! Let us add that General Sikorski did not give orders to the Government Delegate; if anything, he issued directives or recommendations to him. The Commander-in-Chief issued orders to his army, including the Home Army, which was part of the Polish Armed Forces [*Polskie Siły Zbrojne*], and not the 'Armed Forces Polish' [*Siły Zbrojne Polskie*].

Prof. Zimmerman's statement that the alleged 'Order no. 152/42' concerns the national minorities is also untrue. The 'national minorities' are only discussed in point five of this photocopy of the transcript; the previous four points deal with quite different issues.

The language of this 'document' is so different from all the other orders and writings by General Sikorski that the thesis that this 'document' is false is justified. Historians should pay close attention to statements about collecting contributions for the 'FWP', and also the announcement of the establishment of a 'Military Tribunal' after independence was regained!

As if that were not enough, in the second point of the alleged 'Order no. 152/42' it is written: "Due to the lack of financial funds for the organisation of the Polish Army in Poland, all Polish citizens should be taxed immediately, regardless of their financial possessions". There were no such ideas in London or Warsaw; in fact, it was the Communists who were in favour of taxing everyone and everything.

It is worth paying attention to one more rather unacademic activity by Prof. Zimmerman, which involves sending the reader to a copy of the document kept in the archive while the document itself has long since been published. Zimmerman ceaselessly resorts to this method of work. Listing all the examples would take many pages, so I will limit myself to a few specific cases out of necessity. On page 268, the author writes about the alleged 'Report 291 by the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army' of 4 March 1943. In footnote 43 he refers the reader to the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute. This document has been known of at least since 1989, when it was published in the sixth volume of the *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945* (p. 303). It can be easily confirmed that it is in fact dispatch 291 from the Government Delegate and the Home Army Commander. It is also untrue when Prof. Zimmerman refers (p. 261) to the content of an excerpt from the 'Review of the most important

events in the country for the period from [4] 5 to 12 December 1942' (*Przegląd najważniejszych wydarzeń w kraju za czas od [4] 5 do 12 grudnia 1942 r.*), while at the same time directing the reader to the Archives of New Records (AAN, ref. no. 203/I-18, p. 244). It is difficult to guess why the author did so, since this document was published in the second volume of the first edition of the *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945* (p. 384).

Chapter eight (pp. 298–336), entitled 'The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Polish Underground, April 19–May 15, 1943', yields more 'mistakes' by Prof. Zimmerman. Writing about the discovery of the Katyn massacre (p. 299), he mentions a message from General Rowecki to the 'prime minister's office in London'²⁹ of 21 April 1943. In footnote 6, he refers to the copy from the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (AIPN BU 1558/3, pp. 29–30). However, he does not report that this dispatch was published in the second volume of the *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945* (document 425).

The situation is similar in the case of message 733 (and not 738) from the Government Delegate: this document was published (1761) in the sixth volume of the *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945*. In addition, the dispatch says that "Further action of exploitation of the Katyn tragedy with the aim of stimulating anti-Bolshevik sentiment and attempting to discount these sentiments in order to obtain a voluntary application for a trip to work in Germany [is conducted]". So this does refer to the German actions in the 'Katyn' case.

The author's use of (not very accurate) copies of documents leads to the dissemination of false information. On page 175 of the Polish edition, he quotes excerpts from General Sikorski's message to the Home Army HQ of 3 March 1942, incorrectly stating that they came from a dispatch of 7 March. Moreover, there are mistakes in the quoted Polish text: for example, 'they came' (*nastali*) instead of 'they found' (*zastali*), 'the German e[astern] front' (*niemieckiego frontu wsch[odniego]*) instead of the 'e[astern] front', and also 'retained' (*zachowanych*) instead of 'appointed' (*mianowanych*). It should be noted that the English edition (p. 121) does not quote directly this part of the document mentioned, however, it reports its content without blunders other than erroneous date of the dispatch.

²⁹ This strange note, which appears occasionally throughout the book in question, is incomprehensible. I do not know why the author has decided to include it in two footnotes (5 and 6) here.

The author's fairly arbitrary treatment of such quotes is one of the features of this publication.

Another problem is that when the author discusses the same document several times, he always refers to different copies of it kept in different archives. Here, too, I have a request for the future: these documents should be grouped together under the catalogue numbers from various archives, so that all readers (and also writers) about these matters will have clarity about which document is being referred to. This is extremely important, especially in the case of archives which have only fragmentary copies of documents.

Finally, it is worth analysing the selective bibliography included in the book (pp. 575–604). Anyone who studies Polish-Jewish relations – including the attitudes of the Polish Underground State (and its organs) towards the Jews – is aware that this is an extremely complex topic. There are also a huge number of various publications with relevant thematic threads. The selective bibliography provided by the author also has its shortcomings, and above all, there are quite significant gaps that should be filled. An analysis of the publications omitted could influence the content of the book.

As for the collections of documents, a serious drawback in the bibliography – even if selective – is the lack of the collection of documents from *Żegota* (*Rada Pomocy Żydom przy Delegaturze Rządu na Kraj* – Council to Aid Jews with the Government Delegation for Poland) issued by the Head Office of State Archives.³⁰ Nor did Prof. Zimmerman resort to even one volume of the Minutes of the meetings of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Poland, October 1939 – August 1945 (*Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej październik 1939 – sierpień 1945*) published by the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (PAU) in 1994–2010. Was there nothing interesting for the author therein? Meanwhile, there are many examples of documents published by PAU that are related to the subject of the book in question. I would like to draw the reader's attention, for example, to a document of 11 March 1942 entitled *Stosunek Sowietów do polskich mniejszości narodowych* [The Attitude of the Soviets

³⁰ *Rada Pomocy Żydom "ŻEGOTA" przy Pełnomocniku Rządu RP na Kraj i Referat Żydowski "Żegota" Departamentu Spraw Wewnętrznych Delegatury Rządu RP na Kraj. Dokumenty z zasobu Archiwum Akt Nowych 1942–1944*, ed. M. Olczak, Warszawa 2015.

to the Polish National Minorities].³¹ In Zimmerman's bibliography one may also note the lack of any documentation concerning the national minorities from the archival collection of Adam Bień,³² the deputy Government Delegate for Poland. This publication came out in print in 2001, and there has been ample time to read it. Without going too deeply into its content, let us only mention the copies of the *Nasze Ziemie Wschodnie* [Our Eastern Lands] periodical, or the periodical study entitled 'Information on the nationalities' [*Informacja narodowościowa*] published therein. We can find a great deal of information about Jews there.

On pages 301–2, Prof. Zimmerman writes about the reports from the Polish underground about Jewish–Communist ties in occupied Poland and about the anti-Polish, mainly propaganda activities undertaken by Communist paratroopers. Since he refers practically exclusively to the documentation prepared by the structures of the Polish Underground State, attention should be paid to the other existing literature on this issue. Personally, I would recommend reading the memoirs, for example, of Leon Bielski³³ or Adolf Matysiewicz.³⁴

Finally, in the published bibliography, there are numerous editorial mistakes that cause confusion and do not offer the best testimony to the editorial work. The Central Catalogue of the Polish Underground Press 1939–1945 [*Centralny Katalog polskiej prasy konspiracyjnej 1939–1945*], compiled by Lucjan Dobroszycki, is placed in the 'Atlas, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, catalogues' section (p. 588), but the Władysław Chojnacki's bibliography of 'compact and ephemeral underground publications' [*Bibliografia zwartych i ulotnych druków konspiracyjnych*] (p. 590) is found under 'Studies.' Such inconsistency is surprising. There is an incomprehensible bibliographic entry on page 585 regarding the collection of documents published in 2001 by the Council for the Protection of Memory of Struggle and Martyrdom [*Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa*]. The correct entry should be as follows: *Polacy – Żydzi 1939–1945*.

³¹ *Dokumenty rządu RP na obczyźnie. Suplementy do tomów I–VIII protokołów posiedzeń Rady Ministrów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, październik 1939 – sierpień 1945*, ed. W. Rojek, A. Suchcitz, Kraków 2010, pp. 275–81.

³² *Archiwum Adama Bienia. Akta narodowościowe (1942–1944)*, ed. J. Brzeski, A. Roliński, Kraków 2001.

³³ L. Bielski, *Spotkanie z ziemią*, Warszawa 1965.

³⁴ A. Matysiewicz, *Przez linię frontu*, Warszawa 1983.

Wybór źródeł [Poles – Jews 1939–1945. Selection of sources], ed. A.K. Kunert, preface by W. Bartoszewski, Warsaw 2001. Further confusion is introduced by the description on the same page. Two publications by Stefan Korboński are given here, one from 1956 and the other from 1975³⁵; however, Korboński's work directly referring to the subject of Prof. Zimmerman's book is not mentioned there. This refers to Korboński's book *The Jews and the Poles in the World War II*, published in New York in 1986. Its Polish edition, entitled *Polacy, Żydzi i Holocaust* [Poles, Jews and the Holocaust], was published in 2011 in Warsaw.

The bibliographic errors and lapses seem to be less important in a situation where analysis of the selective bibliography leads to the conclusion that the author does not know the content of at least some of the publications he has himself listed there. If Prof. Zimmerman had become acquainted with these works, he would not have written untruthfully, for example, about the creation of the Social Anti-Communist Committee (*Społeczny Komitet Antykomunistyczny*).³⁶ On the other hand, page 583 lists the first edition of the essential publication of the Home Army's 1939–1945 documents (*Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945*); the second edition of the first volume of this publication has been added below. The problem is that I did not find any reference to this particular volume in the text of the book. The legitimate question therefore arises of whether Prof. Zimmerman did use it, or rather whether the academic editor of the Polish edition decided to 'enrich' the list by adding this volume.

Taking the number of comments I have submitted above into account, I am forced to say that the book by Prof. Zimmerman raises serious, well-founded objections. It would take too much space to list all the author's mistakes and faults; I found over a hundred such cases throughout the work. I am sad to say that Prof. Zimmerman knows neither the literature of the matters he writes about,

³⁵ Significantly, in the case of Korboński's book *Polskie Państwo Podziemne* [The Polish Underground State], the 'Selective bibliography' includes an underground edition published by NZS Wrocław, which is in fact a reprint of the Paris edition from 1975. We do not have information about the first, at least partially critical, edition of this book from 2008. Also, the title of the publication included in the 'Selective bibliography' is incomplete, because in fact it should be *Polskie Państwo Podziemne. Przewodnik po Podziemiu z lat 1939–1945* [The Polish Underground State. A guide to the Underground from 1939–45].

³⁶ The lack of any such discernment makes this alleged order from General Sikorski, no. 152 of 25 January 1942, appear as if it were an authentic document.

nor the documents (even the published ones), nor the underground structures. Therefore, his book cannot be regarded as a reliable description of the attitude of the Polish Underground State towards the Jews during World War II. It is also very surprising that this publication was issued under the patronage of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

In addition, I have to raise serious objections to the work of both the academic editor, Martyna Rusiniak-Karwat, and more generally the Polish Scientific Publishers PWN SA. The number of errors indicates that the readers are being treated very frivolously. Let us add that a significant part of them have appeared in the Polish edition alone, and do not appear in the English edition! This, in turn, calls into question the declaration of the Editor: “We are offering the reader a changed – and we hope – refined version of the book published in 2015 by Prof. Zimmerman” (p. 606). But no – the Polish edition of this book has not been ‘refined’. On the contrary. As an example of the ‘achievements’ of the editors of the Polish edition, let us examine the title on p. 252 of the subsection ‘Struktura Polskiego Państwa Podziemnego z uwzględnieniem Delegatury Rządu na Kraj (1944)’ [The structure of the Polish Underground State, including the Government Delegation for Poland (1944)]. Such a title is surprising, because from the beginning to the end of the subsection (p. 255) the text has not moved beyond the year 1942. This issue can be explained when we read the original English-language version, where on page 176 we find a diagram entitled ‘Main structure of the Polish Underground State with special reference to the Delegates’ Bureau, 1944’: so the title of this diagram in the English version has become the title of the sub-chapter in the Polish version.

At the very last, then, it should be said that the money invested by the various institutions listed on page 10 of Prof. Zimmerman’s book could have been much better spent.

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SARA BENDER, *POGROM W GRAJEWIE LATEM 1941 R.*
AND JEFFREY KOPSTEIN, *POGROM W SZCZUCZYNIE*
27 CZERWCA 1941 R., OR, HOW NOT TO WRITE HISTORY

The articles mentioned in the title refer to different events, although they took place close to each other in time and place. These publications have two things in common. The first is their methodology, or rather the lack of it: both texts are based on selected extracts from a single source. The second is that in both cases the writers' intention was to justify a thesis that could be called at least questionable.

At the end of 2019 an article by Sara Bender was published, 'Pogrom w Grajewie latem 1941 r.' [The pogrom in Grajewo in the summer of 1941], in the fourth volume of the publication *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku* [Pogroms of Jews in the Polish lands in the 19th and 20th centuries].¹ One would expect such an article to examine what happened in Grajewo in summer 1941 after the German army entered there. A pogrom did indeed take place there, and Poles did take part in it. However, it was one of several events that took place in this town at that time; yet we will not learn this from Bender's article.

¹ S. Bender, 'Pogrom w Grajewie latem 1941 r.', in *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, t. 4: *Holokaust i powojnie (1939–1946)*, ed. A. Grabski, Warszawa 2019.

What, then, was her intent? “The subject of this article”, explains the author, “is the pogrom that took place in the summer of 1941 in Grajewo [...]. In this article, I will discuss the crimes committed primarily by Poles, especially the four-week pogrom in the Grajewo synagogue. During the pogrom, the victims were tortured and murdered by local Poles, with the minimal presence of the German army”²

Below I will demonstrate that all the statements above are false, and that the article is an example of the selective treatment of available sources. Here we have an affirmative attitude towards Jewish sources, as postulated by Jan Tomasz Gross, which in fact is the only one available in the Grajewo Memorial Book (*yizkor*). This source is the *History of the Grayeve Ghetto* written by Nachman Rapp.³ Rapp’s story is unique, even compared to the texts that can be found in other memorial books, biased and saturated as it is with anti-Polish stereotypes. However, Bender does not note this, and does not even do anything as elementary as conducting an internal criticism of the source. Meanwhile, even a cursory reading of the text shows us what we are dealing with. Rapp begins his story by describing what happened in the 1930s. In his telling, Poland, on the brink of war, is a fascist country where a “deplorable regime” ruled on the basis of terror, and whose number-one enemy was the Jews. Importantly, the author notes the existence of the National Party and such organisations as the National Radical Camp, but only in the context that the later murderers of Jews would come from among their members. He also notes the strong influence of Nazi ideology in Poland. In this situation, the author was surprised by the conflict between the good friends which, in his opinion, Poland and Germany were. Interestingly, in Rapp’s opinion, it was the pro-German *Sanacja* regime that started the aggression and ‘hate campaign’ in the press. He claims that the Poles demanded the creation of the ‘Gdańsk corridor’.⁴ Complaining about Poland and Polish anti-Semitism, Rapp ends with a description of an episode that supposedly happened on the day of mobilisation in Grajewo, when newly mobilised, drunken Poles allegedly lunged and shouted at the Jews, threatening to settle scores with them.

It was only the entry of the Red Army into Grajewo which made the Jews feel safe and happy. The situation settled down and “every Jew, without exception, received a job

² Ibid., p. 75.

³ N. Rapp, *History of the Grayeve Ghetto*, <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Grajewo/gra174.html>, accessed 1 June 2021 (pages 174–196 are located at this address, but it is easy to switch to other pages).

⁴ Ibid., p. 178.

from the state, and did not receive a bad remuneration”⁵ The new authorities nationalised the factories and bakeries, and opened stores. A school teaching in Yiddish was established; a theatre was also based there, in which the report’s author was involved. “Jews were employed in all areas of economic and cultural life, as well as in town and district councils and in all institutions⁶ [...] For the first time, the Jewish youth in Grajewo noticed the great opportunities to develop that the Soviet government had given the young people”⁷ On the site of the Great Synagogue, which the Germans had burnt down in September 1939, the new authorities built a theatre with 1500 seats. Only the Polish fascist gangs, pursued by some Jews, disturbed their contentment. These “poisonous gangs”, as Rapp calls them, were made up of former native fascists or nationalists.

As we can see, the *Free Łomża* published by the Soviets would not have been ashamed to publish a similar narrative,⁸ and Sara Bender used sources such as these as the sole basis for describing the events of summer 1941 in Grajewo. What is even more bizarre, in the short section entitled ‘The Soviet occupation (1939-1941) as a trigger for the conflict’,⁹ Bender basically copies Rapp’s narrative. She also adds a few of her own thoughts. According to her take, the Red Army entered when the Polish Army was in a “state of disintegration” at the end of the “short-lived Second Polish Republic”. The author also stated that at the end of the Soviet occupation, despite the easing of the anti-Polish line and the decline in the number of Jews employed in the administration and the Soviet militia, “the hostility of Poles towards Jews did not abate”¹⁰ According to Bender, the Poles believed that the Jews had betrayed Poland, denounced them, and participated in the deportations of Poles to Siberia. “Such views further exacerbated the Poles’ hostile attitude towards the Jews”¹¹

The above description of the influence of the Soviet occupation on Polish-Jewish relations can be called absurd at best. It is strange that the author does not refer to a number of publications that explain this issue more broadly.¹² She does

⁵ Ibid., p. 176.

⁶ Ibid., p. 183.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Free Łomża* was a Soviet propaganda sheet which appeared on 5 October 1939.

⁹ Bender, ‘Pogrom w Grajewie’, p. 77.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Here I am referring, for example, to the remaining articles contained in the book *Wokół Jedwabnego*, vol. 1: *Studia*, and vol. 2: *Dokumenty*, ed. P. Machcewicz, K. Persak, Warszawa 2002.

admittedly draw¹³ upon a very good study by Marek Wierzbicki,¹³ but she only takes from it the information that the Russians relied on the Jews at the beginning of the occupation, but then gradually started to treat the Polish population better and better, resulting in a decrease in the number of Poles imprisoned.¹⁴

Two more sections of Bender's article, 'Operation "Barbarossa" and the Polish settling of scores in Grajewo' and 'The pogrom and slaughter in the synagogue,' are basically a continuation of the summary of Rapp's narrative. Admittedly, the author notes the existence of another Jewish testimony, that of Zelik Tetnbojm,¹⁵ but uses it to a very limited extent, relying only on what appears in the article by Andrzej Żbikowski.¹⁶ In addition, the very way in which she uses Rapp's account must raise a number of doubts. Despite his negative attitude towards the Poles, Rapp does not claim that they were entirely to blame for what happened to the Jews in Grajewo. Bender, on the other hand, wishes to show it very much. She expresses this clearly at the end of the subsection:

The crimes that took place in Grajewo in the summer of 1941 are unique in nature because the local Jews had experienced persecution from both Germans and Poles. This was the result of the Poles' deep hatred towards Jews – a hatred and hostility so great that it surprised even the Germans. The latter allowed the Poles to do whatever they wanted with the Jews for a month. The tortures which Poles subjected the Jewish men imprisoned in the Grajewo synagogue in July 1941 were characterised by particular cruelty. Even when comparing them with the murders of Jews in other towns in the region, it can be said that they had no equal.¹⁷

¹³ M. Wierzbicki, 'Stosunki polsko-żydowskie za Zachodniej Białorusi w latach 1939–1941', in *Wokół Jedwabnego*, vol. 1, pp. 129–58.

¹⁴ The author fails to note that in another paragraph, Wierzbicki writes that the Poles were the most repressed ethnic group in Western Belarus, and the loss of Jews in administrative posts resulted from the influx of *vostochniks* (persons born in the eastern part of the area which was part of the Soviet Union prior to 1939), *ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁵ Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw), Underground archives of the Białystok ghetto, 204/10, Zelik Tetnbojm, 'Der blutike Kapitel Grayve' (The bloody chapter of Grajewo).

¹⁶ A. Żbikowski, 'Pogromy i mordy ludności żydowskiej w Łomżyńskim i na Białostocczyźnie latem 1941 roku w świetle relacji ocalałych Żydów i dokumentów sądowych', in *Wokół Jedwabnego*, vol. 1, pp. 180–84.

¹⁷ Bender, 'Pogrom w Grajewie', p. 77.

And later:

The Germans were well aware of the Poles' hatred towards the Jews. The awareness that the Germans had left the Jews to their fate and did not intend to intervene in their defence ignited the [Poles'] lust for blood [...] It can be taken for granted that no one forced the Poles to murder the Jews [...] They had literally been looking for such an opportunity, and when it finally arose, they took advantage of the chaos prevailing at the beginning of the German invasion, and attacked their Jewish neighbours in an organised and extremely cruel manner.¹⁸

Apart from the Jewish reports, there are quite a large number of Polish sources from which we can find out what really happened in Grajewo in the summer of 1941; however, Bender did not use them in her work. While it may be understandable that she could have found it troublesome to find the documents on the above-mentioned subject in the resources of the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (hereinafter: AIPN),¹⁹ she should nevertheless have been able to find at least two very relevant books. The first is *Grajewo w latach wojny i okupacji* [Grajewo during the war and occupation], in which we can find an article by Waldemar Monkiewicz entitled 'Zbrodnie Wehrmachtu na ziemi grajewskiej' [The crimes of the Wehrmacht in Grajewo district];²⁰ the second is the very interesting *Diary stored in a barrel* by Władysław Świacki.²¹ Świacki, codename 'Sęp' [Vulture] (1900–72), was one of the first organisers of the ZWZ-AK [*Związek Walki Zbrojnej-Armia Krajowa*: the Union of Armed Struggle, from February 1942 the Home Army] in Grajewo. On the orders of his superiors in the underground, he became the commander and organiser of the auxiliary police in Grajewo in summer 1941. In subsequent years he was an active member of the ZWZ-AK, took part in the battle in Grzędy

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁹ Oddziałowe Archiwum IPN w Białymstoku (Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance Branch in Białystok; hereinafter: AIPN Bi) 646/11, Files in the criminal case against Maciejewski, Wincenty; AIPN Bi 405/45; Files in the criminal case against Jarząbek, Stanisław; AIPN Bi 410/18; Files of the investigation in the case of Gąszewski/Gąsiewski, Aleksander. The materials on the case of Maciejewski, who was one of those who guarded the theatre and tortured prisoners, are particularly interesting.

²⁰ *Grajewo w latach wojny i okupacji, Materiały z sesji popularno-naukowej odbytej w Grajewie dnia 19 stycznia 1985 roku*, Grajewo 1986.

²¹ W. Świacki, *Pamiętnik przechowany w beczce*, Grajewo 2007.

on 8–9 September 1944. After being arrested some time later, he was deported to Germany; the diary ends with his return to Poland. After a few years, the author started an underground conspiracy against the new government, as a result of which, after being arrested and tried by the Communist judiciary, he spent five years in a prison in Wronki. He wrote his diary in the 1960s, which was hidden and preserved by another well-known conspirator, Prof. Stanisław Skrodzka-Kumor. The story of Świacki – a direct witness to the events – is invaluable, especially since he did not conceal certain facts that show some of Grajewo's Polish inhabitants in a bad light. Also, he described them at a time when no one could have imagined how important these facts would later become in historiography. Let us then juxtapose the story told by Sara Bender and Nachman Rapp with the account of Władysław Świacki.

So, according to Sara Bender, what happened in the summer of 1941 in Grajewo, and how does she justify her description as quoted above?

The Germans supposedly entered the town on 24 June. The next day at 10 a.m., the Jews were assembled in the market square, where a German officer gave a speech in which he called them a nation of criminals whose blood was impure. Hence, the Jews could no longer live among other peoples, and in the future they would be liquidated. On penalty of death, they were to obey every German. A rumour spread among the frightened Jews that Poles from the criminal underworld were preparing for a pogrom, and that the Germans had told them that killing the Jews would be safe.

According to Bender, the pogrom took place after Sunday mass on 29 June 1941. Poles armed with axes and sticks began to attack Jews in their homes and in the streets. Ten Jews were killed and about thirty were wounded. Rapp's account states that the Poles launched the attack immediately after leaving church. At the same time, however, we have reports that Father Aleksander Peża and the Communist Henryk Sobolewski strongly opposed it. Here we have a curiosity, because Rapp said that the priest who called on the community not to be drawn into German provocations was denounced by the Poles and then killed by the Germans. However, this story about the death of Father Peża turned out to be untrue, as already pointed out by Żbikowski.²² The pogrom supposedly ended upon the intervention of the German gendarmes, who

²² Żbikowski, 'Pogromy i mordy', p. 184. However, contrary to his report, Fr. Peża was in fact later murdered by the Germans for his underground activity, on 15 July 1943. <https://grajewiak.pl/index.php/biogramy/631-peza-aleksander>, accessed 2 July 2020.

shot three of the 'pogromists' near the church. The Germans allegedly intervened at the request of a Jewish delegation. Here Bender ends her story of the pogrom on 29 June.²³ This is the first example of how the author selectively treats her sole source, as Rapp explains the background to the events:

It was just a clever trick on the part of the German executioners who, on the one hand, organised the pogrom, and when it happened, they pretended not to know about it. On the other hand, they incited the Christian population against the defenceless Jews. [...] This cunning game was organised in such a way that later, when the Germans imprisoned the Jews in the ghetto, the Jews took it as a favour to them that they would live far away from the Poles, who had threatened them with a similar pogrom every day.²⁴

Rapp also told the rest of the story. The Germans supposedly took several of the wounded Jews to the hospital. There, they brought a Pole, Lutek Remiszewski, to one of them, whom the wounded man mistakenly thought was one of his torturers. As a result, Remiszewski and other Poles ended up in the synagogue building, which was turned into a prison. Rapp explains that the Germans' goal was to force the Poles and the Jews into confrontation. Bender did not acknowledge these elements: first, that the pogrom had been organised by the Germans; second, that Poles were also imprisoned in the synagogue. As we will see later, the latter fact is completely incompatible with the further course of the author's narrative.

The next day, an SS and Gestapo unit arrived in Grajewo. About five hundred Jewish men were gathered in the market square.²⁵ Then the Poles were called upon to point out the Communists. The ones indicated were forced to leave the ranks, and then the Poles started beating them mercilessly. These beatings took place without any involvement on the part of the Germans.²⁶ A few days later (on 3 July), the situation was repeated. This time around three hundred Jews were gathered in the cattle market. There was

²³ Bender, 'Pogrom w Grajewie', p. 80.

²⁴ Rapp, *History of the Grayeve Ghetto*, p. 192.

²⁵ In the interwar period, Grajewo was a *poviat* town in the north-western part of the Białystok province. In 1921 it was inhabited by 7346 people, including 2834 people who declared the Jewish faith, and of whom 2484 proclaimed Jewish nationality. In 1937, 9500 people lived in Grajewo, 3000 of whom were Jews.

²⁶ This information is not available in Rapp, but in Tetnbojm's note 15.

the selection, the beating and photographing by the Germans, and then the victims were brought to the synagogue and imprisoned there. Then the Germans left, and the Jews were watched by the Poles. Next began what Bender calls “the pogrom in the synagogue”, in which the hundreds of Jews guarded by the Poles had been imprisoned for four weeks. The prisoners were forced to work, then beaten, tortured and murdered in various, quite sophisticated ways. The commanders of the Polish torturers were named as Dawidowski and Staniszewski, who in addition extorted “remnants of property” from the families of the victims. In August, the ordeal ended with the execution of the prisoners by the Germans. A little earlier, on 10 August, a ghetto had been established.²⁷

Rapp does indeed describe all this in his account. He talks about what the Poles did, but clearly points out that the perpetrators of many of the tortures, such as throwing people into a basement full of dead bodies, were “German gangsters”.²⁸ It was the Germans who organised physical exercises involving jumping over benches and jumping through the window from the second floor. Those who broke their legs when jumping were finished off with truncheons. It was the Germans who forced two Jewish men to kiss, and then beat them as they did so, and also when they stopped. It was finally on 26 August that the Germans set up a mock court which sentenced about 120 Jews to death. The list of crimes described by Rapp is much longer. True, a few Polish criminals played an auxiliary role in the abuse of the victims. But Rapp clearly identifies the Gestapo as the main perpetrators. He writes: “Everything was carried out by the Gestapo and a few Poles”.²⁹

Bender does not make any note of these descriptions – an unusual way of treating the source. For her, the perpetrators of what happened in Grajewo were the Poles alone, because – as she explains in the section ‘Why here?’ – they were anti-Semites and nationalists incited by the Church.³⁰ Of course, one may write something like that, but does it have anything to do with academic research?

Let us also consider how Władysław Świacki saw the course of the events described above. The chronology he gives is slightly different, but it does not significantly affect the overall picture of the events. In his telling, on the morning of 29 June 1941, several

²⁷ Bender, ‘Pogrom w Grajewie’, pp. 81–82.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

³⁰ Bender, ‘Pogrom w Grajewie’, pp. 83–85.

dozen Gestapo men, commanded by an officer whom Świacki describes as a colonel named 'Kolasa' came to Grajewo.³¹ The Gestapo men were joined by soldiers, gendarmes and some civilians from the vicinity of Ełk and Prostki. Some of the Germans then began to rob Jewish houses. Świacki, along with others, stood behind the church wall and watched what was happening. They all saw how the Gestapo officer spoke to the Jews, insulted them and issued orders similar to those described by Rapp. Then the Jews were led through a line of torturers who beat them with clubs. Some of them were killed at that time. The Germans beat the Poles and forced them to help in the massacre of the Jews. The Germans allegedly stuck sticks in their hands and photographed them. After a few hours it turned out that about eighty people had been killed. However, Świacki noted that some Poles said that Hitler would free Poland from the Jews. Then the Gestapo left. In the subsequent actions their place was taken by local bandits, commanded by two individuals named as Szamina and Staniszewski. Interestingly, Świacki stated that he had not seen them before. Over a hundred people were killed or injured during the pogrom. Note that Świacki gives a much higher number of victims than Rapp. This was all accompanied by large-scale looting. Then Świacki, together with Fr. Peża and Mgr. Kulesza, went to the town commander, *Hauptmann* Schmidt, to ask for an intervention. It ended with the above-mentioned shooting of three Poles in front of the church.

In the following days, the group led by Szamina and Staniszewski, under authorisation from the Gestapo, began arresting Jews, Russians and Poles, as real or imaginary collaborators with the Soviet authorities. Those arrested were gathered in the former synagogue, which the Soviets had converted into a theatre. At that time, at the initiative of the German authorities, the Polish auxiliary police were established, and, after certain vicissitudes, Stanisław Świacki was appointed its commander. The reason for creating this police force was the fact that the gendarmes travelled around the powiat, and the Gestapo travelled from Ełk. Meanwhile, the gang led by Szamina and Staniszewski became more and more audacious. Schmidt handed over Soviet rifles to fifteen men who had joined the police. This body was supposed to keep order in the town; however, when asked if they could deal with the torturers from the theatre, Schmidt replied that they were under the Gestapo's control and could not be touched. Świacki knew

³¹ From the reports obtained by Monkiewicz, it appears that officer was called Kuleschka (*Grajewo w latach wojny i okupacji*, p. 88).

that terrible crimes were taking place in the theatre, that the dead were piling up in the cellars. Despite the commandant's repeated requests to intervene in what was happening in the theatre, Schmidt consistently refused. Not only that: he ordered the policemen to set up a station near the theatre. However, Świacki did not give up and began to collect evidence that the bandits were extorting money from the families of those imprisoned. A series of efforts and clever intrigues eventually led to the arrest of the perpetrators. The policemen took over the supervision of the prisoners and collected further information about the actions of Szamina, Staniszewski and their henchmen. Unfortunately, at some point the Gestapo came to supervise the prisoners and made them jump through the window, after which they were beaten. They also released Szamina and Staniszewski. Then the mock trial was conducted, which Świacki witnessed; this almost cost him his life, as he refused to participate in shooting the prisoners. The other policemen also refused to do so. However, they were forced to escort the victims to the Jewish cemetery.³²

Świacki wrote his story twenty years after the period in question, and he had perhaps confused the sequence of events. In describing these incidents, he probably also whitewashed the members of his auxiliary police: reading the files mentioned in footnote 19 indicates that things could have been a bit different, and that events were not as crystal-clear as the author wants to portray them. However, this does not change the fact that this was a clear reportage of the activities of the occupiers in Grajewo. The Germans found around a dozen men in the town who eagerly participated in their undertakings. Świacki strongly condemns the actions of these people, and claims they were later held in contempt.

While it can still be said that a pogrom was held on 29 June in which a group of residents participated, calling what took place in the synagogue (theatre) a pogrom and saying that it was carried out by Poles alone is bizarre, and does not even follow from Rapp's account on which Bender relied.

The second article I would like to discuss is the publication by Jeffrey Kopstein, 'Pogrom w Szczuczynie 27 czerwca 1941 r.' [The pogrom in Szczuczyn on 27 June 1941].³³ This is another example of how biased a difficult historical source such

³² Świacki, *Pamiętnik przechowany w beczce*, pp. 171–91.

³³ J. Kopstein, 'Pogrom w Szczuczynie 27 czerwca 1941 r.', in *Pogromy Żydów*, vol. 4, pp. 59–71.

as the memorial books can be, and also how theses of great recklessness can be drawn up after making a selective reading of the text.

In the introduction, Kopstein puts forward the thesis that the pogrom in Szczuczyn was typical of a whole wave of pogroms in Białystok and Łomża. The author does not justify this thesis in any particular way, although it is at least counterfactual.

At the beginning, Kopstein discusses the source he uses – because, as in Bender's article, only one is used – the letters of Chaja Sójka Golding contained in the memorial book of Szczuczyn.³⁴ At the same time, the author accuses Żbikowski³⁵ of not using the most valuable reports, but of only referring to the testimony of Basia Kacper.³⁶ It is obvious that Kacper's report, although enigmatic, is consistent and specific. Chaja Sójka's letters are chaotic and emotional, and in terms of factography, we cannot learn much from them. Nevertheless, in Kopstein's opinion, these are the most valuable source. Going further, one might ask why the author does not inform the reader how Chaja was able to write these letters and how many there were. Nor does he note that the same memorial book also contains the account of Mojżesz Farberowicz, which contributes a lot to the description of events. Moreover, Chaja Golding Keyman's account in Grajewo's memorial book is readily available from other sources.³⁷ One can also point to the accounts of the aforementioned Golding and her sister Sara, contained in the New York newspaper *Forward* on 5 May 1946.³⁸ Let us assume, however, that these sources and the files of the 'August' trials as collected in the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Białystok were hard for the author to access. However, he could at least have compared the content of Golding's account with what Żbikowski stated about these trials. Unfortunately, Kopstein's sole source is Golding's letters, or in fact three extracts from them, which the author supplements with his own commentary. It is true that he mentions the accounts he found in Mirosław Tryczyk's book *Miasta śmierci* [Cities

³⁴ Chaja Sójka Golding's letters are in the Szczuczyn Memorial Book, pp. 44–62 <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/szczuczyn/szc044.html>, accessed 1 June 2021. Golding escaped with her family from the Szczuczyn ghetto to the Białystok ghetto from where they came to Oświęcim. After the war, she left for the Netherlands and wrote her letters from there.

³⁵ Żbikowski, 'Pogromy i mordy', pp. 172–80.

³⁶ Basia Kacper (actually named Batia, i.e. the daughter of God) was a seamstress from Szczuczyn, who survived by hiding in the vicinity of Grajewo, including in the town of Grabowo. After the war, she gave a testimony to the Jewish Historical Commission in Białystok; she also testified twice at the court trials of the perpetrators of the pogrom. Her account can also be found in the Memorial Book of Grajewo.

³⁷ <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Grajewo/gra215.html>, accessed 1 June 2021, pp. 218–25.

³⁸ AIPN Bi 015/350, Files without title and pagination.

of death],³⁹ maintaining that they corroborate the Golding sisters' stories in the Memorial Book.

The first fragment of the Memorial Book cited by Kopstein discusses how, after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, the Poles just released from Soviet prisons, burning with hatred for Jews and Bolsheviks, took power in the town for two weeks. The result was a pogrom on the night of 27–28 June 1941, as a result of which several hundred people were killed. The author took pains to cite the extract with the most drastic descriptions of the murders. The next section reports on how a group of Jewish women went to seek help from Polish intellectuals and a priest, and finally got it by bribing some German soldiers who had accidentally ended up in the town. The theme of the Polish intelligentsia's indifference returns in the third extract from Chaja's letter, regarding a certain secretary of the notary Tyszka, who appropriated the rabbi's coat. Kopstein claims that:

the pogrom broke out and spread not only because of hatred, hostility and rage, but also because of the undisguised indifference of the key figures of the Polish community to the fate of the local Jews [...]. Meanwhile, neither the priests nor intellectuals were moved by the frightened Jewish women's dramatic pleas for intercession, as is emphasised by numerous testimonies of this and other pogroms. Neither the clergy nor the lay leaders of the community lifted a finger; they did not show the slightest sign of solidarity with their fellow citizens.⁴⁰

If Kopstein had read other accounts from Szczuczyn and the surrounding area, he would have easily seen that many of them contradicted his thesis. A classic example is the attitude of the inhabitants of Knyszyn and Rutki, and of certain clergymen from Knyszyn, Grajewo and Jasionówka. There is also an interesting account from Szczuczyn itself that those who opposed the bandits were beaten by the 'pogromists'.⁴¹ The author completely ignores the fact that the townspeople had already lived for

³⁹ M. Tryczyk, *Miasta śmierci. Sąsiedzkie pogromy Żydów*, Warszawa 2015.

⁴⁰ Kopstein, 'Pogrom w Szczuczynie', p. 63.

⁴¹ Branch Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, Institute of National Remembrance in Białystok, Files of investigation 19/06/Zn into the participation in the murders of Polish citizens of Jewish nationality on 5 July 1941 in Wąsosz, Grajewo powiat, Report of the interrogation of the witness Stanisława Kumor of 5 November 2009 by prosecutor Piotr Dąbrowski, pp. 965–67.

almost two years under Soviet terror, as a result of which many of them had died, and even more had been deported deep into the USSR. A few days before the events discussed, the direct fighting, during which a significant part of the town's buildings had been destroyed, came to an end. He does not notice – because it is not mentioned in Chaja's account – that the Germans had already started their cleanup of the town, and it was on their orders that the pogrom he described was carried out. Moreover, how could the intelligentsia have opposed an armed, drunken gang running around the streets, robbing and murdering Jews, in addition doing so at the Gestapo's orders? The author contradicts himself, describing how Chaja and other women went to work for the Germans. So in the end, who was in charge in the town?

“Two weeks after the June pogrom”, the author continues, “on 13 July 1941, the local authorities [referring to bodies made up of Poles, created by the Germans] organised another massacre, or at least participated in it”.⁴² This time he is referring to the murder at the cemetery in Skaje, during which about a hundred Jews were killed. When describing this event, Kopstein refers to the account of one Barbara K., which he took from Tryczyk. He does not notice that this is in fact Basia Kacper, whom he himself referred to at the beginning of his article. The error stems from the fact that while writing his book, Tryczyk did not notice that ‘Basia’ was a Polonisation of the Jewish name ‘Basha’ (itself derived from ‘Batia’), and decided to change it to ‘Barbara’ [of which ‘Basia’ is a common hypocoristic – translator's note], which Kopstein simply copied. We later read: “Polish peasants from the village of Skaje took part in burying the bodies, which indicates the material motives of the pogrom's perpetrators”.⁴³ This is one of the most bizarre sentences in the article. Of course, it is true that robbery was a key motive for the murderers. One has to ask, however: what was the viewpoint of the peasants, who were being forced under German orders to bury the dead?

The author further claims that “preserved sources [which ones? – P.K.] testify to the negligible presence, or even the absence, of the Germans during the above-mentioned events”.⁴⁴ This is not true. All the criminals' actions were carried out on German orders.

⁴² Kopstein, ‘Pogrom w Szczuczynie’, p. 64.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

German control was complete, as evidenced by the fact that the insubordination of three of the pogrom's leaders ended in their death at the hands of the Germans.⁴⁵

Kopstein's fundamental error, however, is different. One can indeed draw conclusions similar to those he has presented, on the basis of the one source he used. But his description covers only a small spectrum of what happened in Szczuczyn and its vicinity. It is a little as if the description of the defensive war of 1939 was limited to the defence of Westerplatte. And the events in the town are important, if not crucial, for understanding what happened in the Łomża region in the summer of 1941.

But it does not stop there. Paradoxically, most of the article is devoted not to a description of the events in the town (3½ pages), but an analysis of the causes of why they happened (5½ pages).

Unfortunately, there is nothing innovative and new in this part of the article apart from the currently fashionable topics of Polish nationalism and anti-Semitism. The author then discusses the significance of the Soviet occupation. Before the Soviets appeared in the town, the Germans ruled there for several days. At that time, they allegedly deported about three hundred Jews from Szczuczyn to Germany. This was in accordance with the order from the German Supreme Command of the Land Forces (OKH) of 24 July 1939, according to which men capable of military service aged 17 to 45 were sent as prisoners to camps in East Prussia.⁴⁶ Both Jews and Poles were deported; most of them did not return to Szczuczyn. Kopstein claims, although there is no proof, that the Germans did this "probably with the participation of the Poles".⁴⁷

Like other authors, Kopstein then tries to demonstrate that the thesis that the Jews supported Soviet power is false. His proof is a list of members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik) in Szczuczyn, of which Jews supposedly made up about 15 per cent. He also claims that a significant part of the Jewish elite was deported to Siberia, although it is impossible to guess where he gets this information.⁴⁸

Then we try to define the significance of Germany and its policy for the events that took place in summer 1941. Of course, he cites the directive by Reinhard Heydrich, quoted everywhere, according to which the Germans controlled the pogrom policy,

⁴⁵ AIPN Bi 403/135/3, District Court in Elk, Minutes of the main hearing of 17 March 1949, p. 15.

⁴⁶ J. Kowalczyk, 'Zbrodnie Wehrmachtu w regionie białostockim w latach 1939–1945', *Biuletyn GKBZH* 1982, vol. 31, p. 93.

⁴⁷ Kopstein, 'Pogrom w Szczuczynie', p. 64.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

but it was in Szczuczyn that “the Poles developed their own detailed plan of violence”.⁴⁹ It remains a mystery to me on what basis the author comes to such a conclusion. It cannot in any way be derived from the letters of Chaja Sójka Golding. I assume it is a copy of the thoughts of Tryczyk, who makes such assumptions in his book.⁵⁰

The last paragraphs of this subsection are also intriguing. Kopstein writes here about the theory of “social distance”. In Szczuczyn, due to the Jews’ numerical advantage over the Poles and their dominance in the economy, as well as the political elections (before the war the Zionists won the majority of Jewish votes), “there was not even minimal solidarity between Poles and Jews. In such a situation, a pogrom could have taken place under favourable conditions, that is, for example, if the nationalists’ supporters wanted to take advantage of the deterioration of relations between the residents which took place during Soviet rule, as well as the Germans’ consent to attack the Jews”.⁵¹

We are dealing here with a strange theory that the anti-Jewish riots in 1941 took place only in those places where the election results had gone one way or another several years earlier. It is interesting, however, what conclusions Kopstein would have reached if he had examined more towns in Poland, and not just the ‘pogrom’ ones. It seems that this is another artificial, and so to speak, forcibly created theory, which has little or no significance in explaining the events which took place in the Łomża region in the summer of 1941. The author’s sole intention was to prove ‘Polish guilt’.

Sarah Bender and Jeffrey Kopstein’s articles are similar. Both are based on excerpts from memorial books. In both, instead of the thorough work of a historian involving criticism and analysis of the source material, we are given theoretical considerations of a kind stubbornly repeated by researchers of Polish-Jewish relations in the manner of Jan Tomasz Gross. Both texts cultivate the thesis that has been repeated for years about bloodthirsty and anti-Semitic Poles murdering Jews. In both cases, the main topic of the article – be it the events in Grajewo or Szczuczyn – somehow recedes into the background, and a specific thesis is put at the forefront of the issues discussed. But should history be written this way?

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁵⁰ Tryczyk, *Miasta śmierci*, p. 299.

⁵¹ Kopstein, ‘Pogrom w Szczuczynie’, p. 70.

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SOME REFLECTIONS ON *THE LAST JEW FROM WĘGRÓW*,
THE MEMOIRS OF SHRAGA FEIVEL BIELAWSKI,
AS A SOURCE FOR RESEARCHING THE HISTORY
OF THE HOLOCAUST AND POLISH-JEWISH RELATIONS
IN THE POVIAT OF WĘGRÓW

In December 2015, thanks to the efforts of the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research, a book by Szraga Fajwel Bielawski entitled *Ostatni Żyd z Węgrowa: Wspomnienia ocalałego z zagłady w Polsce* [The last Jew from Węgrów: Memoirs of a Holocaust survivor in Poland], was published in Poland. Initially, in 1991, the book was released in English in a small circulation in the United States, where it passed without much publicity.¹

Professor Jan Grabowski, the research editor of the Polish edition, states in the introduction that “the description of Bielawski’s wartime experiences should be required reading for all who are interested in the history of the extermination of Jews in Poland, and for those who are ready to confront the most controversial and shocking aspects of Polish-Jewish relations under the occupation”²

¹ S.F. Bielawski, *The Last Jew from Wegrow. The Memoirs of a Survivor of the Step-by-Step Genocide in Poland*, ed. L.W. Liebovich, Praeger, New York 1991.

² S.F. Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd z Węgrowa*, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warszawa 2015, p. 7.

After reading this memoir, it is difficult to disagree that it contains plenty of outrageous facts and controversies; however, it did not receive a review written by a professional historian for almost three years, nor was the work's content cited in historical publications or press articles. It seemed that after a mere two years, Bielawski's memoirs would disappear from bookshelves virtually unnoticed.

However, since 2018 this publication has had a kind of renaissance. Professor Jacek Leociak, in the recently published *Młyny boże: Zapiski o kościele i zagładzie* [God's mills: Records about the Church and the Holocaust], wrote a three-page summary of its content, considering it credible.³

Grabowski also returned to the active promotion of Bielawski's memoir on the pages of his latest collective publication *Dalej jest noc* [Night without End],⁴ in which he undertook a description of the extermination of the Jews in Węgrów powiat (Polish: powiat, an administrative unit, county).⁵ Grabowski uses the content of the oft-cited memoir to recreate the sequence of events and show the mass-scale involvement of the Polish population in the extermination process.

As a local historian, I decided to deal with Bielawski's history as part of my interest in the history of the region. I learned about this book for the first time shortly after its American premiere, but I did not get my hands on the original until 2009. As I read it, the work evoked more and more shock and disbelief, but also the first doubts about the authenticity of some of the scenes describing the participation of the inhabitants of my town and the surrounding area as active accomplices in the extermination of the inhabitants of the Węgrów ghetto. When the Polish edition of the book was published in 2015, I motivated myself to undertake an exhaustive verification of its content. In the course of numerous analyses, I had the opportunity to juxtapose many

³ J. Leociak, *Młyny boże. Zapiski o Kościele i Zagładzie*, Wołowiec 2018. pp. 90–93. See also H. Grynberg, *Pamiętnik*. 3, Wołowiec 2017, pp. 580–86.

⁴ J. Grabowski, 'Powiat węgrowski', in *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski*, vol. 1, ed. B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, Warszawa 2018, pp. 383–539.

⁵ In the opinion of journalists, the chapter on the district of Węgrów not only abounds in the most drastic descriptions of the Jewish ordeal, but is also the one in which the accusations against the local community are formulated most harshly. See J. Borkiewicz, 'Pogruchotana pamięć', *Rzeczpospolita*, 19 May 2018 ('Plus Minus' supplement), pp. 14–15; P. Zychowicz, 'Człowiek bywa świnia', *Do Rzeczy* 2018, no. 19, p. 58. See also K. Czarnecka, 'Ukryte w niepamięci. Wywiad z prof. Janem Grabowskim', *Polityka* 2018, no. 7, p. 23; M. Maciorowski, 'Profesor Jan Grabowski: Pomagaliśmy Niemcom zabijać Żydów', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 17 March 2018 ('Ale Historia' supplement); A. Pawlicka, 'Za kilo cukru, pół litra wódki, za buty...', *Newsweek* 2018, no. 16, p. 11.

sources with each other, and I realised that there were many inaccuracies, half-truths and even falsehoods in Bielawski's memoir which call the credibility of his story into question. In this review, I will cover the most important points that I was able to research.

I would like to add that in an enigmatic, but thought-provoking way, my doubts as to the credibility of Bielawski's memories were confirmed by another witness to the Holocaust from Węgrów, Sewek Fiszman. He knew the Bielawski family well because his wife's sister married one of Bielawski's brothers, Jerachmiel. In an interview, Fiszman said: "A man wrote that book *The Last Jew from Węgrów*. His name is Bielawski. I called him about the book. Even as the last Jew, he did not know the stories I remembered. I wanted to buy the book to see what he wrote about, but he wanted \$50. I knew more about him than he wrote in the book, so I didn't buy it"⁶

It seems, therefore, that although he did not read the memoirs, Fiszman was convinced that Bielawski did not write the full truth about the occupation, although it is impossible to determine what exactly he had in mind.

The general context of the Holocaust and the Second World War: a series of mistakes

Even a cursory analysis of the beginning of both editions of Bielawski's memoirs should have led to reflection and the insertion of appropriate comments in the footnotes, which were often missing in the Polish edition. One does not need to make a detailed regional investigation to spot them, because one only needs to know the more important facts from the history of the Second World War. For example, according to Bielawski, in the spring of 1941, i.e. around a year before the construction of Treblinka II, transports full of Jews entered the camp (which was still non-existent) and they were liquidated on the spot. He also claims that the camp supposedly operated until the fall of 1944, while in fact the camp was liquidated a year earlier; from August 1944, the territories of the Sokołów-Węgrów powiat were already occupied by the Red Army.⁷

Bielawski's claim regarding the camp's location is also astonishing; he writes that the Jews of Węgrów were transported along the road to Siedlce, because allegedly that is

⁶ Sewek Fiszman's testimony, USC Shoah Foundation (hereinafter: USC, VHA) 18608, interview of 11 August 1996.

⁷ A. Kołodziejczyk: 'Pierwszy okres "wolności"', in *Węgrów. Dzieje miasta i okolic w latach 1441-1944*, ed. A. Kołodziejczyk, T. Swat, Węgrów 1991, p. 15.

where the camp was located. After passing through the camp's gates, the prisoners were tattooed and pseudo-medical experiments were carried out on them; however, this never happened in the case of Treblinka. There were never crematorium ovens at that location either, yet the author mentions huge crematoria.⁸

Writing about the heartlessness of the Poles who did not care to save even a single Jewish life, he mentions Finland, which was never under German occupation, as a constructive example of a country whose citizens risked their lives to save Jews.⁹ Before the war, around 4000 Jews lived there, many of whom took part in the defence of the country against Soviet aggression during the Winter War of 1939–40, and in subsequent clashes with the Red Army in 1941–44.

There is more false information. According to Bielawski, even before the German aggression against the USSR, the people of Węgrów were herded in front of loudspeakers to listen to a speech by Adolf Hitler, in which “he shouted in a loud voice that all Jews would be destroyed; if even one Jew remained alive after the war, I will salute him personally”.¹⁰ This peculiar reading of the sentencing of the accused should also be noted in other reports, including from other ghettos; however, I have not found any information about this or any other speech by Hitler in which he used the words quoted by the memoir's author.¹¹

Let us note, moreover, that an extract was removed from the Polish edition in which the information appeared that Adolf Eichmann, the SS-Obersturmbannführer¹² jointly responsible for the Final Solution, was Hitler's deputy. In reality, these two individuals never met in person. Nor did Eichmann run the extermination of the Jews in the General Government, which the memoir's author attributes to him. It is likewise untrue that the Germans filmed the extermination process in the camps and sent the records to Berlin, where in 1945 they fell into hands of the Allies when – as Bielawski writes – Berlin was ‘liberated.’¹³ Clearly, it was the Allies, in the author's opinion, who liberated the Berliners, oppressed since 1933,

⁸ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 125.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹¹ See K. Grzegorzewski, “Judenfrage”. Retoryczny obraz propagandy antysemitycznej w III Rzeszy na przykładzie publicznych wypowiedzi Adolfa Hitlera i innych polityków NSDAP w latach 1933–1945’, *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Litteraria Polonica* 2011, vol. 14, no. 1.

¹² The military equivalent of this rank in the Wehrmacht was lieutenant colonel.

¹³ Bielawski, *The Last Jew*, pp. 80–81.

from the clutches of the Nazis. But if any such material really had fallen into Allied hands, it would have been made public, at least during the Nuremberg trials.

There are also errors in the chronology of events related to the history of the Second World War. These would seem to be an insignificant mistake; however, they are another example of the work's inaccuracies. According to the author, a few weeks after the invasion of the USSR, the Germans requisitioned winter clothes from the Jews,¹⁴ as if, in August 1941, they prophetically assumed that the bitter Russian frost would overtake the Wehrmacht near Moscow. It is also puzzling that in May 1943, when the Bielawski family was hiding with Polish peasants, they heard the sounds of artillery fire and wondered whether it was German or Soviet;¹⁵ the front, however, was at that time 1000 km from the vicinity of Węgrów.

The above examples prove that Bielawski was not well aware of the history of the Holocaust and the Second World War, and provided unreliable information. Let us mention here that the first edition of the book was verified by his sons and edited by Louis W. Liebovich, a professor of journalism at the University of Illinois. Many of these inaccuracies were not referred to in either the introduction or the footnotes by Jan Grabowski.¹⁶



Who was Szraga Fajwel Bielawski?

According to the book, Bielawski was born on 3 March 1916 in Węgrów, a district town located 80 km north-east of Warsaw. In fact, according to the records of his marital status, the date of his birth is different: 11 March 1911.

A photo of Bielawski from an allegedly false identity card, apparently issued in 1942. In fact, it is a post-war passport photo, as evidenced by the Polish state emblem imprinted on it. Source: S.F. Bielawski, *The Last Jew from Wegrow*, ed. L.W. Liebovich, New York 1991.

¹⁴ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 107.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁶ Sometimes Grabowski's footnotes are very puzzling. The information cited by Bielawski about the establishment of the camp in Treblinka was included in a footnote stating that it was probably a labour camp. Bielawski stated that the transports of Jews to be liquidated arrived at the camp, and the bodies of those murdered were burned. This clearly indicates the Treblinka II extermination camp, which was established a year later than stated in the description by the author.

Before the war, the town was a typical *shtetl*, mostly inhabited by a Jewish population engaged in trade and crafts. Bielawski finished his education at the elementary school level and took up the family business. His well-to-do family traded in timber and also ran a haberdashery shop on the Market Square, at number 16, in Węgrów. After the death of his father, Wolf Bielawski, Fajwel and his brothers bought timber, and his mother, along with Menucha, Szraga's sister, ran the haberdashery shop.¹⁷ This information is meagre, but it suggests that the Bielawskis belonged to the middle-class economic class of the town. Their lives were similar to those of hundreds of thousands of Jewish merchants and traders in towns similar to Węgrów. Nothing is known about the political views of the author or whether he was actively involved in any of the Jewish political groups operating in the town.¹⁸

During the occupation, the entire Bielawski family remained in Węgrów and, fortunately, survived the liquidation of 22 September 1942, as well as the liquidation of the so-called remnant ghetto [*getto szczątkowe*, *Restghetto*] a few months later. Until the end of the war, they hid with Polish peasants near the villages of Jarnice and Zajac.

After returning to Węgrów, Bielawski ran a restaurant for a year, then moved to Łódź; in 1946 or 1947 he left Poland. For some time he stayed in Belgium and Germany, where he managed to obtain an American visa. In 1950, he arrived in the United States, where he obtained citizenship, changed his name to Philip Biel, and ran his own company in Minnesota. He wrote his memoirs in retirement in 1991, and died on 13 February 2004.

The Bielawski family: their social position and survival strategies during the war

When the Germans entered Węgrów in 1939, a time of terror and exploitation began for the town's Jewish community, which numbered over five thousand.

¹⁷ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, pp. 40, 31–32.

¹⁸ During the war, Bielawski mentioned his involvement in the underground group led by right-wing Zionists under Zanwel Szpilman. I only managed to establish that a resident of Węgrów with this name and surname was murdered in Treblinka. I have reasonable doubts as to whether this type of conspiracy was really organised in the Węgrów ghetto. According to the memoir, the conspirators Bielawski named unsuccessfully tried to obtain weapons from a combat organisation associated with the PPS, but no historian mentions this in any previous historical research. See T. Wangrat, *Polska i powiat węgrowski w przededniu i w czasie II wojny światowej*, Węgrów 2010; J. Stolarz, 'Powiat Węgrów w walce z okupantem', *Najnowsze Dzieje Polski 1939–1945* 1965, vol. 9, pp. 95–141; P. Matusak, 'Okupacja i ruch oporu w Węgrowie 1939–1944', *Szkice Podlaskie* 2005, no. 13, pp. 57–100.

The Bielawskis lost the opportunity to trade timber, and could only run the haberdashery shop.¹⁹

A key event for the local Jews was the creation of a ghetto in Węgrów. It remained open, and was not fenced off from the rest of the town by a wall or barbed wire entanglements. The fact that the Jewish district was an open ghetto made the lives of its inhabitants a little more liveable than in other ghettos, if only because it was easier to get food. Gradually, however, the Jews' situation became more and more difficult due to their exploitation as free labour, requisitions of their property, financial extortion, restrictions on their ability to earn a livelihood, starvation rations and German terror.²⁰

The population density in the ghetto was high due to the necessity to locate there first the Jews expelled from Greater Poland, and then the Jewish population displaced from smaller towns. The implementation of German orders was supervised by two institutions established by the Germans, the *Judenrat* and the *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst* (the Jewish police²¹), which did not have a good reputation. Working for them ensured greater food rations and increased the chance of protecting oneself and one's family from being recruited into labour gangs.²²

Bielawski speaks positively about the *Judenrat* in Węgrów, while in the chapter describing the period before the liquidation of the ghetto, he vividly describes his conflict with the police chief, Noach Kochman.

This incident ended with the policeman being beaten up, when the *Judenrat* made an attempt to settle a Jewish family in Bielawski's house.²³ The question then arises of what the reason was for Bielawski's exceptional position, if he dared to get into a fight with the chief of police; and why, although no strangers lived in his residence, the Jewish police did not send him and his family members to perform forced labour, such as working in the town. Also, why was the family

¹⁹ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 51.

²⁰ W. Gozdawa-Gołębiowski, 'Powiat węgrowski w latach okupacji hitlerowskiej', in *Węgrów. Dzieje miasta i okolic 1944–2005*, ed. A. Kołodziejczyk, T. Swat, M. Szczupak, Węgrów 2006, p. 330.

²¹ The JO officers were commonly known as *odemans* (OD-men).

²² Efraim Przepiórka, who collected reports from Jewish survivors from Węgrów after the war, notes the corruption: "Since the *Judenrat* and the Jewish police started operating in the town, corruption has also started to appear. Whoever paid a bribe was not sent to work. The *Judenrat* was ordered to send 1000 or 2000 people to work – but money could cancel the order. It was understood that everyone gave money" (E. Przepiórka, 'Tak został zniszczony Węgrów', in *Vengrov: Sefer Zikharon*, ed. M. Tamari, Tel Aviv 1961, p. 63).

²³ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, pp. 103–15.

property not a victim of the numerous requisitions which took place at that time? These questions are important because – as Bielawski claims – from the moment of the aforementioned fight, Kochman became his enemy, unsuccessfully trying to trap him and get him sent to a labour gang as an act of revenge. The only repression that affected him was the forced labour ordered by the Germans, and only when he happened to find himself in the ghetto by mischance.²⁴ It had nothing to do with the conflict with the Jewish police commander which he described.

Bielawski explains his incredible luck in avoiding being included in the labour gangs by the fact that his fiancée, Rachel, had information about the special lists of Jews assigned by the *Judenrat* to tasks required by the occupiers, so when the name of Bielawski or his brother appeared, both of them could hide in advance, first in the ‘outhouse’, and later in a hiding place in the attic.²⁵

How does Bielawski explain that, in the face of the high density of ten people per room, his family of four were able to live in a five-room apartment? Well, it was because he presented the *Volksdeutsche* from the accommodation office with two shirts, which apparently protected his family from being rehoused for almost two years. That is a suspiciously low price for such a big favour, and these explanations seem quite infantile. Considering these two facts (the fight with the chief of the Jewish police and comfortable living conditions during the occupation), we see that Bielawski had a unique position in the ghetto, and that he was probably being protected by someone who represented the ghetto elite, although he himself does not expand upon these circumstances.

Piotr Matusak, who researched the occupation in Węgrów, writes: “In 1940, the daily bread allowance in Węgrów for the Poles was 200 grams per person, and in 1941 it was 250 grams. This was below the level of biological necessity. The situation of the Jews was even more tragic, as they received only half what the Poles did.”²⁶

All the more puzzling is the description of the ration allocation Bielawski includes on the pages of his memoirs: “A week’s rations for one person consisted of one pound of meat, a half pound of sugar, a half pound of butter, and so on.”²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 73–74, 93–96.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 65–66.

²⁶ Matusak, ‘Okupacja i ruch oporu’, p. 65.

²⁷ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 69.

Let us note that the amount of meat he describes is five times higher than what was available on the coupons for Poles, and ordinary Jews did not receive meat at all.

Only Jewish policemen or members of the *Judenrat* could have received such rations in the ghetto.²⁸ It is possible that the passage of time caused the author to become confused regarding the amount of food allocated, although that would be strange at the very least. In other memoirs, the lack of food is a circumstance that the victims of the German occupation remembered well and emphasised strongly in their accounts.²⁹

The fact that Bielawski belonged to the ghetto's elite, most likely the Jewish police, may also be confirmed by the fact that, according to Sewek Fiszman, Bielawski's brother Mosze was an officer in that body.³⁰ It is hard to believe that he and his brother had to hide from being drafted into the labour gangs.

Indirectly, this is confirmed by the wartime memoirs of one Eddie Bielawski, Szraga Fajwel's nephew. On the cover of his memoirs, we can find a photograph of the four Bielawski brothers, an image which was also included in *The Last Jew from Wegrow*. Three of them are wearing boots or leggings, which was a custom of the Jewish policemen. Initially, I was inclined to identify the owners of this type of footwear more with the uniformed services, but in Waclaw Roguski's account I found a report that, at that time, shoes with uppers had become so fashionable that women also wore them.³¹ Therefore, it cannot be assumed *a priori* that just because someone wore such shoes meant they served in the Jewish police.

Another detail is important. The figure on the right, Mosze, is wearing a functional armband. However, the cover reproduction of Eddie Bielawski's book differs from the original, as it has been retouched. The pile of branches in the background has been replaced by a brick wall, and Mosze's arm bearing the unfortunate band has disappeared.³² It can be assumed that the memoir's author

²⁸ B. Engelking, F. Tych, A. Żbikowski, J. Żyndul, *Pamięć. Historia Żydów Polskich przed, w czasie i po Zagładzie*, ed. G. Tencer, Warszawa 2008, p. 114.

²⁹ Bielawski also writes about this, but he is concerned with the period after the liquidation of the ghetto, when he was hiding in the hideout, and later in the Polish countryside. Before September 1942, he did not complain about hunger that much.

³⁰ Sewek Fiszman's report.

³¹ W. Roguski, 'Wspomnienia z lat młodości w wsi Górki Borze (do 1944 roku) oraz okresu służby wojskowej (1944–1946)', *Zeszyty Korytnickie* 2010, vol. 2, p. 65.

³² E. Bielawski, *Invisible Jews: Surviving the Holocaust in Poland*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2017. Picture from the book cover.



The Bielawski brothers (from left): Icchak, Fajwel, Jerachmiel, Mosze. The latter was wearing an armband with two bands, which indicates that he held a certain position. Source: Bielawski, *The Last Jew from Węgrow*.

considered his uncle's service in the Jewish police to be too troublesome, and so he decided to have the photo retouched appropriately.³³

Regarding the discussion concerning the Jewish police, the extract from the memoir concerning how Bielawski and his brother dressed is unclear and puzzling.

After the largest liquidation action in September 1942, the Germans established the so-called remnant ghetto in November, where a selected group of Jews was allowed to stay. At that time, Fajwel Bielawski's sister found employment in Jachiel Kreda's laundry, while her two brothers only dined there. Fajwel and Mosze did not do any work throughout the existence of the ghetto, so they did not have the necessary passes allowing the few Jews from Węgrów to legally remain in the town.

At one point they made the decision to change their clothes from Jewish to Polish. Bielawski recalls: "We decided to hide our new 'gentile' clothing with Rachel's friend,

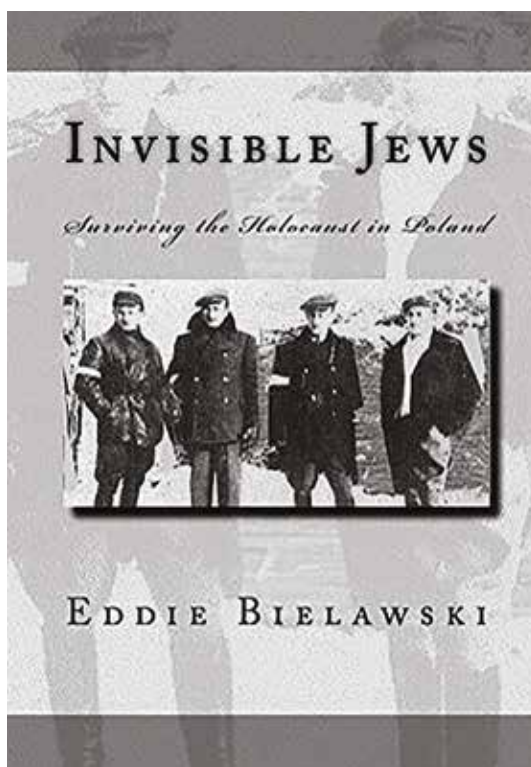
³³ In the collection of the Municipal Public Library in Węgrów, you can see the preserved armband of a Jewish police officer. There is a bilingual inscription, *Juden Polizei / Policja Żydowska*, on a white background. The two stripes which are seen on Mosze's armband are not visible on the MBP armband. In Bielawski's memoir, we read that Moshe was a member of the sanitary team; but if he was indeed wearing the armband of this service, there would have been no need to retouch the photos.

Photo of the cover of Eddie Bielawski's book. The background in the form of a pile of the branches has disappeared, and has been replaced by a brick wall. Mosze's arm bearing the armband has also disappeared. Source: E. Bielawski, *Invisible Jews: Surviving the Holocaust in Poland*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2017.

the Zelinska woman, who was a dentist. She agreed and said she would allow us to change there, if the need arose".³⁴

This does not seem to make any sense. Bielawski goes around (even though he does not have to) in some clothes that could mark him out as a Jew, and, if danger arises, he has to get to a Polish dentist in order to change into a non-Jewish outfit that allows him to look like a Pole. On the way, he risks exposure and wastes time that he could have used to find a hideout or leave the town in a hurry. He runs the risk of not finding the owner of the house, which would further worsen his situation. All these problems would disappear if Bielawski simply wore the clothes he purchased, or bought a spare set and put it somewhere for safekeeping, just in case. He could afford to do so. He and his brother, if we believe Bielawski's account, did not have any documents proving that they were registered employees, which put both of them at risk of being shot if they came across any gendarmes. So, walking around in clothes that indicated their Jewish origin, and moreover not carrying any documents, was an invitation to the Germans to inspect them, which would have led to a tragic end.

One also wonders what, in the reality of 1943, was the garment which indicated that its owner could be Jewish? The Germans forbade Jews to wear items of clothing related to religious life, such as *tallit* or skullcaps, so it seems that at that time only the uniform of a Jewish policeman could have clearly indicated the owner's



³⁴ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 183.

origin. Bielawski himself mentions that the policemen from Węgrów wore dark blue uniforms, as an indication of the standardisation of their dress.³⁵ No other description of the uniform of this formation has survived. Jan Stolarz mentioned, however, that they had special armbands and 'English-style' caps with a green brim.³⁶

As I mentioned earlier, from Sewek Fizman's account, we learn that Moshe Bielawski served in the Jewish police, so in his case the decision to replace his uniform with a civilian outfit would be understandable. Since Fajwel took a similar decision, it may mean that he was also a member of the *Ordnungsdienst*. It is true that Fizman only described Mosze as a policeman, but it is also possible that Fajwel joined the police in the last period of its existence, or had simply come to own the uniform of a Jewish policeman.³⁷ When the largest liquidation action took place in September 1942, the Germans deliberately spared the members of the *Judenrat* and Jewish policemen. Stanisław Wojciechowski writes: "The Jews who were in the Jewish police and the *Arbeitskommando* survived the longest".³⁸ On the other hand, Stolarz describes the Jewish police in Węgrów as follows:

In order to ensure that none of the Jews would leave their [ghetto] area, the Germans established the Jewish police. There were many candidates. The policemen – with special armbands, in English-style caps with a green brim – eagerly fulfilled their duties of persecution and assistance in the murder of their brothers, imposed on them by the Nazi occupants. They were equipped with rubber truncheons, which – as I have seen – they did not hesitate to use, beating those who violated the Nazis' regulations and orders.³⁹

Perhaps, thanks to this camouflage, Bielawski and his brother managed to survive liquidation in the ghetto, but he was not willing to write about it.⁴⁰ He does write

³⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

³⁶ Stolarz, 'Powiat Węgrów', p. 112.

³⁷ Sewek Fizman recalled that, as an outsider from Warsaw, he was particularly vulnerable to being detained for forced labour, and that he hid at home from the Jewish police. This limited his freedom to walk around the ghetto and observe what was happening there.

³⁸ S. Wojciechowski, *Osiem epizodów z mojego życia*, Warszawa 1992, 2nd edn, p. 34.

³⁹ Stolarz, 'Powiat Węgrów', p. 112.

⁴⁰ Bielawski describes the way in which he handed over clothes to Mrs. Zielińska as an example of his caution, just like burying money in a specially marked place near the Kreda dye shop. But in the description

that during the operation in September 1942, all the Bielawskis hid in the attic above the shop, and that he also survived the subsequent liquidation of the so-called remnant ghetto in April 1943. From that moment on, the whole family was hidden in the countryside by Polish peasants and were fortunate enough to live to see the end of the German occupation in August 1944. During the liquidation action, the Germans spared the Jewish policemen, who were used to bury the dead and empty the contents of Jewish shops. The Germans also used Jewish policemen to guard and lead to the execution sites those Jews who had survived the liquidation action and were hiding in the ghetto.⁴¹

Today it is difficult to determine whether only one or both of the brothers were included in the ranks of the police, but the Jewish *Ordnungsdienst's* actions during the war were sufficient reason not to reveal in their memoirs any connections that the Bielawski family might have had with this formation.

Who were the beneficiaries of the German occupation – the Poles rather than the Germans?

For Holocaust researchers, the most important material is information written from the perspective of the eyewitnesses to the crime. According to Bielawski, however, the history of the Holocaust looks as if the Germans only actively signified their presence during the two liquidation actions in the Węgrów ghetto; and in the other situations, the negative role during the occupation was primarily played by his Polish neighbours. So there is no mention of the terror and ruthless exploitation inflicted on the Poles.⁴² Nor does the author clearly specify any

of his escape from Węgrów, we do not find the slightest mention of he and his brother digging up the hidden money before leaving the town and taking the deposit from Mrs. Zielińska. Thus, according to the memoir, both brothers – wearing 'Jewish' (i.e. very distinctive) clothing and lacking any money – leave the town, only to return to it after the Red Army entered in August 1944. It is hard to believe in such amnesia.

⁴¹ See Archiwum Państwowe w Siedlcach (State Archives in Siedlce; hereinafter: APS), SO 653, Testimony of Klementyna Bobruk of 25 May 1948, p. 35; *ibid.*, Testimony of Janina Krysiak of 25 May 1948, p. 35; Sewek Fiszman's report.

⁴² The only Polish victim of the Germans noted in the book is "the father of Maniek Karbowski", the persecutor of the Bielawski family. I managed to establish that his name was Bolesław Karbowski; he was not murdered by the Germans, but by the Soviets. He was a policeman and in September 1939, together with other policemen from Węgrów, he was evacuated to the East, where after 17 September he was taken prisoner by the Soviets. In 1940, he was murdered along with other policemen from Węgrów in Mednoe. The fate of 'Maniek Karbowski's father' is another example of Bielawski's factual errors and lapses.

information concerning the death penalties imposed for Poles who hid and gave aid to the Jewish population.⁴³ Instead, there are descriptions of the fraternisation of Poles with the Germans and the tangible, material benefits that this collaboration brought them, including the takeover of Jewish houses and shops. The Poles also allegedly did not want to share their food with those starving in the ghetto.⁴⁴

Moreover, it is astonishing why there is no information about the Jewish district in Węgrów being literally wiped out from the face of the earth by the occupying authorities, but when a related thread appears, it turns out that, following the decision of the local priest, the bricks from the demolished synagogue were used to build a wall around the cemetery. The reader is therefore convinced that all the post-Jewish houses fell into Polish hands. In fact, only those in the Aryan quarter survived. During the war, they came under German administration and the Poles could only lease them; after 1944, they became municipal property.⁴⁵

In connection with the process, vividly described by Bielawski, of the Poles rapidly taking over the Jewish houses, the following question arises: how did it happen that his well-situated brick house was not handed over to Polish owners during the occupation? Bielawski explained that the Germans established an officers' club in his house and shop. However, it appears that during the occupation the so-called *Soldatenheim*, thoroughly expanded by the Germans and adapted to their needs, was located in a completely different place – on the opposite side of the market square, in the building of the current Tax Office. Stanisław Wojciechowski gives the exact location of this club: “During the occupation,

⁴³ When the Bielawski family was hiding with the Polish Korczak family, the Polish farmer warned his children that if they told someone else about it, their parents would face death. Bielawski himself does not confirm the truthfulness of Korczak's words in his book, and other Poles, such as Waclaw Bujalski (with whom the Bielawskis were hiding for over a year), justified their fears by the fact that they were in danger from an unspecified threat. In describing the Polish peasants, Bielawski stated that, considering the realities of the occupation, they were fortunate and not afraid of anyone. The danger appeared only when the front was approaching, because until July 1944, according to the author of the memoir, “death was only a concern of the Jews” (Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 265).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89, 99.

⁴⁵ This was the case with the house of Mosze Mendelbaum, the head of the *Paolei Sijon* party, who is mentioned in Bielawski's book. In December 1942, it was leased by the Germans to my grandfather Antoni Piątkowski, and from August 1945, the profits from the lease were taken over by the Communist authorities. It was similar with other post-Jewish properties whose legal owners did not return after the war.

in the building next to the church, in addition to the pre-war offices of the *starosta*, magistrate and tax office, the Germans organised an officer's casino on the ground floor⁴⁶.

I am signalling this inaccuracy because – as I will show later – there are a large number of errors in Bielawski's memoirs. The plunder of Jewish property by the Poles and the friendship between the residents of Węgrów and the Germans which he cites are only a prelude to much more serious accusations.

The participation of Poles in the liquidation of Jews

The most dramatic chapter of the book is devoted to the liquidation of the ghetto in Węgrów on 22 September 1942. Bielawski describes that before its commencement, he, his sister, his brother and his mother had concealed themselves in the attic above their shop and stayed there for 49 days, until the Germans announced an amnesty for the Jews on 10 November. The Bielawskis' shop and house were situated on the market square in Węgrów, where the Jewish population was herded on the day of its liquidation, before they were transported to Treblinka. In the following days, trucks stood in the market square and were used to transport to the camp those who were taken by a liquidation team specially brought from Sokołów Podlaski to remove the victims from their hiding places in the ghetto.⁴⁷

As he described, for the first three days he only heard what was happening outside, but on the fourth day he made a narrow hole in the mortar, and from that moment he could observe the events taking place on the market square.⁴⁸

According to the author, on the first day the inhabitants of Węgrów enthusiastically joined in with the liquidation action. His Polish neighbour, Maniek Karbowski, together with the SS men, searched the Bielawskis' house, while other Poles helped to load the Jews onto trucks throughout the day. The tragedy was accompanied by the laughter of the Poles, who in the evening, after the action was over, in the Karbowski's pub, right next to the Bielawskis' hideout, loudly

⁴⁶ Wojciechowski, *Osiem epizodów*, p. 22. This account seems to indicate that the town's inhabitants did not distinguish between a soldier's house and an officer's salon; perhaps the Germans themselves did not make strict distinctions in places such as Węgrów.

⁴⁷ J. Tchórzewski, *Świadectwo dojrzałości. Wspomnienia z lat 1928–1945*, Katowice 2007, p. 106.

⁴⁸ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 88.

manifested their joy at getting rid of their neighbours from the ghetto. The joy was allegedly even greater as the Jewish shops and their contents passed into Polish hands.⁴⁹

In the following days – according to the author – the Polish involvement remained considerable. The Poles discovered the hideout of the Bielawskis' neighbours, and handed Tojbe Chudzik and her three daughters into the hands of the cruel gendarme, Giller, who shot all four of them. They also showed the Germans where the three Złotowski sisters, also neighbours of the Bielawskis, lived.⁵⁰ In another description, no Germans were present, but firefighters from Węgrów and 'blue' policemen loaded the family of the dentist Nisman, a well-known person in the town, onto a truck. When one of his daughters tried to escape, she was shot down in cold blood by 'blue' policemen.⁵¹

On the seventh day of the operation, Polish firefighters and policemen, assisted by a single German, led the remaining captured Jews out of the prison located in the so-called Żywica house, including the family of Bielawski's maternal uncle, Schlessinger. Nearly fifty people were led to the Jewish cemetery, where they died at the hands of Polish policemen. Bielawski writes: "The Germans could not have had it any easier. One German soldier would supervise, the Polish firemen would keep order, and the Polish police would execute the Jews. The Poles finally could fulfill their fantasy of killing Jews. The Nazis only needed to send one SS officer".⁵²

Even the Polish children played a part: "The policemen, carrying rifles, paraded alongside to make sure no one escaped. Polish children stuck out their tongues and mocked the Jews".⁵³ Earlier Bielawski recalls: "The families I had seen supporting each other in the street were now dead, murdered by these bandits. The gentile Poles were not satisfied with rounding up their neighbors for the gas chambers. Now, the Germans let the Poles, themselves, exterminate whoever had been missed by the trucks to Treblinka".⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 124.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 133.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 131–32.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 137–38.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 137.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 135.

Bielawski's comment on the scene he saw after the Poles executed the Jews in the Jewish cemetery is very telling: "The next morning there were no more Jews to catch, and nothing more to watch. The Germans walked arm in arm with Polish girls. The Poles and Germans were partners, and they had been successful".⁵⁵

It would be difficult to accuse the Poles of participating in the Holocaust more eloquently. By asking the rhetorical question, "Why would a village of people collaborate with a vicious group of invaders to send their neighbors to gas chambers?"⁵⁶ Bielawski unambiguously sent all the Poles of Węgrów to the dock.

Are these descriptions true, and was Bielawski a witness of the described events? It is worth asking ourselves these questions in greater detail.

Was Bielawski really hiding in the attic?

Serious doubts as to whether Bielawski saw what he described in his memoir arose after my inspection of the place that was both his hideout and observation point. The house and shop have survived to the present time, and can now be found at Rynek Mariacki 26 (formerly Rynek 16), although the attic has been closed for many years and unused by anyone. The only entrance, through the hatch, was blocked long ago when the ceiling was plastered over during the store's renovation. The only way to get to the attic was from the roof. If the Bielawski family did indeed hide out there, there should be some remnants of it on the walls – a scratch on the wall indicating that someone had cut through the bricks with a sharp tool, which would leave a mark in the form of new mortar. It thus seemed worth trying to do a reconnaissance.

I admit that I doubted whether I could discover the remains of the hideout, but after I entered it turned out that it really did exist, and that it had survived in surprisingly good condition. Walls, doors, and even a few objects belonging to the Jewish owners survived: a kerosene lamp, bottles, cans of German-canned fish, fragments of cardboard boxes with Hebrew inscriptions. On one of the beams, someone cut marks that were probably used to record the number of days in hiding. Was there one person or more? Did the author of *The Last Jew from Wegrow* really spend time there?

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 139.

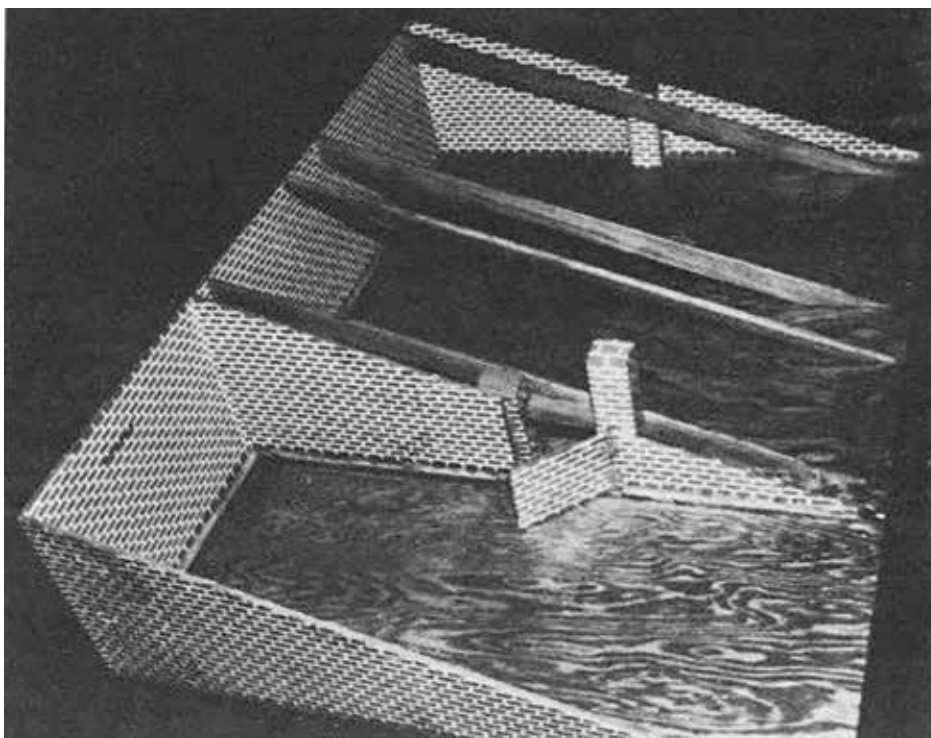
⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 126.

Bielawski claims that he built the hideout himself. For the purposes of the book, he prepared both a detailed description of its structure and an appropriate drawing. However, a closer inspection showed that there is a serious discrepancy between his description and drawing and the actual state of the building. The hiding place allegedly had the shape of a narrow rectangle, and Bielawski says he built one wall along the attic. In fact, the room is L-shaped, and the person who constructed it built two brick walls which meet at a 90-degree angle, separating the entrance hatch leading from the kitchen from the rest of the attic intended as the hiding place.

Bielawski was also supposed to have very cleverly disguised a brick door with a metal rim. He recalls that his Polish neighbour, Maniek Karbowski, zealously searched the attic and rapped on the walls to hand over the Jewish family



A contemporary photo of the shop and house of the Bielawski family. The shop was located where there is now the entrance to the 'Szmizjerka' shop. Around a dozen years ago, the roof structure was changed to a triangular form, which revealed the hideout. The original looked like the nearer part of the building, which now contains an exchange office, among others. The Bielawski family's yellow and grey house stands sideways at 90 degrees to the store. Photo by Roman Postek.



The drawing of the hideout included in the book, which – as it turned out – bears little resemblance to what I discovered in the attic of this building. Source: Bielawski, *The Last Jew from Wegrow*.

to the Germans, so the masked door turned out to be a brilliant solution, and their Polish persecutor left this place in the conviction that there were no Jews hiding in the attic.⁵⁷

If, however, the description of Maniek's meticulous searches was accurate, the hideout would have been detected within a few minutes. Someone who visited the store regularly would have had no trouble noticing that the attic was smaller than the size of the ceiling in the store would suggest, and by knocking on the door, it would have been easy to discover the unmasked iron frame on the right side of the door. In the description of the construction and in the drawing, the right edge is cleverly masked with a false chimney. In fact, this was never built, so someone checking the wall in more detail would have discovered a narrow gap between the wall and the iron-rimmed bricks that make up the door. To make

⁵⁷ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 127.



The hideout. Standing outside it, I shone a flashlight into the interior. We can clearly see that there is no false chimney on the left side, and the right end of the door is not directly adjacent to the chimney. Photo by Mariusz Szczupak.

matters worse, the hideout's builder failed to fit the door so that the brick rows in the wall were aligned with the door bricks to form a single line. This is a small but clearly visible fault. The Bielawski family probably owed their rescue to the fact that when the shop was being searched, one of the Germans looked into the attic with a flashlight, inspected the walls for a moment, and then went downstairs. And later – contrary to what the author of the memoir writes – no one else came looking for them.⁵⁸

When writing about the equipment in the hideout, Bielawski also mentions that he prepared flashlights and candles to illuminate it. It is hard to believe that, after being in the hideout for 49 days, he did not remember that he could have

⁵⁸ In a 1997 interview, Bielawski said that the Germans, accompanied by Maniek Karbowski, searched his house and shop only once. Contrary to what he had written in his book, he did not mention any subsequent attempts to find their hiding place in the attic. After its discovery, I spoke with the post-war owners of the property, in whose hands it had been for over 30 years; they had been unaware of its existence for the whole time.



Items found in the hideout, including a kerosene lamp, cardboard boxes with Hebrew inscriptions, and a tin of German-canned fish. Photo by Mariusz Szczupak.

used a kerosene lamp to illuminate it, which would have been better suited for this purpose than candles. Anyway, I found such a lamp inside the hideout.

Moreover, Bielawski writes: On the morning of the fourth day, I decided I had to see what was happening outside. I took a knife and began to scrape out the mortar between two bricks on the wall facing the square. It took a whole day and night of scraping, but I finally gouged a small peephole⁵⁹.

Anyone familiar with the topography of the town would seriously doubt whether this was the case after reading this passage. The very idea of gouging a peephole to see something is questionable. A scratch on the white plastered outer wall of the store would have exposed the hideout to the public, which can be verified by carefully examining the façade in the contemporary photo. If such an opening were made today, it would also be perfectly visible.

And finally – as Bielawski knew very well – the view of the greater part of the market square, where the most dramatic events took place, was obscured

⁵⁹ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 127.



The shopping hall, now demolished, which effectively made it impossible to see what was happening in the market square. A photo from the 1960s, taken shortly before its demolition. Photo by Eugeniusz Rajs.

by a large shopping hall (which no longer exists), the roof of which was higher than the Bielawski's loft.

In the drawing in the book, one row of bricks was marked, so it was possible to pierce the mortar with an ordinary knife. However, on the spot, I measured the thickness of the bricks in the wall, because – as I mentioned – the building has survived in the same shape to this day.⁶⁰ The bricks were up to 38 cm thick, so it would have been absolutely impossible for anyone to pierce through this wall with an ordinary knife. There is not even an indication on the wall of anyone trying to do so, because then the mortar on the length of two bricks would have had to be fresher than that on the rest of the wall. In an interview in 1997, Bielawski recalled that he had a small, folding knife. Anyway, even if he had miraculously made a crack in it, he could not have seen through the opening any of the incidents which he described. With such a large distance between the eyes and the opening of the slit, it would have been impossible to see any dynamic action such as Bielawski describes.

This is not the only case of false report about the construction of a hideout. Later, when the entire family was hiding in the countryside with Waclaw Bujalski,

⁶⁰ The only visible change is the location of the gable roof on a part of the building in place of the former one-slope roof, and that the walls are now insulated with polystyrene.



The wall separating the hideout from the market square. It would not have been possible to pierce it with the pocket knife that Bielawski had at his disposal. Currently, this part of the building has a different, gable roof, rising above the wall, as can be seen in the photo. When the store was owned by the Bielawski family, the single-pitched roof dropped to the opposite end of the building. The concrete poured over the bricks is a remnant of the previous roof structure. Photo by Mariusz Szczupak.

Bielawski claimed he came up with the idea of building a shelter in the Polish farmer's field. As it turned out, the hideout had already been built for two people by another escapee from the ghetto, Sewek Fizman, and the Bielawskis only adapted it to accommodate a larger number of people.⁶¹

Bielawski's reports on his observations from the hideout differ from those he gave in Łódź after the war.

The extermination of Jews in Bielawski's post-war testimony

These testimonies were submitted to the Central Jewish Historical Commission in April 1945, and the minutes were recorded by hand by one Epstein, whose first name is not known.⁶² Bielawski testified in Yiddish and his words were translated into Polish. At the very beginning, he gave a false date of birth (1914) and stated that

⁶¹ Sewek Fizman's report.

⁶² I have not been able to establish who he was or what his name was.

he had been in Węgrów only at the beginning of the war. Both pieces of information contradict what he stated in the pages of his memoir.⁶³

In the first two-page testimony, we find a description of the death of Rabbi Morgenstern, who was murdered in September 1939. In the second, Bielawski focuses on the events that took place in Węgrów until the end of the war. He begins by repeating the story of Morgenstern's death, then discusses the help that the people of Węgrów gave in 1939 to the prisoners driven to the sports ground by the Germans, and then talks about the slave labour performed by the Jews of Węgrów. The above events, divided into two pages, can be treated as a prologue to the tragedy of the Jewish community after 22 September 1942. However, his testimonies do not contain any details of the liquidation of the ghetto in Węgrów. On this subject, Bielawski testifies: "This was the situation until 1942. Then the Operation began in Węgrów. 10,000 Jews were sent to Treblinka. About 5000 were shot by the German and Polish police at the Jewish cemetery in Węgrów. The Polish population took all the property that was left by the Jews".⁶⁴

In the case of the events of 22 September 1942, the account basically boils down to three facts that are obvious to everyone who survived the occupation in Węgrów or its vicinity. Most of the Jews were taken to Treblinka; some were shot by the Germans. I have not come across any source that confirms the participation of 'blue' policemen as a firing squad at the cemetery. There are also reports that the Nazis tried to secure valuables in order to transport them to Germany.⁶⁵ Of course, there were also cases of Poles plundering Jewish property, but the thesis that all the Jewish property ended up in Polish hands is not supported by the facts either.

In Bielawski's account, we do not find any information that would confirm that he was an eyewitness to the liquidation of the Węgrów ghetto, or that he knew something more than anyone else. A witness who twice reports to the clerk about

⁶³ Testimony of Fajwel Bielawski, Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; hereinafter: AŻIH) 301/38.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Bielawski did not mention that the Jewish stores were thoroughly stripped by the Jewish policemen who, under the supervision of the Ukrainians, loaded the goods onto trucks that were to go to Germany. See A.P., 'Gromadzenie świadectwa', in *Vengrov: Sefer Zikharon*, p. 72.

the tragic death of Rabbi Morgenstern – which he only knew about from a report by his mother – should have provided a more extensive account of the dramatic events which he saw with his own eyes. However, this did not happen.

Philip Biel, as an eyewitness to the Holocaust in the sources of the Yad Vashem Institute and the USC Shoah Foundation

One of the tasks of the Yad Vashem Institute is to consistently implement a programme to collect information about the murdered Jews. Those who were eyewitnesses to the deaths of their relatives, friends or other people known to them personally filled in the appropriate fields on special forms by providing the personal data of those who had been murdered or who died of natural causes. It was permitted to file reports about people whose death the witness had second-hand information, as long as he was convinced of the truth of the report. And even if the witness had only seen a deportation to a death camp, this was considered a death certificate.

In 1979, Bielawski – under his new American name of Philip Biel – filled out 34 such forms for Yad Vashem, containing information about the circumstances of the death of the Jewish inhabitants of Węgrów which were known to him. Since the files have now been digitised and made available online, we may now view all the cards he filled in.⁶⁶

The list includes the victims of the execution, described by Bielawski, which the ‘blue’ policemen carried out in the Jewish cemetery. On the basis of his book, it should be possible to identify 43 relatives and close friends, 30 of whom were taken to the cemetery and allegedly shot there by the Polish police.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, the Yad Vashem institute gives only eight names of members of the Schlessinger family. Together with them, the executioners allegedly killed the Marcusfeld family, consisting of Mendel Marcusfeld, his wife, Frajdla, and their son, Mosze, with his wife and son, Dawid. In the book version, all the above-mentioned persons were shot at the Jewish cemetery on the eighth day after the liquidation action began, which makes it possible to precisely determine the date of their death as 30

⁶⁶ ‘Phillip Biel Yad Vashem: Pages of Testimony Names Memorial Collection’, https://yvng.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&advancedSearch=true&sln_value=Biel&sln_type=synonyms&sfn_value=Phillip&sfn_type=synonyms, accessed 10 September 2019. We note parenthetically that two of them were double-entered by mistake, reducing the number of registered victims to 32.

⁶⁷ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 127.

September 1942. Meanwhile, Bielawski gave November 1942, at least a month later, as the date of the eight members of the Schlessinger family's death on the forms.

The author also saw others going to the execution site: Szlom Zylbernagel and his wife, and Izrael Zylbernagel with his wife and son. However, we do not find these names among the forms Bielawski filled out in 1979. We do see those of the Rozebaum, Szydłowski and Tik families, although there is not the slightest mention of their fates in the pages of *The Last Jew from Wegrow*.

On the other hand, the list from Yad Vashem also does not include the names of the three Złotowski sisters, nor the wife and three daughters of Chudzik, who were shot by the gendarme Giller. Meanwhile, in the case of the Chudziks, Bielawski could not only have described the circumstances of their death, but also have given the murderer's personal details, as he might still have been alive in 1979. The witness's recorded account may have resulted in some attempt to find him after the war and bring him to trial for the crimes committed.

Bielawski's most drastic description of an alleged crime was the shooting by Polish policemen of a young girl, Maria Nisman, and the deportation of her parents and sister to Treblinka. The author of the memoirs declared: "I will never forget Dr. Niseman [sic],⁶⁸ never..." but like his testimony before the Łódź commission, the memory proved to be unreliable, and the Nisman family was not included on the list either.

Reporting the case of Maria Nisman could even be called his moral duty, due to the fact that Bielawski presented himself as an eyewitness to her death, and making such information public could be important for her living relatives. There were a few cases when someone ended up in Treblinka but survived, which gave the families some faint hope that maybe some of their relatives were lucky. Such an account would have resolved all doubts.

Bielawski is also not helped by the account in Yad Vashem given by Leon Ptak, who wrote that Dr. Nisman was shot in Kosów Lacki. It is possible that he survived the liquidation of the ghetto in Węgrów, and that when the Germans announced the amnesty on 10 November, he and other Jews were sent to the remnant ghetto in Kosów and murdered there during its liquidation in December 1942. However, I managed to establish the fate of Maria's older

⁶⁸ Feivel Bielawski uses the surname Niseman, but in official documents the dentist from Węgrów is listed as Benjamin Nisman.

sister, Rebecca Nisman, who also avoided capture by the Poles in the town and being transported to the camp by truck; she hid in nearby Węgrów Klimowizna, although German soldiers found and shot her there.⁶⁹

More evidence of the incoherence of Bielawski's testimony is the nearly four-hour interview carried out with him for the USC Shoah Foundation by Sarah Akerlundi, which was videotaped on 10 August 1997, six years after his book was published.

In that testimony, Bielawski describes *inter alia* the construction of the hideout and the moment when the family took refuge there during the liquidation action. He describes in an emotional way the screams, pleas and prayers of the Jews who had been herded onto the market square, but when he is asked a specific question about friends and acquaintances, no specific names are mentioned. There is no word about the Nismans, the Chudziks or the Złotowski sisters. The witness only mentions how the Jews were driven to the town clock⁷⁰ with the help of the 'blue' police, firefighters and ordinary onlookers. The building with the clock is located in the south-eastern part of the market square – exactly diagonal to the store. And that is why, even if the wall was of the thickness described in his memoir and Bielawski could have seen what was happening in the market square through the peephole he cut out, he could not have seen the images he described anyway. The view would have been effectively blocked by the aforementioned shopping hall, which was only demolished in the 1960s.⁷¹

A true image of the Holocaust, gaps in the memory, confusing truth with fiction, or pure fantasies?

Describing the deportation of Jews from the market square, Bielawski quoted words spoken by one of the deportees to the people of Węgrów who were loading their Jewish neighbours onto the trucks: "A man next to the little girl screamed at the Poles, 'You are pushing us into the ovens. God will take revenge on you'".⁷²

⁶⁹ J. Mielniczek, *Szkola. 75-lecie Liceum Ogólnokształcącego w Węgrowie*, Węgrów 1993, p. 21.

⁷⁰ A reference to the town hall's clock.

⁷¹ The author of this article witnessed its demolition, and has photographic documentation of the project.

⁷² Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 130.

So, the Jews of Węgrów knew that they were going to be exterminated in the 'death factory'. When we think about extermination camps, we involuntarily recall images from movies and books: the selection, the gas chambers, and the tall, smoking chimneys of the crematoria – things which never existed in Treblinka. Nor were they in Sobibór or Bełżec, and these camps, along with Treblinka, were the ones that received transports from the ghettos during Aktion Reinhardt. In September 1942, the bodies of the murdered were thrown into huge pits. Only in the spring of 1943, after the liquidation of the ghetto in Węgrów, were special ovens built in the camp. A team of prisoners was ordered to dig up the bodies and burn them in order to remove the traces of the mass genocide. No stoves or smoking chimneys were built in Treblinka.⁷³ Bielawski, however, claims to be familiar with Treblinka and other facts: "Then the bodies were removed, the gold fillings were taken from the teeth, and the corpses burned in huge crematoria."⁷⁴

In the reality of September 1942, no inhabitant of the Węgrów ghetto, even though he knew that Treblinka was a place of mass extermination, could have known about any crematoria, let alone shout about them loudly while being pushed onto a truck. This is pure invention based on knowledge widely disseminated only after the war and related to the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, in which large gas chambers and crematoria were actually built, but used until 1943, after the liquidation of the Węgrów ghetto.

After 'liberation', Bielawski lived in Węgrów for another year; so, he had enough time to hear Polish accounts of the Jewish population being taken on foot to the station in Sokołów Podlaski. However, we learn something else from the book: "Ultimately, almost all the Jews from Węgrów died at Treblinka, having been transported by open trucks over the unpaved road to Siedlce. The road to Warsaw had been a route of commerce and salvation for the Jews of Węgrów. Now, it would become the road to the gas chambers."⁷⁵ As the map shows, the road to Siedlce, near which the camp was allegedly built, leads in a different direction than the one along which the Jews were driven to the railway station in Sokołów

⁷³ S. Różycki, E. Kopówka, N. Zalewska, *Obóz zagłady Treblinka II*, Warszawa–Treblinka 2019, p. 27.

⁷⁴ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 125.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55. It is worth noting that the road from Węgrów to Warsaw runs in a completely different direction than the one to Siedlce. Bielawski travelled to the capital on business many times, so he knew this route well. This makes it more difficult to understand such a mistake in his book.

Podlaski. This description therefore does not conform with real events. In addition, even the night before the liquidation of the ghetto, the author heard some sounds: “We heard the sound of trucks, many trucks, in the street”.⁷⁶ At least 125 large trucks would have had to come to the town⁷⁷ to carry away 10,000 inhabitants of the ghetto, which seems impossible.

Jews who resisted were killed on the spot, and smoke grenades were thrown into their houses; yet we should emphasise that the sounds of shots and explosions are not to be found in Bielawski’s account of the first day of the liquidation of the ghetto. Despite allegedly spending many days observing the market, the author did not note that the *Hiwis*, special units formed by the Germans composed of Ukrainians, Lithuanians and Latvians, took part in the operation.⁷⁸ As noted in many reports, Ukrainians constituted the majority of the liquidation teams that came every day to search for hidden Jews, herding them onto trucks and then sending them to Treblinka, or liquidating them on the spot.⁷⁹

Judging by Jewish reports, the Ukrainians supervised the robbery of goods from Jewish shops by the Jewish police, who had been deliberately spared.⁸⁰ Anyone observing the market square would have seen the *Hiwis*, but in Bielawski’s version, it was the Poles (without any objection from the Germans) who took over the stores, while – and let us emphasise this – his family’s store did not gain a new Polish owner. The Karbowski family, instead of making themselves comfortable behind the shop counter, took the goods out of the shop stealthily and under cover of night.⁸¹

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁷⁷ I found a reference to the largest number of Jews to be loaded into a single vehicle in reports about the Saurer trucks used by the Germans in Chełmno nad Nerem. These were large vehicles, suitably modified to kill the people inside with exhaust gases while driving. 80 people could be loaded into them. See C. Lanzman, *Shoah*, Koszalin 1993, p. 112.

⁷⁸ The participation of Latvians and Lithuanians was mentioned by the then parish priest of Węgrów, see *Ksiądz kanonik Kazimierz Czarkowski. Wspomnienia i dokumenty*, ed. E. Kozłowska, Warszawa 2007, p. 23. The presence of Lithuanians was also noted by Sewek Fiszman (see Fiszman’s report).

⁷⁹ Tchórzewski, *Świadectwo dojrzałości*, pp. 106–12.

⁸⁰ ‘Spisane świadectwa’, in *Vengrov: Sefer Zikharon*, p. 73. Despite the German restrictions, Jews owned most of the shops on the market square. In the collection of the Municipal Library in Węgrów an incomplete list of commercial premises and service establishments in Węgrów from 29 January 1942 has been preserved. Of the 141 listed, Jews were the owners of 97, and Poles of 44. There were 24 on the market square. (‘Węgrówskie listy 2’, in *Żydzi w Węgrowie*, ed. W.W. Ronge, W. Theiss, Węgrów 1990, pp. 62–64).

⁸¹ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 129.

Also, the accusation that it was the 'blue' police that shot Jews under the supervision of a single German is not confirmed by any sources known to me, either Polish or Jewish. The most important accounts include the testimonies of Polish and Jewish witnesses at the firefighters' trial: the recollections of Sewek Fiszman,⁸² one Rotstein, whose first name is unknown,⁸³ Jerzy Tchórzewski,⁸⁴ Władysław Okulus, Władysław Wójcik,⁸⁵ Zygmunt Klem,⁸⁶ Henryka Grabowska,⁸⁷ and Kazimierz Okrasa.⁸⁸

Bielawski wrote that the son of Chaim Naczelnik was an eyewitness to this murder, but a few sentences later, he twice names the father as the witness, and not the son.⁸⁹

There are also other inaccuracies. According to the available knowledge, on 10 November 1942, the Germans announced an amnesty for the hidden Jews, who, after revealing themselves, were obliged to go to Kosów Lacki, where a remnant ghetto was established. However, the German commissioner in Węgrów, Willi Neuman, obtained permission to create a small ghetto in the town itself. The reason for this decision was that, after the liquidation of the ghetto in September, there was a shortage of craftsmen in the town. A few selected professionals thus received special certificates allowing them to remain in Węgrów legally. In the testimony given in April 1945, Bielawski truthfully stated that some of the Jews had these certificates, while others remained there illegally. The fact that the remnants of the Jewish community were divided into those who worked there legally and those who remained in hiding is confirmed in other sources.⁹⁰

However, we have a completely different version in the book, which does not include the order for the survivors to go to the ghetto in Kosów Lacki or the limit

⁸² Sewek Fiszman's report.

⁸³ Rotstein, 'Masowy grób', in *Vengrov: Sefer Zikharon*, p. 61.

⁸⁴ Tchórzewski, *Świadectwo dojrzałości*, pp. 106–12.

⁸⁵ Testimony of Władysław Wójcik, AŻIH 301/4998.

⁸⁶ Z. Klem, 'I wtedy przyszło najgorsze', in 'Węgrowskie listy 2'.

⁸⁷ H. Grabowska, 'Wojna zabrała nam dzieciństwo i młodość', in 'Węgrowskie listy 2'.

⁸⁸ Kazimierz Okrasa's testimony, in the author's private collection.

⁸⁹ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 138.

⁹⁰ See W. Okulus, 'Największa tragedia w dziejach Węgrowa', AŻIH 301/6043 p. 7; Klem, 'I wtedy przyszło najgorsze', p. 45.

on legal permits. According to Bielawski, all Jews who survived the liquidation action were permitted stay in the town, where they were to rebuild the houses destroyed during the liquidation.⁹¹ In fact, the opposite happened, because in the end the Germans decided to demolish the Jewish quarter.

Bielawski's sister, Menucha, was included in the list of employees at the workplace run by their cousin, Kreda, who, with the permission of the Germans, ran a laundry and dye-house. His mother had to go into hiding and Fajwel and Mosze moved to the 'Aryan' district on Kilińskiego Street, where Rachel Mendelbaum, the author's fiancée, lived. They had no documents and, unlike the remaining Jews, they did not do any work.⁹²

When the Germans began the liquidation of the remnant ghetto on 30 April 1943, the family members on Kilińskiego Street managed to hide in the attic of the neighbouring house, which belonged to the police chief's widow.

Bielawski relates: "We peered through the cracks of the wooden gable and saw four of them. They were helmeted and carrying machine guns. The Polish police, carrying guns, followed, and then came twenty or thirty Polish youths"⁹³ Although the entire street was searched, the search for Jews in the widow's house was abandoned for unknown reasons.

Polish criminals appear once again in Bielawski's narrative, supporting the Germans *en masse* in their extermination of the Jews. But did this story really take place? I managed to find the witness Kazimierz Okrasa, who as a young boy lived at that time on Kilińskiego Street. In his opinion, after the liquidation action in September 1942, no Jews lived there anymore, and the Majchra family lived in the Mendelbaum house.⁹⁴ The street was small, everyone knew each other well, so the return and residence – for five months – of a family well known to their Polish neighbours could not have gone unnoticed.

Bielawski recalled that on the day the remnant ghetto was liquidated, he found shelter with a widow who was living in the house of the oldest of the Bielawski brothers, Icchak, which stood opposite the Mendelbaums' house. The author ran

⁹¹ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, pp. 157, 176.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 161–63.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁹⁴ Kazimierz Okrasa's testimony, in the author's private collection.

quickly to the other side of the street at the last moment before the Germans entered the Mendelbaums' house. In fact, the house of Icchak Bielawski was on a different street, a hundred metres away in a straight line.

Further proof that the account of the events at Kilińskiego Street is not true is provided by Bielawski himself in the aforementioned account to the commission in Łódź in April 1945. The testimonies therein show that "On 1 May 1943, the last action took place in Węgrów, in which one hundred were killed, supposedly the privileged ones, and many of whom were in hiding. I managed to hide in some basement, and in this way I saved myself".⁹⁵

This is easy to imagine. Bielawski is lucky that when the liquidation began, he was outside the ghetto and, by chance, close enough to a house with a basement that is not later searched by the Germans. However, this testimony does not mention any attic from which he could have watched the German-Polish punitive expedition. The term "some cellar" suggests a random choice of hiding place. So while writing his memoirs, Bielawski forgot about the content of his testimony from several dozen years ago, and let his imagination run wild, hoping that no one would verify the content of his book – especially as his own testimony would speak against him.

Let us just add that in the previously quoted interview from 1997, Bielawski omitted the period of his stay in Węgrów during the existence of the remnant ghetto between November 1942 and April 1943, and stated that after leaving that hideout, he went straight to the countryside.

On Polish attitudes towards the Jews – from the hidden man's perspective

In May 1943, Bielawski left the town and managed to join his relatives. The entire Bielawski family of ten hid with a group of Polish farmers in the area around Jarnice, Pieniek Jarnicki and Zając, and fortunately lived to see the end of the occupation.

With the liquidation of the remnant ghetto in Węgrów and the relocation of the Bielawski family to the countryside, the Germans disappear from the pages of his book until the end of the occupation. After saying goodbye to the Mendelbaum family, other Jews also disappear. Bielawski's only contacts are with

⁹⁵ Fajwel Bielawski's testimony.

Poles, and more specifically with the inhabitants of the five Polish farms who they turned to and obtained help from.⁹⁶

Hiding in the wilderness in dugouts or in barns, Bielawski ceases to witness any more dramatic events, although this does not mean that his memories of that time are free from descriptions of crimes against Jews committed by Poles. Let us list these threads:

1) Cooperation between Poles and the German occupiers:

a) "I hear it said that Polish youths are out searching for Jews in the fields and forests, killing them when they find any. They brag about how many Jews they have killed in the past several days".⁹⁷

b) Although this should not have come as any surprise to us, we still sat and wondered how the same people with whom we had lived, worked, and played could undertake to murder their fellow citizens, imitating their bitter enemies who had instigated this extermination. It was incredible that they would cooperate with their conquerors in this genocide. But such were the facts".⁹⁸

2) The murder of Jews by the Polish Underground:

a) "On Sunday he heard that several Jews had appeared in Jarnic on Saturday asking for bread. They had been discovered and shot by members of the Polish underground".⁹⁹

b) "The Polish underground urged that the Jews be hunted, though the underground was supposed to be the Germans' enemies and the flame of Polish nationalism. The neighbors eagerly pursued the few Jews who were left in hiding".¹⁰⁰

c) "A friend told me there are still Jews hiding in the forest and that they should be killed, so that there will be no witnesses after the war. Be very careful".¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 90.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 235. This fact has not been mentioned in any of the post-war studies on the Polish underground in the Węgrów powiat. See Wangrat, *Polska i powiat węgrowski*; Stolarz, 'Powiat Węgrów'; Matusak, 'Okupacja i ruch oporu'.

¹⁰⁰ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 249.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 251–52. This incident, Bielawski writes, was triggered by an underground newspaper, which urged the liquidation of the Jews.

Bielawski's informants are the hosts who are hiding him, but – let us note – none of the situations he described has been noted in other sources. In Pieńki, where the Bielawski family was hiding, the Germans killed twenty Jews and the farmer who hid them. This matter was very well known, but in the book of 'the last Jew from Węgrów' we will not find any mention of it.¹⁰²

When the Bielawski family was hiding with Waclaw Bujalski for a year, the real threat was allegedly his anti-Semitic brother, who was in conflict with their host. As he lived nearby, the Bielawskis waited for him to go to the town with his wife, because only then could they build their hiding place in the attic. Bielawski also described a conversation between the Bujalski brothers, observed from the attic, which took place just before the Russians entered. They both wondered what might happen if their farms found themselves in the war zone. The incident could not have happened, however, because the accounts of Waclaw Bujalski's sons show that their only uncle, Józef, emigrated to the United States before World War I, which means that the alleged threat from him was invented by the author of the book.¹⁰³

Post-war reality: between fiction and truth

After the Red Army captured Węgrów, Bielawski was allegedly the first survivor to return to the town, where he quickly became the leader of the reviving Jewish community. In his nephew's book, however, the Bielawskis do not return until the end of August, at least two weeks after the Soviets entered. The man who did reorganise the Jewish community in the town was Rubin Bird-Przepiórka, and when the Jewish Committee was established in Węgrów, it was headed by Szmul Rajzman, who led it until May 1945. Bielawski took over the leadership after Rajzman's departure to Łódź; even though he had not been a member of the committee's governing body before that time, he managed to take credit for other people's work.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² M. Piórkowska, *Sprawiedliwi i ocaleni. Mieszkańcy Węgrowa i okolic, pomagający Żydom w latach okupacji hitlerowskiej*, Węgrów 2012, p. 151.

¹⁰³ Interview with Stanisław Bujalski, in the author's private collection.

¹⁰⁴ Financial reports of the Jewish committee in Węgrów from the commencement of its operation until 23 May, 1945, dated 6 June 1945, AŻIH, Central Committee of Jews in Poland. Department of Records and Statistics 303 / V / 377.

The author of the memoir did not forget to emphasise his services to his needy Jewish brothers, and in one case, to save a Jewish woman, he did not hesitate to undertake a risky action that could have cost him his life from a Soviet soldier's bullet. How does this boastful self-representation relate to the extant testimonies?

During Bielawski's post-war stay in Węgrów, poor Polish families cared for three Jewish orphans. One of these children, Lusja Farbiarz, was saved during the occupation and, as a Polish child named Zuzia, was hidden by one Pelagia Vogelgesang, risking her life to do so. She received material support from the Committee's first chairman, Szmul Rajzman. After his departure Bielawski, who at that time was running a thriving restaurant, took over his duties. However, according to Vogelgesang, he did not provide any help to the girl: "He told [Rajzman] that he was leaving now, but Mr. Bielawski became the chairman of the Jewish committee, but Mr. Bielawski remembered very little about Lusja, and I did not draw any attention to myself; and somehow God helped, that the child did not go hungry".¹⁰⁵

In an interview in 1997, however, Bielawski did not spare his criticism of the Poles around him: "Not one of the neighbours in the country where I lived and next to whom I lived came or shook hands, or expressed happiness that I was alive, or asked whether I needed anything".¹⁰⁶ So let us reverse the situation, and say: when Bielawski became chairman of the Committee, he never came to Ms Vogelgesang, did not shake her hand, and was not glad that a little Jewish girl had survived thanks to her courage and dedication. And what is particularly important, considering the difficult financial situation of her Polish guardian, no-one from the Bielawski family asked whether little Lusja needed anything.¹⁰⁷

The arrival of the Soviets and the end of the German occupation did not mean the end of the ordeal for Bielawski, because "many Poles were killing Jews even after the Russians arrived. They were afraid that the Jews would testify against them, and tell

¹⁰⁵ Testimony of Pelagia Vogelgesang, AŻIH, 301/4975, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ Testimony of Philip Biel, USC, VHA, 34246, interview of 19 August 1997 (Philip Biel was the new name Bielawski used after he settled in the United States).

¹⁰⁷ Bielawski recalled: "Weeks passed and the restaurant prospered. With our profits I purchased proper dinnerware and kitchenware. We bought clothing and bedding, and our food was sufficient for our needs" (Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 286). However, nothing could be siphoned off this abundance of food, not even one plate of soup a day for a small, orphaned Jewish child.

the Russians that the Poles had collaborated with the Germans in murdering the Jews”¹⁰⁸ In fact, there was only one such case in Węgrów mentioned in the ‘last’ Jew’s book. According to the author of the memoir, the surviving son of the laundry owner, Icchak Kreda, was shot by a Pole while trying to recover his plant, which the Pole had taken over during the occupation. There was indeed a murder, but Bielawski’s description is incorrect. After returning to Węgrów, Icchak Kreda joined the UB¹⁰⁹ additionally engaged in illicit trading; he was not shot at the family factory, but in the Miednicki forest, 16 km away from the town. In April 1945, the investigation was discontinued due to the failure to identify the perpetrators. They were resumed only four years later, when none of the Bielawskis were in Poland.¹¹⁰ Contrary to what the author of the memoir writes, no one benefited from the death of Icchak Kreda or took over his business, because both the house and the laundry became communal property thereafter.

The end of the Bielawski family’s stay in Węgrów, as presented in the last chapter of the book, allegedly took a very dramatic turn. In October 1945, the author of the memoir fell victim to the lawlessness of the local UB. He was beaten and threatened with death; fearing for his life, he fled with his brother, his sister and her husband, carrying one suitcase in his hand, leaving the house and restaurant to their fate. He stated in the book that he did not know what had happened to the family’s property and land. Unfortunately, the author did not write the truth, because the entries in the land and mortgage register show that on 15 October 1945, the Bielawski family sold the house and store to the Jaworski family for 250,000 zloty¹¹¹ – a large sum of money for the time. I managed to find a payroll from the Security Office in Jawor, from October 1945 to be precise. And I calculated how many years a person working there would have had to put aside his entire salary in order to buy the Bielawski’s property in Węgrów. The head of the UB in Jawor, Jan Kurczyzna (whose salary was 2448 zloty net) would have had to save up for 8½ years; his deputy, Leon Fajgelbaum (salary 2148 zloty) for 9 years

¹⁰⁸ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, pp. 297–98.

¹⁰⁹ Polish political police at the service of the Soviets. It was responsible for the murder, torture and deportation to camps of those who did not recognise the new Soviet occupation and enslavement.

¹¹⁰ See Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance 473/72, Ludwik Kalata and other convicts, on 24 September 1951 under Art. 221§1 of the Penal Code, art. 257§1 KKWP for the fatal shooting of Icek Kred in the Miednicki forest, and the theft of his money.

¹¹¹ Węgrów: real estate located on the market square at policy no. 1, consisting of a square with an area of 44 rods and the house standing on it, mortgage no. 113 (APS, 62/1218/0/2.1/648, Mortgage in Węgrów).

jest od wszelkich długów i zastrzeżeń.

§ 2. Mocą niniejszego aktu, Iosek vel Iosek-Chil Bielawski, Rachmil Bielawski i Fajwel Bielawski, ten ostatni w imieniu własnym oraz Sruła-Moszek vel Mojżesza Bielawskiego i Menichy vel Mniichy Bielawskiej tudzież Sury-Przejdy Bielawskiej, wszystkie swoje prawa odziedziczone w spadku po Majerze-Wulfie vel Wolfie Bielawskim do powyższej posesyjnej części nieruchomości, położonej w Węgrowie, oznaczonej Nr. hipotecznym 113, czyli całą swoją i mocodawców swoich współwłasność tej nieruchomości, ze wszystkim tym, co na miejscu się znajduje i z prawa, natury lub przeznaczenia nieruchomości i jej przynależności stanowi, bez żadnych wyłączeń, w stanie wolnym od wszelkich długów i zastrzeżeń, sprzedają współstawiającymi Edwardowi i Zofii małżonkom Jaworskim, w równych między nimi częściach niepodzielnie, za cenę ogólną złotych 250.000 dwieście pięćdziesiąt tysięcy i podstawiając kupujących od chwili obecnej we wszystkie swoje i mocodawców swoich prawa do przedmiotu sprzedaży, rozwalają na przepisaniu tych praw a po zamknięciu postępowania spadkowego i tytułu własności przedmiotu niniejszej sprzedaży wszelkie gisła należne, a w szczególności w wykazie hipotecznym powyższej nieruchomości na imię kupujących Edwarda i Zofii małżonków Jaworskich).

Sprzedający Iosek vel Iosek-Chil Bielawski, Rachmil Bielawski i Fajwel Bielawski, ten ostatni w imieniu mocodawców swoich Sruła-Moszek vel Mojżesza Bielawskiego, Menichy vel Mniichy Bielawskiej i Sury-Przejdy Bielawskiej przysięgają, że całą powyższą cenę sprzedażną otrzymali dla siebie, przy czym Fajwel Bielawski i dla wyżej wymienionych mocodawców swoich w całości, gotowizną, jeszcze przed sporządzeniem tego aktu, z odbioru kwitują, z tego tytułu tak obecnie jak i na przyszłość zrzekają się do kupujących małżonków Jaworskich jakichkolwiek pretencji, przy czym gwarantują kupującym z całego swego obecnego i przyszłego majątku ruchomego i nieruchomego, że oprócz ujawnionych w tym akcie spadkobierców, innych spadkobierców po Majerze-Wulfie vel Wolfie Bielawskim nie pozostało i że powyższy spadek pozostały po tymże Majerze-Wulfie vel Wolfie Bielawskim wolny jest

Deed of sale of the Bielawski family's real estate. Source: State Archives in Siedlce, Land and Mortgage Register no. 113.

and 7 months; an investigative officer (1587 złoty) – 13 years and 1 month; a doctor (1040 złoty) 20 years and 10 months; and a cook (854 złoty) 24 years and 4 months.¹¹²

The Bielawskis had intended to sell their property for a long time because the collection of the relevant documents had already begun in May 1945. The contract included a special item, giving the Bielawskis time until the beginning of November to remove or sell their belongings. There was no question of any panicked escape, or even of selling for a song under the pressure of the moment.

In his book, Bielawski mentions that after leaving Węgrów, he moved to Łódź, where his dying mother, Sara Frida Bielawska, was staying. When she died in January 1946, Fajwel Bielawski organised her funeral and after eight days of mourning, he and Mosze left for Belgium. Is the above description correct? A completely different version of the events is contained in Eddie Bielawski's memoirs, which show that Fajwel and Mosze left while Sara Bielawska was still alive, with the intention of bringing her there after they had settled on a location. However, the mother's health deteriorated: the people who took care of her were Menucha and her husband, Moryc.¹¹³ Icchak's wife, Paula, also came with little Eddie for a few days to help (according to *The Last Jew from Węgrow*, Icchak's entire family was in Germany; according to Eddie, however, they left Poland for Austria, and only passed through Germany to embark on a ship to Canada). Later, Paula was with her son at her mother-in-law's funeral.¹¹⁴ However, according to Fajwel's memoir, only he and Mosze, as the last family members staying in Poland, participated in the funeral ceremonies.

Both of these versions recorded by two representatives of the Bielawski family are mutually exclusive. They are, however, linked by the date of Mrs Bielawska's death (January 1946), and also by the fact that in neither memoir does this date correspond to the truth. From the information I found on the Bielawski family's genealogical website, it appears that Mrs. Bielawska died a year later, on 19 January 1947. The same date appears on her tombstone.

¹¹² Calculations made on the basis of T. Balbus, 'Powiatowy Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego w Jaworze – struktura, kadry, działalność (maj–grudzień 1945)', in *Aparat Represji w Polsce Ludowej 1944–1989* 2008, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 22.

¹¹³ According to Bielawski's memoir, Menuch and Moryc were already in Germany at the time of the death of their mother (Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 293).

¹¹⁴ Bielawski, *Invisible Jews*, pp. 15–16.

During an interview in 1997, a specific question was put to Fajwel Bielawski: “In which year did you go to Belgium?” And he replied, “1945, 1947, and I was there until 1947”.¹¹⁵ We may guess that Bielawski initially gave the wrong date, and then corrected it immediately. It is therefore very likely that he stayed in Poland for a year longer than he described in his memoir. However, he said nothing about what he was doing during that time.

Even the title of Bielawski’s memoirs does not correspond to the truth. The last Jew from Węgrów was in fact one Alter Szpilman, mentioned in the book, who lived there and ran a photography salon; it was only after a few years, when his daughter had graduated from university, that he decided to go to Israel.

Summary

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the large number of mistakes made by Bielawski, as well as – in my opinion – his conscious confabulations. The list of objections to the content of the memoir is much longer: suffice it to say that the results of the investigation I have collected would compose a book almost three times larger than the memoir of ‘the last Jew from Węgrów’.

In the light of my findings, Bielawski’s memoir cannot form a reliable basis for the author’s wartime biography, nor for any reflection upon Polish-Jewish relations from that period. His reminiscences are full of gaps, simplifications, and content which is unconfirmed or simply untrue.

The case of Bielawski shows that it is not good practice to place uncritical trust in post-war recollections, especially those which – such as Bielawski’s – were created many years after the events described.

In preparing the account of his wartime fate, Bielawski ‘stocked up’ his book with confabulations and fantasies about the scale of Polish participation in the Holocaust. For unknown reasons, the author’s attention was focused primarily on Poles as accomplices of the Holocaust, although it cannot be

¹¹⁵ Testimony of Philip Biel, USC, VHA 34246, interview from 19 August 1997.

denied that there were abuses and even crimes committed against Jews by Poles.¹¹⁶

However, Bielawski's memoirs give the impression of what might even be called the collective responsibility of the Polish people. In his opinion, the entire town took part in the September liquidation, and almost all the peasants in the countryside were enthusiastic participants in the hunt for the few Jews who were looking for shelter outside the town. But the author's dramatic stories, when juxtaposed with other accounts, documents, and testimonies of surviving witnesses, are most often proved to be untrue.

The publication in Polish of Bielawski's memoir, which was not preceded by a thorough analysis and which lacks appropriate footnotes, is for me argument for more critical verification of sources, especially if, as in this case, there are more or less sensational threads in them with an obvious detriment to historical truth.

Bielawski's book was published in 1991, and went virtually unnoticed. It only reached Polish readers in a truncated version. Removed from the first chapter were *inter alia* the author's critical remarks about the Catholic Church, and from the fifth chapter, the start of his story. The latter is justified in a footnote that states that the missing sections contain basic information about the stages of the extermination of the Jews in Poland. However, it seems that the actual reason may have been slightly different. The author of the memoir simply did not provide a reliable description of the course of the Holocaust, and his text was full of all sorts of errors. It is surprising that, in the first chapter, there was not even a footnote informing the reader that part of the chapter had been removed, with a brief justification as to why it was decided not to include it in the Polish edition.

When *Dalej jest noc* was published in 2018, it turned out that one chapter, authored by Jan Grabowski, was devoted to the powiat of Węgrów.¹¹⁷ The accumulation of confabulations,

¹¹⁶ Fajwel Bielawski claimed that he was afraid of Polish bandits while hiding in the countryside; this is not an anti-Polish invention with no factual basis. While collecting information, I conducted several interviews with inhabitants of villages near Węgrów who told me about crimes of this nature committed for criminal reasons. Bielawski names the firefighter Deszczyński and one of the Ajchl brothers among those who led the Jews to their execution. These people were brought before a court after the war for their participation in the liquidation of the ghetto. However, the author of the memoir could have learned about their activities after the war, because he remained in Węgrów for another year.

¹¹⁷ During the occupation, the Węgrów powiat was not an independent administrative unit. The Germans linked it to the neighbouring Sokółów powiat. The seat of the occupation authorities was Sokółów Podlaski, where the German *starosta* Ernst Gramss resided.

falsifications and silences that I discovered while reading this book is a topic for a separate, multi-page publication. It often quotes Bielawski as a credible witness to Polish crimes against Jews. However, an attentive reader of both publications will easily notice the fact that the content of the Węgrów chapter contradicts the content of Bielawski's memoirs in many places. For example, Bielawski writes about executions carried out by the 'blue' police in the Jewish cemetery. Jan Grabowski, as editor of Bielawski's memoir, did not append any commentary to that report. However, as author of the Węgrów chapter, he wrote that the executions were carried out by the Germans. Elsewhere, Grabowski stated: "The inhabitants of the remnant ghetto were divided into the legals, with permits issued by the Germans, and the illegals".¹¹⁸ Meanwhile Bielawski, writing about the 'amnesty' for the Jews in November 1942, stated that it covered all the surviving Jews, who were then to rebuild the Jewish district. This information was not been corrected in any way.

Jan Grabowski is not surprised by what I have already described: neither of the Bielawski brothers work or hide, but walk around the market square in Węgrów freely wearing 'Jewish clothes' and without any German-issued documents. The author of the memoir even describes how easily he can enter and leave the guarded ghetto.¹¹⁹

There are also many examples of Grabowski's 'arbitrary' use of Bielawski's account, changing its meaning. For example, in the memoir we find a description of how the Chudzik family were discovered by the Poles. The mother and her three daughters were handed over to the gendarme Giller, who shot all four of them. This took place on the fourth day of the liquidation action. Quoting Bielawski's account, Grabowski removed the sentence mentioning the date of the event described, and moved it to the first day of the liquidation of the ghetto. In this way, he authenticated the alleged mass involvement of Polish residents in exterminating their Jewish neighbours from the very first moments of the liquidation action (i.e. 22 September 1942). In turn, when writing about the period when the ghetto was still functioning, he stated: "From time to time the Germans and the 'blue' police conducted searches in the Jewish houses for illegal residents, and they shot those they found in the Jewish cemetery".¹²⁰ In the relevant footnote, we find the additional information: "Among those who died at this time were Rachel Mendelbaum, Fajwel Bielawski's fiancée, who had been hiding with seven

¹¹⁸ Grabowski, 'Powiat węgrowski', p. 461.

¹¹⁹ Bielawski, *Ostatni Żyd*, p. 166.

¹²⁰ Grabowski, 'Powiat węgrowski', p. 461.

other people in a hideout under Kreda's house".¹²¹ In fact, Rachel Mendelbaum died on 6 June 1943. The fact that she died after the liquidation of the remnant ghetto is confirmed in other sources.

Grabowski also drew a description, based on Bielawski's memoir, of the liquidation of the remnant ghetto, in which a group of several dozen Poles allegedly participated actively. Yet this description does not correspond to the truth. Grabowski was aware of Bielawski's account of April 1945, in which the latter stated that he was hiding in a random basement, and not in an attic as he later maintained in his memoir, but he also ignored this discrepancy. The alleged action described in the memoir took place outside the remnant ghetto on Kozia Street (now Kilińskiego Street), while Grabowski moves it several hundred metres away, to the ghetto.¹²²

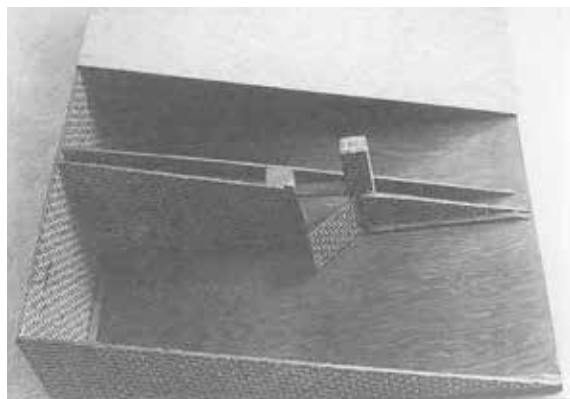
The examples given illustrate to just a small extent the wider phenomenon of how Grabowski analyses his sources. As a result of these actions, we are offered a publication which – as I have demonstrated – contains many errors and distortions. Can it therefore constitute the basis for an honest discussion of Polish-Jewish relations during the German occupation?

Finally, one more note. When we found Bielawski's hideout in June 2018 and revealed this in the press, Grabowski publicly commented on our discoveries. The article in which he presented his thoughts confirmed the paradigm that has been noticeable in research conducted by the "new Polish school of research on the Holocaust". This is the belief that Holocaust survivors always tells the truth, and the very fact of questioning their account is worth stigmatising. According to Grabowski, we located the hideout where Bielawski allegedly was hiding.¹²³ While there are some indications that the memoir's author may have been elsewhere during the liquidation action, it is also possible that he was hiding in the place he had mentioned. The thesis that Bielawski was not in the hideout has never been considered a certainty.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² A specific paradox is that since, according to Grabowski, Rachel Mendelbaum was hiding on Gdańska Street and she was shot before the liquidation of the ghetto, Bielawski could not stay in her house on the day of the ghetto's liquidation. That is why Grabowski not only deliberately changed Bielawski's whereabouts from Kiliński Street to the ghetto, but he also changed the three-person Mendelbaum family who are mentioned in the memoirs into brothers, although only one, Moshe, accompanied him.

¹²³ J. Grabowski, 'Zaczyna się negacja świadectw zagłady. "Nie wierzę w ani jedno słowo tego Żyda"', <https://oko.press/prof-grabowski-zaczyna-sie-negacja-swiadectw-zaglady-nie-wierze-w-ani-jedno-slowo-tym-zyda/>, accessed 15 August 2018.



A drawing from the Polish edition of Bielawski's book, which is easy to compare with the earlier drawing from the US edition. It is clearly visible that part of the roof and one of the chimneys were intentionally covered, so that more inquisitive readers would not raise reasonable doubts.

The drawings (see the reproductions) of the hideout also raise significant doubts. There are as many as three chimneys (two real and one false). There were too many of them for such a small room, which could raise the suspicion of a more inquisitive researcher. In the Polish edition of Bielawski's memoir, a roof was added to cover part of the room, thus making the drawing seem more credible. Also, there were actually two ovens: one heating the store, the other a cooking stove.

The most important discovery was the measurement of the wall and publicising the fact that it was 38 cm thick. According to those who explored the attic and the hiding place, it would have been impossible to pierce an observation hole in it with an ordinary knife. And this provided a basis to deny the credibility of Bielawski as an eyewitness to all the stories that allegedly took place in the market square in Węgrów. Grabowski did not refer to this important information. Instead of a substantive polemic, we faced only an *ad hominem* attack.¹²⁴

It is no exaggeration to say that the discovery of an intact Jewish hideout from the occupation period after more than seventy years is a discovery of great importance for Holocaust researchers. It should be examined and described in detail as soon as possible, items lost in the rubble should be searched for, and the results of the research should be made public. Meanwhile, for over two years, no-one from the Association of the Centre for Holocaust Research has bothered to travel the 80 km from Warsaw to Węgrów to do so. If the research of such an unusual discovery is not within the scope of the Centre's interest, what is the priority in this institution's research work?

¹²⁴ For this reason among others, we have been called 'amateurs'. However, as such, we found 22 sources directly related to the Bielawski family; in Grabowski's publications, we find only three. We did not use state grants; we covered the costs of the research out of our own pockets. For the publication of *Ostatni Żyd z Węgrowa*, the Centre for Holocaust Research received a subsidy of 25,400 zloty from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

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WITOLD W. MĘDYKOWSKI, *MACHT ARBEIT FREI?
GERMAN ECONOMIC POLICY AND FORCED LABOR
OF JEWS IN THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT, 1939–1943*,
ACADEMIC STUDIES PRESS, BOSTON 2018, PP. 418 [454],
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This is a review of a book by Witold W. Mędykowski entitled *Macht Arbeit Frei? German Economic Policy and Forced Labor of Jews in the General Government, 1939–1943*. The work was published in Boston in 2018 thanks to the efforts of the Academic Studies Press as part of their series ‘Jews of Poland’, and is 418 pages in length. In the introduction, apart from thanking the people who contributed to the book, the author mentions the German Erinnerung, Verantwortung, Zukunft Foundation,¹ which is also responsible for running a project

¹ In January 2020, the Erinnerung, Verantwortung, Zukunft foundation conducted a total of 2922 research projects: in Portugal (1), Spain (2), France (18), Switzerland (6), Belgium (5), the Netherlands (15), Italy (6), Germany (1816, including 19 in Berlin), Denmark (4), Norway (6), Sweden (3), the Czech Republic (92), Austria (21), Croatia (27), Poland (252), Slovakia (10), Hungary (40), Bosnia & Herzegovina (35), Kosovo (5), Macedonia (14), Albania (6), Greece (16), Bulgaria (6), Romania (28), Moldova (19), Ukraine (488), Belarus (191), Lithuania (18), Latvia (8), Estonia (4), Finland (1), Russia (261), Turkey (2), Israel (171), Georgia (5), Armenia (5), Azerbaijan (1), Kazakhstan (4), Kyrgyzstan (3), and Tanzania (1) (*Projektfinder*, <https://www.stiftung-evz.de/projekte/projektfinder.html>, accessed 14 January 2020).

related to the history of forced labour in the Third Reich. Mędykowski also discusses the archives that he used in conducting his research.² The work is chronologically divided into two parts: the first covers the period from the beginning of the war to the beginning of operations in the East on 22 June 1941, and consists of four chapters; the second presents the issue of Jewish forced labour from the beginning of the war with the USSR until 1943, and is divided into five chapters.

Mędykowski points out that the reason for the change in how the Jews on German-occupied territories were treated was Operation Reinhardt; the commencement of hostilities against the USSR was of less influence on German conduct toward the Jewish population. However, he highlights the actions undertaken by the *Einsatzgruppen*³ in the East, where Jews were murdered *en masse*. From the point of view of the book's thesis, it is important to connect the forced labour aspect with the Holocaust in the General Government. Two important threads intertwine here: the exploitation of the Jewish population as a workforce, and its importance for the war industry of the Third Reich. Mędykowski explains that the greatest change in the treatment of Jews took place at the beginning of Operation Reinhardt. Despite the diametrical differences, attempts were made throughout the German occupation to deliberately marginalise the members of this group, and this marginalisation took place simultaneously on the social (exclusion from society) and economic (extreme pauperisation) levels. The actions taken were part of the policy of the total annihilation of the Jewish population in the occupied territories and in the countries allied with the Third Reich.

The author has divided the introduction into several sections to help the reader better understand the issue of Jewish forced labour. The first, entitled 'Beginning of the war', deals with the change in approach to the Jews. With the establishment of the German administration, first in the military and later the civilian spheres, the attitude towards the Jews began to evolve. The author believes that initially in occupied Poland they

² These archives are mainly located in Poland, Germany, and Israel.

³ *Einsatzgruppen (Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, Operational Groups of the Security Police and Security Service (S. Datner, J. Gumowski, K. Leszczyński, 'Einsatzgruppen (wyrok i uzasadnienie)', Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce 1963, vol. 14; W. Mędykowski, W cieniu gigantów. Pogromy 1941 r. w byłej sowieckiej strefie okupacyjnej, Warszawa 2012; Wokół Jedwabnego, vol. 1: Studia, vol. 2: Dokumenty, ed. P. Machcewicz, K. Persak, Warszawa 2002).*

enjoyed relative peace and their lives were stable.⁴ Operation Barbarossa saw the first changes; from this point we can discuss the mass murders that the *Einsatzgruppen* carried out in the areas captured in the East. The negative attitude towards the Jewish population also escalated after the *Galizien* District was incorporated into the General Government (hereinafter: GG) and the subsequent Operation Reinhardt.⁵ The Jews' fate was influenced by the Germans' decision to liquidate the large ghettos that they themselves had previously created. One of the effects of the extermination policy was the creation of a system of 'residual ghettos' where those who had not been sent to extermination camps vegetated. Labour camps were set up next to them, and their inmates were used in the war economy of the Third Reich. This method was also a form of extermination, albeit indirect, consisting of 'destruction through labour'.

The next part of the introduction is entitled 'Definitions'. Mędykowski first explains what forced labour is and how it should be understood; this undoubtedly broadens the perspective, allowing for a different look at the main problem raised in the book (p. xv). This theoretical part of the introduction helps the reader understand why the system for exterminating the Jews which the Germans created was so effective. Mędykowski highlights its organisational effectiveness and the overlapping of competences characteristic of Nazism, as well as the complete moral degeneration of the people who manned the system (pp. xvii–xviii).

The next section is entitled 'The types of forced labor: Categorization'. There are three main types:

- the obligation to work (*Arbeitspflicht*);⁶

⁴ This view may be considered too general if, for example, we take into account the German 'cleansing' of the areas of Gdańsk-Pomerania. According to information provided by Grzegorz Berendt, the mass terror against Jews in Pomerania started at the beginning of September 1939. Due to the small number of Jews there, the area's Jewish population had been completely exterminated by the end of the year. For example, in the Starogard powiat, extermination took place on 18 October 1939. A similar situation took place in other powiats in occupied Pomerania (G. Berendt, 'Żydzi w Okręgu Rzeszy Gdańsk-Prusy Zachodnie w latach 1939–1945', in *Wyniszczyć, wynarodowić, wypędzić. Szkice do dziejów okupacji niemieckiej na Kaszubach i Kociewiu (1939–1945)*, ed. G. Berendt, Gdańsk 2010, p. 185; Szpęgawsk, ed. J. Milewski, Tczew-Starogard Gdański 1989, pp. 19–20; id., *Kociewie w latach okupacji hitlerowskiej 1939–1945*, Warszawa 1977, p. 62; M. Kubicki, *Zbrodnia w Lesie Szpęgawskim 1939–1940*, Gdańsk-Warszawa 2019, pp. 113–20).

⁵ Mędykowski emphasises the important role of the so-called 'Final Solution to the Jewish Question', i.e. the murder of most European Jews as planned by the Germans.

⁶ On the territory of the Third Reich, forced labour was introduced by a law of 3 May 1935. This allowed for the control of the flow of labour and the assignment of specific groups of people

- forced labour (*Zwangsarbeit*);⁷
- slave labour (*Sklavenarbeit*).⁸

At this point, the author also makes a typology of the various concentration, extermination and labour camps. He lists the places where the obligation to work was imposed on the Jews. The next element of the introduction has been separated out as a sub-chapter entitled 'Forced labor in occupied Poland'. Its purpose is to demonstrate that the Jews were obliged to work as early as September 1939. The situation became even worse after the creation of the General Government, in which the obligation to work was extended to Poles as well as Jews (p. xviii). One of the elements of labour-related extermination was the so-called building battalions that were created from the first days of the German occupation (p. xix).⁹

Then, the literature used in the creation of this publication is described. It is shown that the first works on the Holocaust were published in Poland in 1946; the leading position in this field belonged to the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland [*Główniej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce*]. Mędykowski mentions that the most important institutions contributing

to individual industries (W. Jastrzębski, 'Warunki życia i pracy robotników przymusowych', in *Polscy robotnicy przymusowi w Trzeciej Rzeszy*, ed. W. Bonusiak, Rzeszów 2005, p. 103; C. Łuczak, 'Polityka zatrudnienia w Trzeciej Rzeszy', in *ibid.*, p. 19).

⁷ As part of their theoretical consultations, German leaders searched for the optimal model to exploit the areas that were about to be conquered. During one such meeting (23 May 1939), Adolf Hitler decided that the population in the conquered territories would not be included in the obligation to join the armed forces and the police apparatus. However, it was decided to force them to work for the benefit of the German economy. These workers received very modest remuneration, which took various forms (money or food). The first changes in this system date to the end of 1941, when the campaign in the East stalled and the Wehrmacht needed reinforcements. From 1942, conscription to the German armed forces on the basis of the DVL (*Deutsche Volksliste*) began (*Berlin. Wspomnienia Polaków z robót przymusowych w stolicy III Rzeszy w latach 1939–1945*, ed. J. Gmitruk et al., Warszawa 2012, p. 12).

⁸ The Jewish population were subjected to slave labour from the first months of the occupation. After the start of the attack on the USSR, Soviet prisoners of war were also included. It was also one of the elements of the General Plan for the East (*Generalplan Ost*). After the population shifts in Central and Eastern Europe, there was a plan to create a system in which slave labour would be widely used. This was called the Great Plan (*Großplanung*) and was to be implemented for 25–30 years after the successful conclusion of the campaign in the East. In the case of occupied Poland, the plan was for about 10–15 million people to be used as slaves in the Third Reich's industry. Ultimately this plan was not implemented, except for the use of Jews and Soviet prisoners of war, and partially Polish workers.

⁹ See. M. Wróblewski, *Służba budowlana (Baudienst) w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie 1940–1945*, Warszawa 1984.

to the study of the extermination of the Jews and other nationalities should include the Institute for Western Affairs (*Instytut Zachodni*), the Jewish Historical Institute (*Żydowski Instytut Historyczny*) and the Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation, known since 2001 as the Institute of National Remembrance – the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisję Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu*), formerly the Main Research Commission of Nazi Crimes in Poland (p. xxii). Then he mentions the most important researchers in the field, Czesław Madajczyk¹⁰ and Czesław Łuczak.¹¹ Among the authors who have been important from the point of view of research into the economics of the Third Reich during the Second World War, he mentions Franciszek Skalniak, who dealt with issues related to fiscal and monetary policy.¹² He also emphasises the importance of publications issued by the museums of martyrdom (the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial & Museum in Oświęcim and the State Museum at Majdanek) as well as the cases which came before the International Court of Justice in Nuremberg.¹³ This literature is supplemented by books describing the activities of individual ghettos and enterprises associated with the SS. During his research, Mędykowski mainly sought works related to the sociological and economic aspects of the Jewish population's forced labour in the occupied territories.¹⁴

The book's first full chapter is called 'War against Poland and the beginning of German economic policy in the occupied territory'. As an introduction, the basics of the economic policy towards the Jews initiated in Germany before the outbreak of the Second World War are presented. Mędykowski supplements this with an

¹⁰ Among the most important works in this area, Mędykowski names C. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*, Warszawa 1970; id., *Faszyzm i okupacje 1938–1945. Wykonywanie okupacji przez państwa Osi w Europie*, vol. 1: *Ukształtowanie się rządów okupacyjnych*, Poznań 1983, vol. 2: *Mechanizmy realizowania okupacji*, Poznań 1984; id., *Generalplan Ost*, Poznań 1962; id., *Generalna Gubernia w planach hitlerowskich. Studia*, Warszawa 1961.

¹¹ Among the most important works in this field, Mędykowski lists C. Łuczak, *Polityka ludnościowa i ekonomiczna hitlerowskich Niemiec w okupowanej Polsce*, Poznań 1979.

¹² The works mentioned include F. Skalniak, *Polityka pieniężna i budżetowa tzw. Generalnego Gubernatorstwa narzędziem finansowania potrzeb III Rzeszy*, Warszawa 1976; id., *Stopa życiowa społeczeństwa polskiego w okresie okupacji na terenie Generalnego Gubernatorstwa*, Warszawa 1979.

¹³ Mędykowski mentions the IG Farben trial as a model example.

¹⁴ In this field, he also used the work of the Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft Association. Thanks to their work over recent years, according to the author, they represent the best state of research and the highest level of accuracy.

examination of the issues in the field of nationality policy, the basis of which can be found in the failure of German demands against Poland, the aftermath of which was the Obersalzberg conference.¹⁵ It is worth emphasising at this point that such a broad background allows the reader to place the forced labour imposed on Polish territory in a broader context. The author lists some of the places where Polish troops held out the longest, though he omitted the defence of the coast. Such information should have been included in a footnote; if this had been done, the reader would have had an even better picture of the course of Poland's defensive war in 1939. Next, the first chapter presents the beginning of Germany's aggression against Poland and a clear description of Operation Tannenberg (p. 7).¹⁶ One positive element is the quotation here of the words of Reinhard Heydrich (p. 8);¹⁷ this quote allows the reader to understand the motives of the Germans as they were deciding on the mass murder of the Polish population.

¹⁵ During a secret meeting in Obersalzberg (22 August 1939), Hitler outlined his plans to increase German domination in the East. Issues related to Poland were also discussed at the meeting. Hitler stated: "The destruction of Poland is in the foreground. The task is to destroy living forces, not to reach a certain line. Even if war breaks out in the West, the destruction of Poland must be the primary goal. It is necessary to settle quickly because of the time of year. I will give the propaganda reason for starting the war, whether it is real or not. The winners will not be asked later whether they are telling the truth or not. Close your hearts to pity. Act brutally. 80 million people must get their rights". During the Nuremberg trial, a second version of the speech was revealed: "I have given orders – and anyone who utters a word of criticism will be shot – that the purpose of war is [...] the physical destruction of the enemy. That is why I have sent my *Totenkopfverbände*, for the time being only to the East, with the order to kill without mercy or pity all men, women and children of the Polish race and language. Only in this way will we win the living space we need. [...] Poland will be depopulated and colonised by the Germans" (quoted after A. Chmielarz, 'Kategorie represji stosowanych przez okupanta niemieckiego wobec obywateli polskich', in *Polska 1939–1945. Straty osobowe i ofiary represji pod dwiema okupacjami*, ed. W. Materski, T. Szarota, Warszawa 2009, p. 94; M. Wardzyńska, 'Kategorie obozów pod okupacją niemiecką w latach II wojny światowej', in *Polska 1939–1945*, p. 101; Ch. Hale, *Kaci Hitlera. Brudny sekret Europy*, transl. M. Habura, Kraków 2012, p. 39; B. Chrzanowski, 'Ogólne założenia polityki niemieckiej na polskich ziemiach wcielonych do Rzeszy', in *Kościerzyna i powiat kościerski w latach II wojny światowej 1939–1945*, ed. A. Gąsiorowski, Kościerzyna 2009, p. 60).

¹⁶ Operation Tannenberg was a programme whose primary goal was to eliminate the 'Polish leadership layer'. It was one of the elements of the *Intelligenzaktion* campaign carried out on the territories incorporated into the Third Reich and the General Government (see A.L. Szcześniak, *Plan zagłady Słowian. Generalplan Ost*, Radom 2001).

¹⁷ Reinhard Heydrich described the course of Operation Tannenberg: "In Poland, executions of the Polish intelligentsia, nobility, clergy, generally of all the elements that could be considered carriers of national resistance, are taking place" (M. Wardzyńska, *Był rok 1939. Operacje niemieckiej policji bezpieczeństwa w Polsce. Intelligenzaktion*, Warszawa 2009, p. 71; D. Schenk, *Hitlers Mann in Danzig: Albert Forster und die NS-Verbrechen in Danzig-Westpreussen* (J.H.W. Dietz, 2000); translated into Polish as *Albert Forster – gdański namiestnik Hitlera. Zbrodnie hitlerowskie w Gdańsku i Prusach Zachodnich*, transl. W. Tycner, J. Tycner, Gdańsk 2002, p. 236).

The first chapter, in addition to the above-mentioned issues related to the beginning of the war and the German plans, briefly describes the impact of propaganda on the perception among German society of the Jewish people (p. 9). This influence resulted from the universality of propaganda activities and the creation in the Third Reich of organisations such as the *Hitlerjugend* (HJ) or the *Bund deutscher Mädel* (BdM); these gathered together young people who were extremely susceptible to the influences of Nazi ideology and agitation. The concept of *Lebensraum*,¹⁸ which was one of the foundational ideas behind expanding the size of German-held territory in Eastern Europe, fits into all of this. Another example of German propaganda was the reintroduction of the concept of *polnische Wirtschaft* into general circulation.¹⁹ Its purpose was to ridicule the statehood of Poland and show the pointlessness of its existence. The whole is complemented by a short description of relations among the nationalities on the territory of the Second Polish Republic before the outbreak of the war (p. 11).

The beginning of the German occupation introduced completely new rules for the functioning of Polish society. This is dealt with in the section entitled 'Violence against the Jews'. When introducing the military administration, the Germans punished with death those people who, despite the bans, still possessed weapons and radio receivers (p. 12). The same treatment applied to persons committing 'misdemeanours' against the Wehrmacht. Mędykowski emphasises that in most cases these provisions were abused, and thus legally legitimised the mass killing of Jews. The practice of forcing contributions from the Jewish population was common (p. 14); it was in line with the policy of the economic pauperisation of this group. Such practices were often accompanied by blackmail and violence. The author emphasises that from the very start of the war, representatives of

¹⁸ *Lebensraum*, literally 'living space'. As National Socialist Germany's power grew, their leaders decided to enlarge the territory of the country. The plan was to conquer areas in the East, which were to provide Germany with greater freedom and opportunities to act. This doctrine assumed the marginalisation of peoples defined in the National Socialist ideology as 'different races' and their complete economic exhaustion. One of the elements for creating this 'living space' was the mass extermination of the peoples living in these areas.

¹⁹ See E.C. Król, *Polska i Polacy w propagandzie narodowego socjalizmu w Niemczech 1919–1945*, Warszawa 1999; id., *Propaganda i indoktrynacja narodowego socjalizmu w Niemczech 1919–1945. Studium organizacji, treści, metod i technik masowego oddziaływania*, Warszawa 1999.

the German administration at almost every level allowed the general pillage of property belonging to the Jews.

Chapter two, entitled 'Forced labor from the period of military government until the beginning of ghettoisation,' constructs the text in a transparent fashion. It begins by citing the order issued by General Walther von Brauchitsch, commander of the attack on Poland in September 1939, concerning the treatment of civilians (p. 18).²⁰ Officially, the Germans wanted to introduce order to the conquered territories without harming their inhabitants. The author highlights that as part of this 'liberal policy'; summary courts (*Standgerichte*) were established shortly after this order was issued.²¹ Then he discusses the organisation of the administration in the annexed territories and the General Government (p. 20). At this point, however, he mistakenly names General Walter Heitz as the head of the military administration in East Prussia, because he commanded the Military District of West Prussia (*Militärbezirk Westpreussen*) from 8 September 1939.²² Mędykowski then quotes the words of the Governor General Hans Frank, who clearly stated that the production potential of the former Polish state should be dismantled, in order to bring about the pauperisation of the population in the General Government as soon as possible (p. 20). This extract clearly indicates the goals of German policy on the occupied territories.

One of the most important parts of this book describes the German preparation of reports on the condition of industry and agriculture in the GG (pp. 22–23).

²⁰ The order of 1 September 1939 concerned the submission of the civilian population to the German military administration. They promised to respect international rights and not to terrorise the civilian population. Factories, workplaces and the civil administration were to continue to function. Severe penalties were decreed for any attempts at sabotage or passive resistance.

²¹ The German authorities used temporary courts (*Standgerichte*) to strengthen the terror apparatus on the occupied territories of the Second Polish Republic in 1939–1945. The first was established in September 1939, and was permanently incorporated into the German occupation administration. Under the guise of legality, they made it possible to intensify the programme of extermination against the population. After a cursory 'trial', the average court hearing lasted just a few minutes, after which most of the accused were sentenced to death. The judgements usually did not contain any justification (see M. Cygański, 'Polityka narodowościowa III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce', in *Zbrodnie i sprawy. Ludobójstwo hitlerowskie przed sądem ludzkości i historii*, ed. C. Pilichowski, Warszawa 1980; C. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1970).

²² Walter Heitz headed the military administration in the West Prussia Military District until 25 October 1939, when a civil administration took power (Cf. Kubicki, *Zbrodnia w Lesie Szpegawskim*, pp. 77–78).

It is supplemented by a presentation of the person of Hans Frank and the position resulting from his role as governor general. Here the role of the intelligentsia, which the Germans also called the 'leadership layer', is highlighted. According to the Third Reich's decision makers, it was first necessary to exclude the occupied territories' representatives from everyday life.²³ The manner in which Frank planned to include the Jewish population in the industry of the Third Reich was also presented; the first step in the introduction of total exploitation was to remove this social group from economic life.²⁴

In addition to matters related to Frank's perception of the Jews' role in the German economy, Mędykowski explains the role of the *Einsatzgruppen* and the *Einsatzkommando*. In the initial phase of the occupation, due to the small number of these units, they were mainly used for activities related to the murder of representatives of the intelligentsia (p. 27). Mędykowski writes that in the case of the Jews it was decided that they would be relocated *en masse* to eastern Galicia.²⁵ The Germans who held offices in the General Government called for this process to be spread out over time; this was due to the limited capacity of the transport network, which would become completely paralysed due to the increased traffic (p. 28). In order to implement the plan to exploit the Jewish population, a mass appointment of Councils of (Jewish) Elders began; these were to take responsibility for:

- censuses of the population residing in the areas under their jurisdiction;
- breakdowns of people by sex and age;
- listing the enterprises and real estate located in a given area.

As a result, economic and demographic information was obtained indicating which of the Jews could be used by the Third Reich as forced labourers. Enterprises and stores in the General Government were obliged to provide compulsory military contingents. On 21 September 1939,

²³ In this case, the Germans used the terms 'elimination' or 'displacement'. In both cases, these words were intended to conceal the real intentions. Those referred to as the 'intelligentsia or 'leadership layer' were planned to be murdered at the beginning of the war.

²⁴ According to Mędykowski, in some cities it took place as early as 6 September 1939 (W.W. Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit Frei? German Economic Policy and Forced Labor of Jews in the General Government, 1939–1943*, Boston 2018, pp. 25–26).

²⁵ This did not only apply to the territory of eastern Galicia; the Germans planned to transform the entire Lublin region into a 'reservation for Jews'.

a decision was made to transport the Jewish population from small towns and villages to ghettos in large cities (p. 29). Mędykowski rightly emphasises the violence of the resettlement actions, as the task was to be completed within a maximum of four weeks from the publication of the regulation. In practice, the leading role of the SS in this practice gradually crystallised (p. 30). The first labour camp was established at the beginning of December 1939 in Lublin, at 7 Lipowa Street.

According to the author, there was a general state of chaos regarding Jewish labour during the military occupation. Decisions on how to exploit this group of people were taken by many different authorities, and were mainly aimed at humiliating them. Jews were first arrested in the streets, then used for all kinds of work, including sweeping, cleaning sewage pits and washing cars. Wearing the Star of David was compulsory, which should be considered a method of social humiliation. Photographing or filming the Jews' treatment was common. In order to improve the organisation of the labour, workers' battalions were created and assigned to perform public work (p. 42). A network of employment offices was founded to help better plan the workforce exploitation; twenty-three of these offices were established on the territory of the General Government. Mędykowski also points to the differences between the treatment of the Poles and Jews who were forced to work from the very beginning of the occupation.

Regarding the study of the occupation economy, the issues related to the rights, obligations and prohibitions that applied to the Jewish population are important. The author describes how people were drafted and divided into groups (pp. 50–51). They were defined by the colour of their work card. One drawback of the text is that it is not explained how these cards were assigned to particular groups (p. 54). The *Judenräte* were responsible for provisioning the Jewish workers. Under German law, the salaries of Jews were 20 per cent lower than those paid to the Poles; this did not apply to camps run by the SS, where there was no form of remuneration at all. A valuable supplement in the text is the description of the GG's economy as a whole. One example of how the Jewish population in the Lublin district were exploited is the approach taken by Odilo Globocnik, who created the first camps in this area (p. 63). An extreme example of this was

the 'Otto' programme²⁶ (pp. 70–71), where the model of 'mobile work camps' developed by Globocnik was used for the first time.

Chapter three, entitled 'Forced labor in the ghettos and labor detachments', begins with the question of the establishment of the *Judenräte*. Their activity in organising the Jews as a workforce and providing social welfare and health protection is described here. In practice, due to the scarcity of resources, it was impossible to carry out these tasks (pp. 80–81). The *Judenräte* were also obliged to register the forced labourers, which facilitated the Germans' organisation of the practice (pp. 84–86). Mędykowski points out the brutality employed in drafting the workforce and the ruthlessness with which the occupiers treated it. Although Jews had already been working for the Third Reich's war machine, in the winter of 1940 they were delegated to clearing snow, which further aggravated the humiliation of their workload (p. 87). It was common for Germans to set up workshops where unpaid Jewish labour was used (p. 90), a process which intensified after the attack on the USSR was launched.

As part of the repressive system of extermination through labour, the occupiers established a group whose task was to obtain the materials necessary to the German war economy. Due to the importance of this task, this group was treated better than the Jews employed in industrial plants (pp. 95–96). Mędykowski describes exactly what materials were collected and what privileges its members enjoyed. He also compares it with other groups of forced labourers working outside the ghetto (pp. 98–99). Contact with the 'outside world' made it possible to trade, and thus to obtain better provisions. At this point, it is helpful to introduce the concept of the 'black market', and to present the principles of its operation in the reality of the occupation.

Because it was the Germans who set up the system of ghettos, it seems necessary to describe the conditions under which these places operated. The author begins by presenting the process of transporting the Jews to the ghettos and how their property was plundered (pp. 101–02). It was principally the Germans who took part in the general theft of equipment

²⁶ According to Mędykowski, the 'Otto' programme concerned the expansion of road and rail infrastructure in the General Government and the border fortifications on the border with the USSR (Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, p. 70).

and other objects from individual apartments or houses. The same was done with the equipment of shops and production workshops. The people thus affected lost about 90 per cent of their pre-war belongings when the transports to the ghetto began.²⁷ To complete the picture of the reality of the occupation, Mędykowski precisely describes the conditions in the ghetto. These were principally characterised by extreme shortages in production and supply. This situation resulted in the creation of a secondary circulation of second-hand objects. The author pointed out that used things appeared on the market at least three times: at the time of the ghetto's creation, during the creation of the transitional ghetto, and finally at the time of its liquidation (p. 107).

The very institution of the ghetto forced the people gathered there to change their behaviour. They became more ruthless as a result of German policy.²⁸ Initially, they were able to run production workshops, although the Germans strictly regulated their existence through a system of official permits (p. 111). Later, the so-called city workshops were created (p. 112). In the opinion of this reviewer, this was in line with the occupiers' policy of aggregating production, with the intention of increasing its effectiveness on a broader basis.²⁹ Deficiencies in the equipment made this highly time-consuming and energy-consuming. Although the conditions for the operation of manufacturing in the ghetto were so difficult, some 'Aryan' enterprises nevertheless commissioned production there. Mędykowski notes that private initiative did exist in the ghettos,³⁰ consisting in the creation of enterprises which cooperated with the occupiers, even though this was officially forbidden (p. 115). Due to the shortage of materials, there were numerous shortages of finished articles. This condition contributed to the existence of the shadow economy and a black market for products and labour.

²⁷ When preparing for transportation, the Jews were forced to leave most of their belongings in their houses. After their resettlement to the ghetto, what little property they had was also stolen, which resulted in the accelerated pauperisation of the population.

²⁸ Mędykowski shows that, according to official estimates, about 350,000 Jews were gathered in the ghetto in Warsaw (Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, p. 109).

²⁹ One example is the textile workshops located in the Łódź ghetto (*ibid.*, p. 115).

³⁰ In this case, this refers to the small- or medium-sized workshops run by Jews, using the workforce from individual ghettos. Due to shortages in production, the Germans gave 'tacit consent' to their existence.

As the course of the hostilities changed, so did the conditions under which the Jews lived in the ghettos. The food supply situation deteriorated after June 1941, when Germany attacked the USSR. The Wehrmacht needed more and more war material; in this situation, the Polish and Jewish enterprises were exploited increasingly heavily (p. 129). One example was the brush-making industry, which was almost entirely dominated by enterprises operating in the ghettos. The same was true of the supply of timber products to the market. Due to the simple production technique, the production of these goods did not require automation, and so could take place in the ghettos. The low quality of the products manufactured there was compensated for by their low price.

Chapter four, 'Forced labor in the labor camps', begins by discussing the Jewish camps located in occupied Poland. Some camps had production workshops, while others did not. As an example of the activity of the former, the author mentions the camp at 7 Lipowa Street in Lublin, which used Jewish labour in the workshops (p. 137).

One of the most important institutions in the German system of exploiting the Jewish labour force was the labour camp in Bełżec.³¹ It had been created as the result of decisions already made in 1939, when plans were made to build a defence line along the German-Soviet border. It fit in with the vision of Odilo Globocnik, who coined the concept of "unconditional use of the labour of the Jews". Mędykowski points out that the people who passed through the camp in Bełżec were no longer fit for further work after leaving the facility. This was due to the extremely bad living conditions, poor food supply and the inmates' physical exhaustion. The author also discusses how the Bełżec camp was developed, considering it a model facility in the German machine for the extermination of the Jews (p. 152). It should be mentioned here that by focusing on the 'usefulness' of the Jews at work, the Germans gave priority to providing better conditions for the specialised workers and craftsmen. In this light, it was decided to murder representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia, deeming them completely useless. The camp in Bełżec,

³¹ The labour camp in Bełżec was organised in the spring of 1940; it was mainly Jews, Poles, Roma and Sinti who were sent there. The living conditions were terrible, and its overseers were characterised by their extreme brutality. It is estimated that a significant number of prisoners died as a result of work-related exhaustion and poor conditions.

with its terrible living conditions, was thus a place of general extermination, and not only due to the forced labour. The author also claims that the best conditions were in the agricultural camps.³²

Another problem was the issue of releasing individuals from the camps. These decisions were taken by the managements of the individual centres which used forced labour. Due to the extremely negative attitude of the Germans who formed the camp administrations, the release of any prisoner from the obligation to work was a matter of total chance, and not the goodwill of the occupiers. Although this question is undoubtedly interesting, the author only presents it in a general outline.

The first part of the book ends with a description of the construction of the border fortifications in the east, which was interrupted in May 1941; according to Mędykowski, this was related to the planned attack on the USSR (p. 180).

Part two begins with chapter five, entitled 'The war in the East: Galicia during the first weeks of the war'. It begins with a description of German-Soviet relations until the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, that is 22 June 1941. Then preparations for the attack are discussed (pp. 181–82). This element of description is an accessible work of synthesis (p. 185). Mędykowski indicates which *Einsatzgruppen* operated in the East shortly after the passage of the Wehrmacht (p. 187). However, his work only deals with topics related to people who were important for the functioning of the economy in the conquered areas (pp. 188–89); this approach is in line with the subject of the publication here reviewed.

The commencement of Operation Barbarossa resulted in changes to the treatment of the Jewish population on the conquered territories. The German administration began to make efforts to completely eliminate the Jews from the economic and social space. As an example, Arthur Greiser, an NSDAP *Gauleiter* and the governor of the *Warthegau*, wanted the areas under his control to be *judenfrei*, that is, 'free of Jews' (p. 191). Representatives of other nationalities were engaged in the mass murder of the Jewish population

³² This was because the Jews had easy access to food and were treated better (Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, p. 174).

in the eastern areas. One example of this is the support given by some Ukrainians to the German administration (p. 193).

Chapter six, 'Jewish labour in Galicia', focuses solely on the area of the Galicia district (*Distrikt Galizien*) established on 7 August 1941. It begins with a description of the German administration which operated in this area (p. 194); Mędykowski then deals with the economic problems there. One of the reasons behind them was the nationalisation carried out there by the Soviets after 1939. After the outbreak of the war with the USSR, entities which had been previously nationalised were easily incorporated into the German system of economic exploitation (p. 199). This led to the inclusion of the Jews in the economy of Galicia at the beginning of the war with the USSR.³³ Ultimately, most of the population was deported to the GG. Meanwhile, shortly after the establishment of the Galicia district, the Jews there were divided into three categories:

A – those who were to remain in place as necessary to sustain production (such as artisans);

B – those intended for placement in labour camps;

C – those destined to be murdered in extermination camps.³⁴

At the same time, the *Judenräte* operating in the Galicia district were ordered to establish municipal workshops where craftsmen were employed.

The progress of the campaign in the East required the introduction of new forces and funding into the economy. One method for boosting the Third Reich's production capacity was to use qualified Jewish workers and include them in production (p. 206); this plan also concerned agriculture in the GG (p. 207). The author points out that those who were not fit for forced labour were destined to be exterminated. This action began in 1942, when some Jews did not have their identification cards stamped; this was tantamount to a death sentence (p. 208). The situation stabilised when the *Judenräte* were obligated to pay the German administration for Jews to be employed (p. 209).³⁵ In order to better understand

³³ Mędykowski mentions that in order to increase economic opportunities in Galicia, Jews were forced to work from the age of 10 (Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, p. 201).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

³⁵ German companies took advantage of this, exploiting the unpaid Jewish labour ruthlessly (*ibid.*, p. 209).

the phenomenon of the use of forced labour, the actual relationship between the remuneration paid to the Jews and the prices of the articles they produced is given (p. 210). Thanks to this, Mędykowski vividly portrays the economic decline of the Jewish population in the Galicia district.

One of the most important institutions dealing with the exploitation of the Jews for forced labour were the agricultural enterprises; these were often under Ukrainian management.³⁶ With the advent of the German occupation, the leadership of individual entities of this type remained unchanged; however, an element of forced labour was added to increase their efficiency (pp. 210–11). The second industry in which Jewish forced labour was widely used was the railway companies in the East (*Ostbahn*) (p. 211). In larger urban centres, such as Lviv, municipal workshops were established whose primary task was to increase supplies for the Wehrmacht. These mainly produced uniforms and items of uniforms. By spring 1942, the existence of such workshops was common. All these undertakings were created top-down by the Germans.

When the German occupation of the Galicia district began, labour camps for the Jewish population were established. Initially, their main task was to support the development of the local infrastructure. Mędykowski points out that this role evolved over time, and the camp inmates were transferred to transport companies (p. 213). In both cases, the Jews were treated as unpaid labour. The remaining labour camps were to become elements of the so-called 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' (*Endlösung der Judenfrage*). The conditions in Galician centres did not differ from those in other districts of the General Government. One of the author's most valuable contributions is his listing of the German enterprises that used slave labour in the Galicia district (p. 218).

The beginning of chapter seven, entitled 'Jewish labor on the shadow of the Aktion Reinhardt' describes the places which held the greatest

³⁶ In line with the Soviet policy of discriminating against the Polish nation, some of the industrial plants had only Ukrainians on their management boards; there were also cases of mixed Ukrainian-Russian managements. After the campaign in the East began, the Soviets either fled the approaching front or were murdered. The Germans introduced a similar model of discriminating against the Polish and Jewish populations, and therefore left some of the industrial plants to the Ukrainian managements. This was a deliberate measure intended to increase tensions between individual ethnic groups in the occupied areas.

concentrations of the Jewish population on the territory of the GG and the lands incorporated into the Third Reich; these were the ghettos in Warsaw and Łódź (Litzmannstadt). Then, the procedure of the 'liquidation' of the individual ghettos was presented. In the case of the smaller ones, evacuation units (*Räumungskommando*) were used. After the 'relocation of the population' – which should be understood as their deportation to extermination camps – the members of these commando units were themselves murdered or imprisoned in concentration camps (p. 224).³⁷ The loss of population in the ghettos is estimated at 85 per cent, as not all of their inhabitants were thus 'relocated'. This did not apply to people working in administration or employed in the Third Reich's war industry (pp. 224–25). According to Mędykowski, Jewish organisations continued to try to save as many people as possible. This was done by trying to convince the Germans that some of those designated for murder could still be used as forced labourers in industrial or agricultural production.³⁸ However, this chapter does not describe the entire phenomenon of the extermination of the Jews, nor is it placed in a broader context.

The extermination of the Jewish population contributed to the reduction of the effectiveness of the war economy in the General Government. As a result of the loss of people who had commonly been exploited as forced labourers, the total production volume of German enterprises decreased. The occupying authorities faced the problem of "replacing the Jewish workforce in a short time" (p. 235). This contributed to the escalation of the conflict between Albert Speer and Heinrich Himmler. The situation was also influenced by increased conscription to the Wehrmacht, which additionally depleted the resources of the available workforce. This resulted in an increase in the demand for Polish forced labourers, and at the same time raised labour costs, as the Jewish population had been the cheapest labour force

³⁷ It was mainly the rail network which was used in the 'relocation' process. In smaller ghettos, far from the railroads and main roads, the Jews were murdered on the spot. One example was the activity of the 101st Reserve Police Battalion mentioned by Mędykowski, whose members took part in such executions (See Ch.R. Browning, *Zwykli ludzie. 101. Policyjny Batalion Rezerwy i "ostateczne rozwiązanie" w Polsce*, transl. P. Budkiewicz, Warszawa 2000; Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, p. 224).

³⁸ Ultimately, around 2500 people were saved; these people were then reassigned, mainly to work in agriculture. New labour camps were built for them; the conditions there did not differ from other sites of this type, or were even worse (Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, pp. 229–30).

available. The largest extermination centres for Jews are discussed later in this chapter;³⁹ although Mędykowski describes the camp at Bełżec in great detail, he makes only passing references to Treblinka and Sobibór. It would have been better to describe these places in more detail, for example in a footnote, as this would have complemented the narrative.

After Aktion Reinhardt had been completed, some of the ghettos were liquidated completely, while some were transformed into the so-called 'residual ghettos' (*Restgetto*) (p. 234). For example, about 35,000 people were left in the Warsaw ghetto; these individuals were used for forced labour in an ammunition factory (p. 243). A network of transit camps, which could be called distribution centres, was also created. There were limited possibilities for Jews to remain outside the places designated for them, and helping or hiding them was punishable by death; these provisions applied in particular to the Polish and Ukrainian populations (p. 241). A very important element of the seventh chapter is the summary of the influence of Aktion Reinhardt on the economy of the GG.⁴⁰ Mędykowski rightly claims that the extermination of such a huge number of people contributed to the collapse of production and the emergence of economic problems that impacted the effectiveness of frontline supplies.

In the next chapter, 'War industry requirements in the face of annihilation of the workforce', the author points out that as operations in the East expanded, Germany's demand for the manpower and materials necessary for offensive operations increased concomitantly. It also discusses the decisions related to the individual national groups that made up the slave labour population. He writes that from the beginning of Barbarossa until summer 1942, about 1.1 million Soviet prisoners of war were exterminated, and 1.2 million Polish forced labourers were deployed on the territories of the Third Reich and the GG. According to calculations by German leaders, including Governor General Hans Frank, German industry still needed about 400,000 people to work (p. 250). In view

³⁹ See *Treblinka: historia i pamięć*, ed. E. Kopówka, Siedlce 2015; id., *Treblinka - nigdy więcej*, Treblinka-Siedlce 2002; *Treblinka*, Warszawa 1967; M. Wójcik, *Treblinka '43. Bunt w fabryce śmierci*, Kraków 2019; *Sobibór*, Warszawa 1967; M. Bem, *Sobibór. Niemiecki ośrodek zagłady*, Włodawa 2011; id., *Sobibór. Exodus 14 października 1943*, Warszawa 2013.

⁴⁰ Mędykowski estimates that about 300,000 people survived the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' in the General Government. Jews (Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, p. 245).

of the extermination of the Jews, it was planned to recruit these missing workers through intensified repression against the population of the General Government. A second element that reduced the effectiveness of the war industry was the Allies' bombing raids on German-held territory.

Mędykowski writes that in view of the initial successes in the East, officials who were involved in the German system of forced labour and the extermination of the Jews guaranteed that those murdered would be quickly replaced by prisoners from the eastern front (p. 253). The author estimates that the wartime German economy was powered by 1.7 million captured Soviet soldiers: 1 million were sent to work in industry, and 700,000 were used in agriculture. Additionally, it was hoped that the eastern territories, including the occupied territories of Poland, would provide even more forced labourers in the future (p. 254). The pressure related to the decline in industrial efficiency resulted in an increase in the activity of the German labour offices. More attempts were made to acquire a labour force, which came to resemble slave-hunting. The SS adapted easily to all this; in accordance with its long-term plans, it intended to transform the camps under its jurisdiction into profitable enterprises.

The SS's plan was to leave alive about 20–30 per cent of the camps' best qualified and physically strongest workers (p. 258); the rest who did not meet these criteria were designated for extermination, a task which was duly carried out. Mędykowski highlights the conflict that developed between the SS and the Wehrmacht. The point of contention between them was the need for the qualified workers who would be necessary for the German army to keep operating efficiently in frontline conditions (p. 260).⁴¹ Next to this, there was the problem of the efficiency of the civil administration of the occupied territories, which the SS officers considered corrupt and completely unable to act (p. 263). At this point, Mędykowski emphasises the role of Odilo Globocnik, who was one of the creators and most effective implementers of the German system of extermination through forced labour.⁴²

The book's final chapter is entitled 'The harvest festival (*Erntefest*) – extermination of the remaining Jews in the district of Lublin'. The narrative is introduced with

⁴¹ These people were only to be left alive because of their skills (ibid., p. 260).

⁴² The author does not give the reasons why Globocnik was dismissed from his functions; this was because he came into conflict with his superiors. Mędykowski does not provide this information until page 283 of his book.

a presentation of the role the Jews played in the Third Reich's armaments industry. An example of a similar activity was the plan to liquidate the ghetto in Warsaw. The Germans then carried out a partial transfer of the workforce (p. 276). By analogy, the author raises the issue of resistance in the ghettos and its influence on the occupiers' further actions (pp. 277–78). In this way he introduces and shows the similarities with the events taking place in the Lublin district. At this point, his list of the most important enterprises which used unpaid Jewish labour throughout almost the entire territory of the General Government should be mentioned (p. 289).

The next element of the narrative is the description of the uprising that broke out in the death camp in Sobibór. According to Mędykowski, this was one of the reasons for the decision to murder all Jews in the Lublin district. This action was codenamed 'Harvest festival' (*Erntefest*), and consisted in the murder of Jews in ghettos and camps. Mędykowski presents its course from the moment when the mass death pits were dug to the shooting operations. The information the author gives concerning the people who survived the massacres is particularly important; he indicates the places where the Germans concentrated them and, in the case of the escapees, also discusses their hiding places. Of the first group, some were used in the '1005' action.⁴³

The summary begins with a recapitulation of how the treatment of Jews by the Germans changed – from the lack of any clear decisions, through their exclusion from society by being shut away in the ghettos, to their economic degradation, and ultimately their complete elimination (pp. 292–93). The author also discusses the attitude of individuals to the use of Jewish forced labour – from the fanatical Odilo Globocnik to the more pragmatic Hans Frank (pp. 292–94). Both of them, despite some differences in their behaviour, strove to eliminate Jews from the German 'ideal society.' The next element of the summary is the presentation of the changes in the perception and interpretation of the concept

⁴³ Aktion 1005 was the programme carried out by the Germans in order to cover up the traces of mass murders in the occupied territories. This consisted of opening up the mass graves and burning the bodies of the murdered found therein. This work made it more difficult to determine the scale of German crimes, and made it impossible to identify some of the victims (J. Hoffmann, *Das kann man nicht erzählen*. "Aktion 1005" – Wie die Nazis die Spuren ihrer Massenmorde in Osteuropa beseitigten, Hamburg 2013).

of forced labour in the years 1939–43. The labour camps were created differently on a total misunderstanding of theoretical evolution. At this point, the full spectrum of the types of Jewish forced labour is once again indicated, from full conscription into the economy of the Third Reich, with the widespread use of labour for military intervention (such as the construction of border fortifications), to complete extermination. The industries in which Jews worked (the production of ammunition, clothes and other items of equipment for the army) are indicated again (p. 308).

The narrative Mędykowski creates shows that the Germans planned to leave only the strongest and best qualified Jewish workers alive. The background to this was the conflict of interests between the SS and the Wehrmacht. The former sought 'physical elimination', that is, the mass murder of all Jews. The second, on the other hand, wanted to use them to increase production and service the military units. It should be remembered that this approach also involved forced labour, which should be categorised as 'extermination through labour' (*Vernichtung durch Arbeit*). This fitted in with Nazi social and economic policy, which was to contribute to the creation of a 'zone of prosperity' for the Germany of the time. This was especially apparent in the areas incorporated into the Third Reich and in the General Government, where plunder, deportations, the total exploitation of material resources and labour and the subordination of the conquered population were implemented. The latter method was harnessed to the economic system, and its slave labour was intended to contribute to the victory of the Third Reich. One more element appears in the system created, which was the attempts made by the Jewish population who, from the beginning of the occupation, tried to find a possibility of surviving the extermination programme in this destructive work (p. 316).

The decisions the Germans took meant that these people were the first to be ruthlessly robbed of their property, exploited in the workplaces, and finally murdered. This view was represented by the fanatical executors of the policy towards the Jews and the 'Final Solution' associated with the SS. Given the Germans' general pragmatism during the Second World War, from an economic and military point of view these actions were senseless. Mędykowski writes that Hans Frank was at the opposite extreme, as he wished to exploit the Jews ruthlessly and make

them slaves of the German war machine. The remaining elements of this system were the civil administration, the Wehrmacht and the entrepreneurs who benefited from the forced labour of the Jewish population.

One good aspect of Mędykowski's work is its appendices. The first consists of maps showing the administrative division of the Second Polish Republic in 1922–39, then the territorial changes made by the German occupiers until 1941, the GG in 1939–44, and the individual labour camps and places for the extermination of the Jews located in the Lublin district. The author also presents the locations of factories in the Radom district. The next part of the appendices includes numerous statistical tables presenting the most important numbers related to the use of Jewish labour in the period 1939–43. At the end of the publication there are photos of senior German decision makers, and of examples of forced labour.

Witold Mędykowski's book, as presented in this review, is an extensive study of the use of Jewish forced labour in the General Government in 1939–43. His work is a model example of a combination of historical and economic research, and thus deserves a place in the field of the economic history of the Second World War. Its undoubted positive is its multifaceted nature and its very good language, which allows for an easy grasp of even the most difficult issues. Placing the statistical material at the end of the publication allows the narrative to flow, and at the same time facilitates its analysis. *Macht Arbeit Frei? The German Economic Policy and Forced Labour of Jews in the General Government, 1939–1943* is a comprehensive work that fills an existing gap in research into the German economy during the Second World War.

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JEFFREY S. KOPSTEIN, JASON WITTENBERG, *INTIMATE VIOLENCE. ANTI-JEWISH POGROMS ON THE EVE OF THE HOLOCAUST*, CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS, ITHACA, LONDON 2018, PP. 173, ISBN: 1501715275

The book discussed here is undoubtedly one of the most important books in recent years to concern the wave of anti-Jewish pogroms that swept across the eastern Polish borderlands in the summer of 1941. In many respects, it can also be considered the best study of the matter out of all the numerous publications that have been written since the emergence of Jan Tomasz Gross's book *Neighbors*.¹ The best-known works by Polish authors include the books by Marek Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Żydzi w zaborze sowieckim. Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej pod okupacją sowiecką (1939–1941)* [Poles and Jews in the Soviet Partition. Polish-Jewish Relations in the North-Eastern Territories of the Second Polish Republic under Soviet Occupation (1939–1941)] (Warsaw 2001); Andrzej Żbikowski's *U genezy Jedwabnego. Żydzi na Kresach Północno-Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej wrzesień 1939 – lipiec 1941* [On the Genesis of Jedwabne. Jews in the North-Eastern

¹ J.T. Gross, *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (2000), published in English as *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (2001).

Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic, September 1939 – July 1941] (Warsaw 2006); Marek J. Chodakiewicz's *Mord w Jedwabnem 10 lipca 1941. Prolog. Przebieg. Pokłosie* [Murder in Jedwabne, 10 July 1941. Prologue. Course. Aftermath] (Warsaw 2012), and Witold Mędykowski's *W cieniu gigantów. Pogromy 1941 r. w byłej sowieckiej strefie okupacyjnej* [In the Shadow of the Giants. The 1941 Pogroms in the former Soviet Occupation Zone] (Warsaw 2012). Of authors from outside Poland, Timothy Snyder refers to this issue in his book *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (2011), and the subject is dealt with directly in the 2004 joint publication edited by Antony Polonsky and Joanna Michlic entitled *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton 2004). The authors of the work under discussion here have admitted themselves that they were directly inspired by the stormy and heated discussion which flared up after the appearance of Gross's book.²

However, unlike the historians who have dealt with this issue so far, they view the problem from a much broader perspective. They are interested in placing the events in a multidimensional context, so they refer to the period before the outbreak of World War II, and look at matters not only from the historical point of view, but also in the light of theories of inter-group and inter-ethnic violence. Therefore, they are interested not only in the contexts of Polish-Jewish relations or the Second World War. As they wrote after the publication of *Neighbors*: "It gave us an unexpected opportunity to combine two important scientific directions that have never been properly integrated: the vast body of socio-scientific literature on inter-social violence, and a new generation of historiography concerning the Holocaust, which locates this violence in specific communities and their different contexts". (p. ix). The work which they drew upon most when researching this subject was Hubert M. Blalock's book *Toward a Theory of Minority-Group Relations* (New York, 1967), devoted to the theory of 'political threat', which takes as the basis for its analysis the relationship between the black and white populations of the United States. From the authors' point of view, the people who have distinguished themselves most in the field of discussion about

² Interest in the anti-Jewish pogroms has not waned, at least in Poland, as evidenced by last year's four-volume edition, which aspires to a comprehensive (though not exhaustive) presentation of the subject of pogroms in Poland in the 19th and 20th centuries. The fourth volume of *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, vol. 4: *Holokaust i Powojnie (1939–1946)*, ed. A. Grabski, Warszawa 2019, is devoted to the period of World War II.

the 1941 pogroms are Doris Bergen, John Connelly, Sol Goldberg, Anna Sternshis, and the aforementioned Antony Polonsky and Timothy Snyder.

It is worth emphasising that the book's authors are respected researchers in the scientific world. They both hold professorships and work at the same faculty (political science) of the University of California. However, the project could not have been carried out without the financial support provided by the following institutions: the National Science Foundation, the National Council for East European and Eurasian Research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the University of Toronto, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of California at Berkeley and the University of California at Irvine.

The book consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 ('Why do neighbours kill neighbours?') is a summary of what to expect in the rest of the publication, and offers an explanation of the reasons why the book's particular structure was adopted. Chapter 2 ('Ethnic policy in the borderland regions') will be of interest for the lay reader, but is somewhat too basic for the professional historian; it is an analysis of the situation in the *Kresy*, with a historical overview of ethnic relations from the turn of the twentieth century to 1941. In the third chapter ('Measuring fear and violence'), we find an overview of the research methods the authors use, as well as analyses of a range of original data from the 1921 and 1931 censuses, the results of the 1922 and 1928 parliamentary elections, and of sources concerning the pogroms, mainly from participants in the events, and from people who experienced the course of events at first hand. Information was collected from the lowest-level administrative units (*gminy*, communes) – a total of over 2000 larger and smaller towns. The authors' hypotheses were tested by a large number of statistical analyses based on differences in medians, non-parametric models and ecological inference. In chapters 4 and 5 ('Beyond Jedwabne' and 'Ukrainian Galicia and Volhynia') the authors test their arguments against the example of two regions of the eastern borderlands: the northern, where the Polish population dominated (Białystok and Polesie provinces) and the southern, where Ukrainians dominated (the Volhynia, Lwów, Stanisławów and Tarnopol provinces). Chapter 6 applies the same techniques to regions beyond the borders of the Second Polish Republic – in Lithuania, Romania and Greece, as well as India and the US. The seventh and final chapter ('Domestic violence and ethnic

diversity') tests the results of this work in relation to the broader discussion of intra-ethnic violence. At the end of the book, in addition to the bibliography and index, there is an appendix ('Pogroms in the Eastern Borderlands, summer 1941') which takes the form of a list of places where pogroms took place (along with references to the reports that speak of them). The local nomenclature, as long as it does not already have firm roots in English-language literature (such as 'Warsaw'), is given in Polish, even if there are German, Jewish or Ukrainian equivalents.

As mentioned in relation to chapter three, the authors focus not only on well-known and already published sources, but also on those which have been forgotten or perhaps unnoticed in the context of the anti-Jewish pogroms. This primarily concerns the statistical data from the 1922 and 1928 parliamentary elections, as well as data from the censuses carried out in 1921 and 1931. These data were published in the interwar period through the effort of the Central Statistical Office, thanks to which they have remained relatively easily available. Even a special query in the archives is not necessary. Although the authors do use archival materials, these are only of an auxiliary nature.³

The book's main argument is that all the previous attempts to explain the pogroms of summer 1941 have been incorrect. Three theories enjoy the most popularity: 1) the attacks were revenge for the Jews' collaboration with the Soviets; 2) the inherent, centuries-old anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism of the Christian populations (mainly Poles and Ukrainians) among whom the Jews lived; 3) the opportunity to steal Jewish movable and immovable property, thus it is an economic root cause. According to the authors, the reasons for this wave of over two hundred anti-Jewish pogroms should rather be located in the ethnic demography and political relations of the interwar period. What happened from the start of the war until summer 1941 only exacerbated the previous problems, gave them direction, and released

³ These are the following: Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records [AAN]), Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute [AŻIH]), Державний архів Львівської області (State Archive of the Lviv oblast [DALO]), Государственный Архив Российской Федерации (State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow, [GARF]), Галузевий Державний Архів Служби Безпеки України (Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine, Kyiv [HAD-SBU]), the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (USHMM, Washington DC), Yad VaShem (YVS, Jerusalem), and the Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO, New York).

the desire to immediately achieve goals which could have been achieved even before 1939.

The authors provide many arguments refuting the previous attempts to explain the phenomenon of the pogroms, and it is difficult to dispute their claims. Regarding the theme of revenge on the Jewish population for their collaboration with the Soviets, they claim that this kind of explanation (promoted by writers including Bogdan Musiał⁴ and Marek Wierzbicki, the latter of whom gives these events a primarily anti-Soviet tone) cannot be proven scientifically. At best, one can say that the Jews welcomed the arrival of the Soviets with a certain goodwill, but not that they collaborated with them. This goodwill was natural considering that Communism, at least in theory, was the only option which offered Jews equal rights. This was something they had lacked in the Second Polish Republic, and the other national minorities competing with the Poles for power (such as the Ukrainians) had not promised them such rights. And so it proved. The installation of Soviet power meant that Jews were allowed to hold positions that they could not practically have occupied under Polish rule. However, since they generally occupied lower positions in the Soviet hierarchy, they were more visible to the general population; this was in addition to their initial goodwill towards the new government, which gave the impression of Jewish ‘collaboration’. Moreover, it was a case of choosing the lesser evil for the Jews, because news of how Germany was proceeding was becoming more widespread. Moreover, the claim that Jews collaborated with the Soviet regime contradicts historians’ knowledge of how the individual nationalities were represented in the new apparatus of power. For example, data from the Białystok region shows that in 1940 Jews constituted only 2 per cent of the members of the rural communes’ ruling bodies, 9 per cent of Communist youth organisations, 5.4 per cent of ‘government candidates’ and 4 per cent of the Communist party cadres (p. 6). Considering Jews made up 12 per cent of the total population of the region, it is clear that not only were they under-represented in the apparatus of Soviet power in proportion to their numbers, but they turned out to be severely limited in this respect.

⁴ B. Musiał, ‘The Pogrom in Jedwabne: Critical Remarks about Jan T. Gross’s *Neighbours*’, in *The Neighbors Respond. The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland*, ed. A. Polonsky and J.B. Michlic, Princeton University Press 2004, pp. 304–43.

It is also interesting that pogroms took place more often in places where pre-war support for Communism was weak compared to those areas where support was relatively high. This was because the most important and largest groups supporting Communism did not come from the Jews, but the Belarusian and Ukrainian populations. In places where Communist slogans were more popular, pro-pogrom sentiments were less likely to develop.

According to the authors, the thesis that the Christian population's anti-Semitism was the main cause of the pogroms is equally wrong. To this end, they ask: how was it possible that only 9 per cent of localities suffered from pogroms, and over 90 per cent did not? For if anti-Semitism and Jew-hatred were as widespread as reported in the literature, then the waves of such incidents should have diffused much more widely around the country. In principle, pogroms should have happened everywhere, but this was not the case. According to them, there is only one answer: the anti-Semitism of the Second Polish Republic has been exaggerated in the historical literature. Despite the pogroms in Poland during the partitions and in two further waves (1918–20 and in the 1930s), despite the economic boycott and the 'ghetto benches', the situation of the Jews in Poland was not as bad as presented. Small Jewish trade survived, and Jews were still predominant in this area in 1938; large-scale Jewish trade continued to flourish, and the II RP's civic freedom resulted in a lush political and cultural life and the operation of a large number of social organisations. The foundations of the Jewish self-government also survived; there was also an extensive network of Jewish education, as well as press in Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish. Moreover, some Polish parties (such as the PPS⁵ and the BBWR⁶) promoted harmonious Polish-Jewish coexistence, and many Poles sympathised with the Jews, or were at least immune to anti-Semitic propaganda. As a result, anti-Semitism of itself was too weak to have triggered the bloody events of 1941.

According to the authors, the third most frequently cited cause of pogroms given in the literature – the so-called economic cause, according to which the desire to steal property and take over the economic posts previously held by Jews – was the main motivation for aggressive actions. But, they argue, had this been the case, then the pogroms should primarily have been expected in those places where the economic

⁵ Polish Socialist Party.

⁶ Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government.

difference between Jews and non-Jews favoured the former most prominently. However, once again, this proves not to have been true. This difference was measured *inter alia* on the basis of the number of jointly-sponsored Jewish cooperatives that granted interest-free loans to the poorest Jewish entrepreneurs (mainly small traders). It turns out that pogroms took place much more often where such cooperatives existed, that is, in towns where the Jewish entrepreneurs were relatively poor. Meanwhile, in places where there was no need for such cooperatives, and the Jews had a clearer economic advantage over the Christian population, pogroms were relatively less frequent. The lack of data means that it remains unclear why the plunder of Jewish property evidently played a lesser role in causing pogroms in the northern part of the *Kresy*, i.e. where the Polish population predominated. On the other hand, in the southern part, where the Ukrainian population predominated, the desire to steal is a much clearer motive for acts of violence.

In the authors' opinion, the real causes of the wave of pogroms discussed here can only be explained by the theory of 'political threat' mentioned above. Briefly, this says that where a minority begins to be perceived as threatening the dominance of the majority, the majority initiates actions to prevent it from losing its dominant position. According to Kopstein and Wittenberg, a similar situation occurred in the Second Polish Republic, and pogroms took place where the non-Jews perceived the Jews as a threat to their privileged position. The factors which reduced the risk of a pogrom in individual localities were: a) the popularity of those Polish political parties that promoted harmonious coexistence between the various ethnic groups – the more popular they were, the greater the risk of a pogrom, due to the growing sense of threat among that part of the nationalist majority that rejected harmonious co-existence with the Jews; b) the demography of the Jewish population – the greater its percentage, the greater the likelihood of a pogrom, for the same reasons as given in the previous section; c) the degree to which Jews aspired to achieve communal equality with the Poles and Ukrainians – the greater the pressure to obtain the same rights in practice that the Christians had, the greater the possibility of physical aggression and pogrom.

Another of the research tools the authors used involved dividing the borderland towns inhabited jointly by Jews and Christians into those where pogroms took place and those where they did not, in order to investigate the differences

between them during the pre-war period; it turned out that they found quite a few such differences.

One of them was strong Jewish support for their own national political parties, especially the Zionists, in the places where pogroms later took place. Following the 'political threat' theory, the authors point to the fact that Zionism in Poland did not primarily revolve around a policy of emigration, but rather of ethnic pride and assertiveness. This was a signal to Poles and Ukrainians that the Jews had their own national policy and would not join the others' national projects. Zionism, at least as a neutral separation from the Poles, was not perceived very positively, even by the Polish left; for the right, meanwhile, it was seen as creating 'a state within a state'.⁷ It came as a shock to Polish public opinion when the national minorities, who had won only 3.2 per cent of the vote in the 1919 elections, took 20 per cent of seats in the Sejm in 1922 thanks to the National Minorities Bloc (created at the initiative of Jewish communities). In this way the Jews, although they themselves had no territorial aspirations in relation to the Polish state, appeared to be supporting the irredentist claims of the Germans, Ukrainians and Belarusians, whether they liked it or not. In the *Kresy*, as much as half of all votes went to the Bloc. Its success in 1922 brought Poles to believe that the national minorities, mainly the Jews, were disloyal and could not be assimilated; this was especially true in north-eastern Poland, where the influence of Izaak Grünbaum was dominant. The effect was that even where only small numbers of Jews lived, the Poles blamed them for the minorities' electoral success. In turn, the Polish and Jewish left-wing parties were weak in the *Kresy*; neither the Bund nor the PPS had any substantial human resources there. The situation worsened when the Polish community responded to the National Minority Bloc with the so-called Lanckorona Pact (May 1923), which called for the total Polonisation of administrative, educational and religious institutions. In 1925 the Zionists in Galicia decided to negotiate and conclude the so-called Settlement, which in turn resulted in accusations from the Ukrainians that they were betraying their common interests.

This political situation translated into anti-Jewish violence in 1941. The data cited by the authors shows that the pogroms took place in places where the National

⁷ This was described by Jolanta Żyndul in her book *Państwo w państwie? Autonomia narodowo-kulturalna w Europie Środkowowschodniej w XX wieku*, Warszawa 2000.

Minority Bloc (in the case of the Jews, this meant the Zionists) had much stronger support than in other places (22 to 1); it can also be seen that in pogrom centres the Jewish population had generally more nationalist attitudes than in others (51 to 39). The same can be said about the Christian populations: for example, the Poles were also much more nationalist in those places (39 to 24) (p. 67).

The authors provide detailed, very interesting data regarding the aforementioned demographic issues and their translation into the risk of a pogrom. Using the example of the Ukrainian population, they show that most often pogroms did not take place where there were very few Ukrainians (below a certain average), but they did occur where Ukrainian populations were in the majority, but not large enough to be sure of their advantage. For if the ethnic group committing the pogrom was too small in per centage terms, then for at least some of several possible reasons (such as lack of public support) it was unable to launch an attack. On the other hand, if it represented a clear majority, it did not feel the need to attack the minority, as its dominant position was *per se* guaranteed. An examination of the demographic situation in pogrom towns shows that the average per centage of Ukrainians there was 43 per cent, while in towns where pogroms did not take place the figure reached 77 per cent. The opposite process can be observed with regard to the Jewish population. On the territory of present-day Ukraine, the average number of Jews in towns where pogroms took place was 565, while in the others it was far smaller: only 43 people. This is clear, among other places, in Volhynia, where the borderland pogroms were the most frequent (22 per cent). In the so-called pogrom towns Jews and Ukrainians predominated, and the Poles were the least numerous. At the same time, probably also due to being minorities, Poles protected Jews from their persecutors. For example, this was the situation in the village of Draganówka, which as a whole community defended the Jews.

The case of Jedwabne shows the importance of the above factors, i.e. the political divisions and the demographic issue. Jews predominated in this town; they were strongly ethnically oriented and mainly voted for the Zionists (76 per cent). The Polish minority, which gave 63 per cent of its votes to the National Democratic Party (ND, *endecja*), was similarly oriented. This shows that no matter how brutal the Soviet occupation was, the Jews and Poles had already been deeply politically divided for many years before the war. Moreover, Jedwabne was also distinguished

by the fact that it did not have a Belarusian minority; this put the Poles and Jews in a situation of direct ethnic rivalry. The average situation in the Białystok region was different, and this was why Jedwabne was so different from the rest of the voivodeship (see Table 4.1, p. 65).

The depth of the political divisions which already existed in the interwar period is also shown by the example of the city of Białystok, which must have had some impact on the surrounding towns, and at the same time prepared the ground for the strong beliefs about Jewish collaboration with the Soviets after the fall of the Polish state. The city hosted the most numerous Jewish community in the region, which numbered around 50,000 people. This group was strongly divided on whether the city should continue to be part of Poland. Not only was the first Jewish newspaper (*Golos Białegostoka*), which appeared in this city just after World War I, published in Russian, but it also openly questioned Białystok's Polish nature; it called for a plebiscite and a vote to join Soviet Russia. This situation lasted until 1939. The authors explain the Polish population's failure to commit a pogrom in Białystok in terms of the fact that the Germans did so immediately after capturing the city.

Political reasons can also explain the exceptional brutality of the pogrom in Lviv. This had little to do with Ukrainian anti-Semitism. After all, if the perpetrators' targets depended on the negative emotions of the Ukrainian population, the pogrom should first have affected the local Poles, as they were much more hated. However, the violence was directed against the Jews only because the Ukrainians wanted to please the Germans immediately after the former's proclamation of Ukrainian statehood, which the Germans did not accept anyway. It can also be seen that in general, pogroms took place much more often in places where there had already been a fierce political struggle, especially between Poles and Ukrainians.

Similar processes were visible outside the borders of the Second Polish Republic. Lithuania is a good example of how political fears led to bloody pogroms. The situation was similar in Romania, where Romanians were the attackers in Bessarabia, as were the Ukrainians in Bukovina. An analogy can even be observed in Greece, where the Athenian Jews, who did not fight for their rights, did not experience violence; whereas the Jews of Thessaloniki, who were more ethnically oriented and pro-Zionist, did. The authors find the same patterns in nineteenth-century Germany, where pogroms came in response to the assimilation, and above

all the emancipation, of the Jews. Only Russia appears slightly different, because unlike the Polish lands, the state authorities were behind the pogroms there.

Most of the reviews published after the publication of this book appreciated the broad perspective which the researchers adopted and their contribution to the historiography of the Second World War, ethnic conflicts, and above all the Holocaust. Volha Charnysh saw the work as “an original and well-crafted study of the interethnic competition on the eve of the Holocaust”, which “advances our understanding of the microfoundations of the ethnic conflict, and challenges existing explanations of the violence against Jews in twentieth-century Eastern Europe” (*Perspectives on Politics* 2018, vol. 4, no. 16, p. 1210). Shawn M. Ragin was of a similar opinion, stating: “It is original, the sources are carefully analysed, and the conclusions are convincing” (*German Studies Review* 2019, vol. 42, no. 2, pp. 394–96). Joshua Zimmerman was also in no doubt that in this case we are dealing with “a uniquely valuable scholarly work that makes a major contribution to our understanding of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War” (*Slavic Review* 2019, vol. 78, no. 3, pp. 830–32). However, Kamil Kijek interpreted the content of Kopstein & Wittenberg’s book completely differently (‘Konieczny kierunek i ślepy zaułek w badaniach nad zagładą Żydów na terenach dawnej Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej’, *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2019, vol. 15, pp. 735–53). He levels a very long list of accusations at the authors, including the lack of a reliable research programme, basing their theses on metrics which are easy to measure and prove, of ignoring the realities of the Second Polish Republic, and even of academic hubris. However, such accusations are difficult to take seriously. For example, Kijek claims that while stating the existence of a relationship between pre-war Jewish policy and pogroms during the war, Kopstein and Wittenberg accused the Jewish population of being ‘guilty’ of the murders committed in the summer of 1941, while nothing of the kind was written in the book discussed here. The authors were as far as possible from adopting such a position; all they did was to assess, with the cold eye of the scientist, the importance of various factors in the outbreak of aggression and the motivations of those who committed the murders. Another, less serious accusation against the authors was that they focused on the attitudes of the Jewish population. According to Kijek this is unacceptable, and the focus should have been placed on considering the perpetrators, not the victims. However, it was not

explained why it is impossible to study both. More of Kijek's individual charges are likewise ineffective. For example, the book says that most of the ideologues of the Polish nationalist camp came from the middle class and for this reason, throughout the interwar period, "their group did not manage to penetrate provincial circles with its programme" (p. 739). This is untrue. The original only says that the most important Polish anti-Semites came from the middle class, and that they failed to successfully infect the rural population with their programme during the interwar period, as evidenced by the fact that most peasants had a positive attitude towards Jewish traders, who were cheaper than Polish traders, although this did not mean that they automatically felt any great love for them (p. 10). It is also untrue that the authors presented the 1936 parliamentary proposal to limit Jewish ritual slaughter as an idea put forward by the National Democratic Party; in fact, it was put forward by Janina Prystorowa, a member of the government camp, which Kijek calls a "gross error" (p. 749). There is nothing like this in the text. Nowhere did the authors write that the National Democratic Party submitted the draft of any such law. They simply state: "The tone was further reinforced by National Democratic members of the Sejm who called for outlawing Jewish butchers practicing kosher slaughter" (p. 40). The calls and campaigning by Democratic Party MPs to ban Jewish ritual butchers in no way contradicts the fact that it was the BBWR deputy Prystorowa who submitted the motion. This then is not a 'gross error', but two separate issues.

In concluding the discussion of the above book, it should be recognised that it may prove very useful for those historians in Poland and around the world who are studying Polish-Jewish relations and the history of the Holocaust to absorb its content and take on at least some of its authors' research methods. We should hope that everyone will be able to undertake an equally precise and reliable approach to historical research. At the same time, it is essential not to succumb to emotions and weigh all the arguments *sine ira et studio*. This will be good for everyone – not only for historical truth, but also for historical researchers.

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MARTYNA RUSINIAK-KARWAT, *NOWE ŻYCIE
NA ZGLISZCZACH. BUND W POLSCE W LATACH 1944–1949*,
INSTYTUT STUDIÓW POLITYCZNYCH PAN,
WARSZAWA 2016, PP. 296, ISBN: 9788364091834

In an interview Marek Edelman, probably the most famous activist of the General Jewish Workers' Union in Poland, aka the Bund, described the party's post-war history in this way:

After the Holocaust, political activity based on the Jewish masses no longer made sense. The Bund disappeared with the Jewish people. It was a party of the Jewish proletariat, and the latter [...] “marched in groups of four to the *Umschlagplatz*.” In addition, all our values, starting with tolerance, were contrary to Bolshevism [...]. We had some more meetings, we published newspapers, but this was not real political activity. Before the war, the Bund was a party which decided the fate of the country, which participated in its structures. It didn't make sense after the war.¹

¹ Quoted in W. Bereś, K. Burnetko, *Marek Edelman. Życie. Do końca*, Warszawa 2013, pp. 444–46.

Does Edelman's well-known and oft-repeated opinion of the irrelevance of the Bund's post-war fate fully reflect the epilogue of this organisation in Poland? When looking for an answer to this question, it is worth reaching for the monograph by the historian and political scientist Dr. Martyna Rusiniak-Karwat entitled *Nowe życie na zgliszcach. Bund w Polsce w latach 1944–1949* [New Life in the Ashes. The Bund in Poland in 1944–49], published in 2016 by the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The author's goal was to present the Bund as a party "decimated, but still alive, which in the new reality tried to modify its political program and mark its presence on the so-called 'Jewish street', that is, at the forum of the Presidium of the CKŻWP [the Central Committee of Jews in Poland] and the Jewish committees, and on the Polish political scene" (p. 13). Undoubtedly, the preparation of a book on the party, whose real importance in the period under discussion was limited, and as such underappreciated by historians for many years, must have posed a great challenge for Dr. Rusiniak-Karwat, particularly as her book is the first attempt in Poland at a monograph examining the history of the Bund after 1944.

The work is structured chronologically and thematically, and consists of seven chapters in which the author discusses the process of the party's revival after the Holocaust, the activity of the Bund among the surviving Jews, the party's programme, its attitude to the PPR, the activity of party members on the CKŻWP's forum, the party's activity (committees, press and publications, anniversary celebrations, etc.), its dispute with the Zionists, contacts with Bund activists in the West, and the process of liquidating the party in 1949. The book ends with an appendix which contains eight of the Bund's manifestoes from the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (AŻIH) and from the party press. The content is complemented by 23 photographs from the AŻIH's and private collections.

The author's use of a wide base of sources and literature on the subject is noteworthy. The work was prepared on the basis of materials stored in Polish archives (Archiwum Akt Nowych [Central Archives of Modern Records], AŻIH, the Institute of National Remembrance, and the State Archives in Wrocław), foreign archives (the diaspora archives in Tel Aviv, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York, the Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem, the National Archives in London), as well as 30 press titles in Polish and Yiddish, sources published all over

the world, and individual memoirs. Rusiniak-Karwat has performed a creditable task of organising and disseminating the post-war legacy of the Bund as deposited at the AŻIH in Warsaw.

The articles and studies include the most important works devoted to the party's post-war history, including books by Daniel Blatman, Joshua D. Zimmerman, Yosef Gorny, David Engel and David Slucki. The author also mentions Polish historians who examined selected aspects of the Bund's activities in 1944–9 (including Bożena Szaynok, Natalia Aleksium, August Grabski, Aleksandra Namysło and Grzegorz Berendt). The bibliography also includes works wherein Bund members describe the party's history themselves. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the author also reached out to participants in the events described, and conducted interviews with notables including Marek Edelman and Ichhak Luden, editor of the last Bund magazine published in Israel, *Lebns Fragn*.

Rusiniak-Karwat points out how difficult the process of rebuilding the party in the post-war ruins was. The first chapter of the book begins with a description of the losses. The activists who survived in the ghettos, camps and the USSR lacked the most charismatic party leaders: Wiktor Alter, Henryk Erlich, Szmul Zygielbojm, Maurycy Orzech, Włodzimierz Kosowski. Those who joined the process of rebuilding the party after 1944 had experienced traumatic experiences. Among the most active in this period included Dr. Szloma Herszenhorn, Salomon Fiszgrund, Sioma Temczyn, Michał Szuldenfrei, Liber Brenner and Ignacy Falk. One great advantage of Dr. Rusiniak-Karwat's book is the biographical notes, thanks to which the reader has the opportunity to get acquainted with the characters who formed the post-war party structures; this is all the more valuable as their later fate is not widely known. After several years of failures and the final dissolution of the party, a few Bund members decided to stay in Poland, as did the above-mentioned Marek Edelman. A group of opponents of 'organic unity' with the PPR, whose size is difficult to estimate, left legally or illegally for the West at the turn of the 1950s. Those who supported the process of the Bund's dissolution were in turn condemned to silence in the Bund's own press and in world literature. Many former party activists left Poland as a result of the anti-Semitic campaign of 1968.

Drawing on a solid base of source, Dr. Rusiniak-Karwat has made an attempt to reconstruct the party's activities at the central and local level. Until 1949,

the Bund (along with the youth groups *Cukunft* and *Skif*) was one of the few Jewish parties operating legally in Poland². Political pluralism was in line with the concept of national and cultural autonomy for Jews in Poland that the authorities were promoting at that period. In fact, the diversity of views on the so-called Jewish Street was controlled by the government, and all legalised organisations had to ‘pay tribute’ by including into their manifestoes a point about the alliance with the USSR and the acceptance of the policy pursued by the Polish Workers’ Party.

As the emigration of the Jewish population increased, the size of the Bund’s ranks was constantly changing (after the war the party had about 2000 members), which in turn influenced the quality of work of individual committees in the country. The changes were so dynamic that it is difficult today to determine exact how many local Bund committees there were. Some of them were ephemeral; not all institutions kept their own documentation, and where they did do so, not all their materials were preserved (the author lists 44 committees whose activities are documented, p. 75). Undoubtedly, the strongest concentration of Bund activists was in Łódź after the war. During the first few years after the war, the committees in Lower Silesia and Szczecin were also very active.

After the tragedy of the Holocaust, the Bund – which had been the most influential Jewish party before the war – became a marginal group, whose socialist programme drawing upon a broad base of traditions was losing out to the new political reality in the country. The party activists made attempts to validate their political programme, adapting it to the new realities, including a declaration of support for “the alliance with the USSR, the accession to the July Manifesto and the actions of the KRN and the Provisional Government” (p. 27). Moreover, the unity of the workers’ movement was declared, as well as its disassociation from the Polish government in exile. Bund representatives joined the CKŻwP, sat in the State National Council (KRN) and the Legislative Sejm (Michał Szuldenfrei), while traditionally selecting the PPS as their ideological ally.

² There is still no broader-scale monographic study on the post-war history of individual Jewish parties in Poland. So far, studies on the Zionist movement have appeared: N. Aleksion, *Dokąd dalej? Ruch syjonistyczny w Polsce (1944–1950)*, Warszawa 2002; G. Berendt, ‘Zjednoczenie Syjonistów Demokratów “Ichud”’, in A. Grabski, G. Berendt, *Między emigracją a trwaniem. Syjoniści i komuniści żydowscy w Polsce po Holocauście*, Warszawa 2003, pp. 101–223; D. Flisiak, *Działalność syjonistów-rewizjonistów w Polsce w latach 1944/1945–1950*, Lublin 2020.

Rusiniak-Karwat points out that the decimated party found itself in a very difficult position, in fact remaining in permanent dispute with the main Jewish political groups in Poland – the Zionists and Communists from the Jewish faction of the PPR. Shortly after the war, the Zionists who promoted the emigration of the survivors (*Sh'ërit ha-Pletah*) to Palestine gained a significant advantage in the Jewish community; the Bund consistently opposed the programme of emigration. This was a very different trial of strength compared to the situation on the political map of pre-war Poland. Before 1939, it was the Jewish socialists who dominated over those Zionists who envisioned building a Jewish state in Palestine. The trauma of the Holocaust and the geopolitical shock caused in Europe by the Second World War made realistic that which had seemed to be a pipe dream a few years earlier. The author devotes much space to the Bund's attitude to the Zionists and emigration. This is one of the most exhaustively described issues in the book, reflecting well the essence of the dispute within the Jewish community at that time, which boiled down to the answer to the question 'stay or leave?'. The author also presents the Bundists' attitude, closely related to the issue of emigration, to the refugee camps in the Allied-occupied zones of Germany and Austria, the Palestine issue, and the party's contacts with the World Jewish Congress (chapter 5).

Opposing the idea of 'emigrationism' — especially after the Kielce pogrom, when tens of thousands of Jews in Poland were affected with the burning desire to leave — stood no chance of gaining support from the Bund's activists. The book shows that the problem of the approach to emigration also existed within the party itself. Although the Bund was an anti-Zionist party, a position in support of leaving Poland did emerge (Ignacy Falk). The supporters of such a solution doubted the possibility of rebuilding *Yishuv* in Poland, and argued in favour of individual emigration, which did not — as the Zionists proclaimed — necessarily have to mean Palestine. Unfortunately, it is not known whether this view had any real influence on the party's activities. Falk himself was one of the greatest critics of this Zionist policy³. The differences in how certain issues were perceived within the party are probably a topic worth developing in separate biographical texts

³ See Aleksium, *Dokąd dalej?*, pp. 251, 254.

devoted to the outstanding Bundists. As the book shows, the internal divisions concerned a range of matters, and probably contributed to the group's weakness (p. 150). Rusiniak-Karwat's analysis allows us to distinguish a faction within the Bund who opted for a merger with the PPS, another seeking to merge with the Polish Workers' Party, supporters of the party's dissolution, and supporters of the concept of a 'Jewish settlement in Poland'. Disagreement can also be observed when the author describes the activities of individual committees. For example, Bundists from Legnica and Wrocław boycotted the pro-Palestinian mass rallies organised by the Zionists in early 1948, in which party representatives from Dzierżoniów actually participated (p. 59).

The Bund activists wanted to stick to their own opinions on many issues. This is best seen in the example of the party members' activities on the CKŻwP forum as described in the book. Against the will of the majority, the Bund rejected the content of the CKŻwP's Memorandum for the Anglo-American Commission of February 1946, and put up its own candidates on the PPS's electoral lists for the Legislative Sejm elections of 1947. Year by year, the Bund's dispute with the Communists deepened, particularly on matters such as how to specify the autonomy 'for the Jewish Street' which they demanded, while uncritically succumbing to the influence of the Polish Workers' Party. This dispute eventually led to the party's dissolution.

Some of the threads examined by the author remain unfulfilled. Perhaps this is a natural impression, resulting from the fact that the thematic scope thus constructed required a synthetic approach. Therefore, I will limit myself to only one example, which in my opinion is of some importance. The issue of the Bundists' attitudes towards anti-Semitism occupies little space in the work. In the first years after the war, it was one of the key issues for Polish Jews, who were torn between 'emigration fever' and the concept of rebuilding a Jewish settlement as advocated by the authorities and the CKŻwP. This also applied to Bund activists. One of the four manifesto pledges adopted at the First National Party Conference in Łódź (16–17 June 1945) was to fight anti-Semitism. This issue was raised many times, especially after the murder of the Bund activist Fiszka Nejman from Łódź (24 June 1946) and after the Kielce pogrom (4 July 1946). The author of course mentions these events (pp. 32–35, 40, 59, 65, 150), pointing out that they changed the Bundists' attitude

towards the prospects for the Jewish minority in a Poland ruled by Communists. However, it does not elaborate on what anti-Semitism was in the view of the Bund. How did the party members react to the great wave of violence against Jews in Poland in the first years after the war? According to Bund activists, what was the 'fight against anti-Semitism' they demanded to have looked like?

There are also minor editorial shortcomings at work. For example, p. 46 lacks all the footnotes listing the illegal Jewish parties (the author added a footnote concerning *Aguda*, but at the same time there is no explanation of who the 'folkists' and revisionists were). In the aforementioned footnote to *Aguda*, Rusiniak-Karwat lists the literature concerning the CKŻwP: but this list lacks the monograph entitled *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce (1944–1950). Historia polityczna* [The Central Committee of Jews in Poland (1944–50). A Political History] (Warsaw 2015) by August Grabski (although, to be scrupulously accurate, the author does refer to this work elsewhere in her book). On p. 47, the name of the representative of the Jewish Agency, Mosze Iszaj, is not expanded upon. Sometimes there are repetitions in the narrative, such as in the description of the newspaper *Dos Naje Lebn* (pp. 60–62), the celebrations and anniversaries (pp. 91–95) and the activity of the Historical Commission (pp. 123–27), as well as inconsistencies in spelling (e.g. Grzegorz/Grisza Jaszuński, pp. 25, 69). The work also lacks an ending in the form of a short summary of the conclusions drawn from the author's research. However, these oversights do not influence my overall high assessment of the work as a whole. It is worth adding that the author has managed to reconcile the academic requirements with a clear manner of communication, which makes the book very accessible to read. Above all, however, it allows us to look at the Bund in a slightly different way than that as established on the basis of Edelman's opinions. After 1944, Bund members tried to continue their activity in extremely difficult conditions. It was by no means a passive endeavour, but rather a political activity carried out on several fronts by a marginalised party.



CHRONICLES

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REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE 'POLISH-JEWISH
RELATIONS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.
RESEARCH, CONTROVERSIES, PERSPECTIVES'.
THE THIRD COLLOQUIUM: 'POLES AND JEWS
IN THE SHADOW OF THE GERMAN OCCUPATION
OF POLAND', KIELCE 2019

Since 2016, the Delegation of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) in Kielce, together with the Institute of History of the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce (UJK), has over the past few years organised several scientific conferences focused on Polish-Jewish issues. At the invitation of both bodies, researchers representing Polish and foreign research centres have visited Kielce to present and discuss the latest research findings on the issue of the Jewish presence in various Polish military formations (2016), or the activities of the so-called 'blue police' targeting Jews in the General Government (2016). The Kielce Branch of the IPN and the Institute of History of the UJK have also held regular conferences on strictly Polish-Jewish relations under the title of 'Polish-Jewish relations in the 20th century. Research, controversies, perspectives'. Each year, this event raises various issues which sometimes would otherwise remain as blank spots on the scientific canvas. These have included the issue of sources for research on mutual relations between Poles and Jews, as well as the issue of saving Jews during

the Second World War, which have already been discussed during these sessions. In 2019, the 'Polish-Jewish relations in the twentieth century' conference was held for the third time (in Kielce on 3 July 2019), on the following topic: 'Poles and Jews in the shadow of the German occupation of Poland'. It seems that the organisers' choice of topic was quite deliberate. There is now a trend of research which visibly minimises or marginalises the role of the Germans in shaping Polish-Jewish and Jewish-Polish relations during the German occupation. Any consideration of the 'German presence' should naturally lead to questions about the influence it had on the scope of the contacts which were possible between the Poles and the Jews. Without the occupation's anti-Jewish and anti-Polish legislation, condemning Jews to extermination, punishing Poles with death for helping Jews or forcing them to participate in capturing Jews, in conjunction with the widespread and real terror it sowed, one cannot speak fully of a Polish 'witnessing' of the Holocaust, or of the anti-Jewish activities conducted by part of Polish society.

The guiding spirit of the conference was raised in the opening remarks given by the head of the Kielce Sub-Branch of the Institute of National Remembrance, Dr. Dorota Koczwańska-Kalita; the Mayor of Kielce Bogdan Wenta; the deputy director of the IPN, Dr. Mateusz Szpytma; and the director of the Institute of History of Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Prof. Beata Wojciechowska. Dr. Koczwańska-Kalita said: "We are portraying Polish-Jewish relations in the shadow of the German occupation. We will show them both from the legal, i.e. the political and administrative, point of view, and also how they developed in different poviats, because this matter was very complex, and looked different in different regions of Poland. We will show both the Polish and Jewish sides and their optics". The deputy director of the IPN mainly referred to the title of the third colloquium, 'Poles and Jews in the shadow of the German occupation'. According to Dr. Szpytma, when speaking of Polish-Jewish and Jewish-Polish relations, the context of the occupation in the public consciousness is fleeting. As the deputy director of the IPN said, it was this "'third actor' – the occupier – who was most important, because it was Germany who shaped what was happening under the occupation in a decisive way. Of course, this does not mean that one should evade responsibility for the wrongs that were committed on both sides". The mayor of Kielce emphasised the importance of scientific research in building and shaping

contemporary relations between the two nations, as in his opinion these could also contribute to toning down destructive emotions. Referring to the date of 4 July, the upcoming anniversary of the Kielce pogrom in 1946, he encouraged the joint commemoration of this event. An important thought was also expressed by Prof. Wojciechowska, who emphasised that the complicated matter of Polish-Jewish relations required great sensitivity from specialists. She also emphasised the fact that researchers from various research centres had participated in the conference.

After the official part, the conference speakers took the floor. The main thesis of the conference was clearly addressed in the first panel. In his paper 'The political and administrative system of the General Government in 1939–1945', Dr. Wojciech Wichert (of the IPN's Regional Historical Research Bureau [OBBH IPN] in Szczecin; his paper was read by Dr. Ryszard Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki) characterised the system of German rule in the General Government. He drew attention to the concept of leadership and the scope of the power wielded by administrative and police offices (especially the *starostas*), as well as their competences in the field of implementing the sentences imposed and the possibility of shaping their own nationality policy. As Wichert put it, the more energetic and independent heads of the counties "literally became 'little Hitlers'". In turn, the lecture by Dr. Ryszard Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki (of OBBH IPN Kraków, Kielce Delegation) entitled 'Under the threat of death. The choices and attitudes of Polish and Jewish residents of Garbatka during the German occupation (1939–45)' shifted the focus from the general level to the practical dimension of the German occupiers' activities. In his paper, based on the example of a single town, Kruszelnicki highlighted the circumstances that formed the basis of Polish-Jewish relations before the war, such as the recreational nature of the settlement, the influence of the Piłsudski camp and the activities of the Socialists. In the context of the occupation, he focused on the atmosphere of fear created by the Germans, the terror caused by the mass arrests of several hundred people on 12 July 1942 and the breakdown of the structures developed during independence. He also raised the issue of the demoralisation of the population, as expressed for example in the spread of robbery. Despite the large losses and the interactions of various situations, there were many people in the settlement who helped the Jews in the years 1942–45. The conference participants had the opportunity to hear one more speech on this

panel: Prof. Vasyl Hulai (Василь Гулай, Vasyl Gulay) (of the National University of Lviv Polytechnic, Lviv), in his paper 'Jews as the object of the creation of 'the image of the enemy' by legal publications in the district of Galicia of the General Government', focused on elements of anti-Jewish propaganda. One constant element in shaping this 'image of the enemy' was the emphasis on the presence of Jews in the Soviet police authorities, together with the image of the Jewish speculator. An important theme in Prof. Hulai's speech was the analysis of the press and its importance in the anti-Jewish campaign. At first, it had a nationalist tone, in the spirit of the OUN-UPA's propaganda. Prof. Hulai listed in detail individual titles such as *Злочовське слово*, *Тризуб* and many others, of which thousands of copies were published in almost every major city centre. Most of these titles, however, were only published until the end of 1941; after that time, the Germans limited the number of permitted titles to four.

The next panel was devoted to microstudies. The conference participants heard papers by the following: Dr. Jakub Parol (of the Museum of Independence Traditions in Łódź), on 'Methods of exterminating Poles and Jews at the prison in Radogoszcz (1939–45)'; Marlena Bodo (PhD student, Jagiellonian University) on 'Poles and Jews during the German occupation in Szydłowiec (1939–45)'; Mateusz Kofin (PhD student at the Ignatianum Academy in Cracow) on 'Jan Mosdorf – a 'converted anti-Semite' and a "righteous nationalist". Case study'; Dr. Joanna Potaczek (from the Centre for Dialogue Between Religions and Nations in Jarosław) and Grzegorz Oleniacz on 'Poles and Jews during the German occupation in the Sanok district (1939–45)'. The speech by Ms. Bodo, devoted to Poles and Jews in Szydłowiec, was of particular interest. Although the title showed a balance with regard to both nations, her presentation was dominated by her analysis of the situation of the Jewish population: first the Holocaust, and then Polish-Jewish relations. She referred to the Germans' general anti-Jewish activities that destroyed the foundations of that people's existence, taking into account local conditions determining mutual relations and mutual Polish-Jewish perceptions, such as the property status and the open character of the Szydłowiec ghetto, which made it possible for Jews to conduct trade and obtain food almost until its closure in September 1942. Ms. Bodo also referred to the 'Memorial Book' of Szydłowiec's Jews and the way in which Polish-Jewish relations were presented in this study.

The next panel was started by Leszek Dziedzic (of the Museum of the History of Kielce) with a lecture entitled ‘Two peoples – two paths. Presidents of the *Judenrat* in Kielce’. Attempts to assess the acts of *Judenrat* officials are nothing new; much has been written about Chaim Rumkowski or Adam Czerniaków, offering harsh and firm judgements on their actions. The paper’s title left no doubts as to the differences in the attitudes and actions of the Kielce *Judenrat*’s leaders, Mojżesz Pelc and Herman Lewi. In the view of the speaker, Pelc was clearly a positive figure, as a fighter who battled in inhumane conditions for the rights and dignity of the Jewish people; on the other side, we see Lewi, a pre-war industrialist, zealously implementing all the German orders, but who died shouting ‘Long live Poland’.

We do not find such great disproportions in evaluating the protagonists of the speech given by Krzysztof Jakubowski (of the *Tygodnik Ciechanowski* local newspaper), entitled ‘Women and the Holocaust. Maria Tyk (a Jewish woman) and Marianna Cybulska (a Polish woman)’. Jakubowski devoted his lecture to two stories, the first of which concerned the Jewish community from the small town of Strzegowo in the north of Mazovia (incorporated into the Reich after 1939) and the friendship between the Tyk sisters (Jewish women) and their Polish neighbours. The second story concerned the relationship between the Polish woman Marianna Cybulska (*née* Zalewska) and her Jewish employers, the Eisenbergs from Warsaw. After the Jews were expelled from the Warsaw ghetto, Cybulska took care of Eisenberg’s daughter, Teresa. With great difficulty and at the risk of her own life, she saved the child; when she learned in 1945 that none of the Eisenberg family was still alive, she placed her in a Jewish orphanage in Warsaw.

Maciej Korcuć (from the Kraków Branch of the IPN) devoted a great deal of space to references to the colloquium’s title in concluding this part of the conference with his paper entitled ‘The struggle of the Jewish youth in Pilica. Facts and context of events’. Korcuć stated that his paper was “a story about people subjected to the terror of the German Reich. The invasion by this state into the lives of millions of citizens of the Republic of Poland of various nationalities changed almost all points of reference. It turned the lives of millions of people upside down”. As Korcuć continued, if one tells the story of those times without taking the presence of the Reich into account, this distances us from the truth about the reality of the occupation. From the lecture, the audience

learned about the resistance of the Jewish youth in Pilica (for example, scattering anti-German leaflets) and about its contacts with an ethnic-Polish Communist organisation called the Union of Working People of Towns and Villages. Of especial importance was the recollection of the testimony of Estera Rusinek, who described the activities of a Jewish group that, among others, forced the Polish population to ransom the money it had put aside for organisational purposes. Korcuć's analysis supplemented the information about the events in the village of Wierbka which had already been published.¹

The organisers devoted the last two papers to issues of historical sources. Prof. Jerzy Gapys (of the Institute of History of Kochanowski University in Kielce) discussed several elements of Jewish daily life in a paper entitled 'The diary of Stanisław Turnau as a source of Jewish history in 1939–44'. First of all, he highlighted the journal's value as a historical source for the the Second World War period. In the notes by Turnau which he quoted, the speaker argued that we can find testimonies of German anti-Jewish activities: gradual restrictions of mobility, income and trade, and then the ghetto uprising, hunger, mass executions and finally 'Operation Reinhard'. The diary also shows the aid activities undertaken by Polish landowners, which (if the author of the diary is to be believed) at times took place on a mass scale. The source quoted by Gapys also makes clear the polarisation of the behaviour and attitudes displayed by Polish society towards the Jews. The conference ended with a speech by Dr. Tomasz Domański (OBBH IPN Kraków, Kielce Delegation) entitled 'A new paradigm? Polish-Jewish relations under German occupation as presented in the book *Dalej jest noc* [Night without End]'. The core of Dr. Domański's speech was the extensive review of this work which he prepared,² which provoked a lively discussion and polemic within the scientific community dealing with Jewish studies. In his lecture, Dr. Domański drew attention to the way in which German-run organisations composed of Poles were presented in this study, including the 'blue police' and the volunteer fire brigades. He also referred

¹ K. Samsonowska, 'Dramat we wsi Wierbka i jego dalszy ciąg na zamku w Pilicy', in *"Kto w takich czasach Żydów przechowuje?...". Polacy niosący pomoc ludności żydowskiej w okresie okupacji niemieckiej*, ed. A. Namysło, Warszawa 2009, pp. 125–32.

² T. Domański, *Korekta obrazu? Refleksje źródłoznawcze wokół książki "Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski"*, vol. 1–2, ed. B. Engelking, J. Grabowski, Warszawa 2018–2019.

to the alleged existence of a German-Polish administration during the occupation. The basic problem identified in Domański's paper is the omission or insufficient consideration by some researchers of the role of the German presence and its influence on the mutual relations between Poles and Jews during the war. Domański also emphasised the importance of the analysis of source materials, pointing to specific examples of the unreliable approach displayed by the authors of *Dalej jest noc* to the historical sources they used.

Lively discussions took place both after the individual panels and at the end of the conference, which (although this may sound a little trivial) were interesting and important. Speakers and listeners asked about the topics of specific papers. This led to questions about the sources for some of the research, and the need to precisely define which police forces took part in, for example, displacement actions. Opinions and demands were also offered concerning the need to increase the number of English-language publications of Polish research on the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations. The Kielce conference, like much of the other research in the broadly understood field of Jewish studies, showed how popular the above subject is, as well as how great are the emotions it arouses in Poland and around the world. According to the conference participants, including the author of these words, research into the context of the occupation needs to be continued and expanded upon.

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REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH
CONFERENCE 'THE BEGINNINGS OF THE NAZI
OCCUPATION. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN POLISH
AND JEWISH LIFE 1939–41', WARSAW,
18–19 NOVEMBER 2019

At dawn on 1 September 1939, troops of the Third Reich crossed the borders of Poland without a formal declaration of war, thus starting the first campaign of World War II. This aggression, and the subsequent German occupation, led to the deaths of millions of Polish citizens. In connection with the 80th anniversary of this event in 2019, Polish research communities prepared a number of various initiatives aimed at commemorating the tragedy of that period, summarising the present state of knowledge in this field, and indicating the perspectives for further research.

The international conference held on 18–19 November 2019 in Warsaw, entitled 'The Beginnings of the Nazi Occupation. Continuity and Change in Polish and Jewish life 1939–41', was part of the calendar of celebrations related to these celebrations. The event was prepared by the Warsaw Ghetto Museum in cooperation with the Polish Society for Jewish Studies, the Jewish Historical Institute, the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity and Touro College

in Berlin. The meeting was attended by 25 speakers representing both academic centres and other research institutions, from Poland, Israel, Germany, Great Britain and Australia among others. They included renowned and experienced researchers, as well as representatives of the younger generation. The conference aimed not only to present the results of the latest academic research on German policy towards Poles and Jews in the first years of the occupation, but also to present the contrasts that appear in the common memory of these events in Polish and Jewish cultural circles. The session was also attended by many listeners who actively participated in the discussions on the issues presented.

The proceedings began on Monday 18 November in the conference room of the Jewish Historical Institute. The opening ceremony was hosted by Albert Stankowski, the director of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum; Prof. Paweł Śpiewak, the director of the Jewish Historical Institute; and Prof. Jan Rydel, a member of the Steering Committee of the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity. As Mr. Stankowski emphasised in his speech, the conference on the beginnings of the German occupation represented the inauguration of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum's research activity; it could not have been organised without the support of both the Polish and the foreign institutions that study the fate of the Jewish community in Poland. In turn, Prof. Śpiewak emphasised the symbolism of the place where the individual panels on the first day of the conference were to take place: "Until May 1943, the Great Synagogue was located here. Its demolition was a sign of the end of the Jewish community in Warsaw and Poland". In a way, Prof. Rydel's preamble served as an introduction to the issues raised during the session. From the outset, he highlighted the clear disproportion in the amount of research conducted into individual years of the German occupation, stating unequivocally that the period after 1941, when the process of extermination reached its apogee, was examined much more frequently by researchers. The clear gaps in research into the initial phase of the occupation necessitate a closer look at the phenomena that took place in the first months after the outbreak of the war. "Poles and Jews saw that the German occupation was a phenomenon of a previously unknown scale of barbarism. However, they could not have foreseen later events", said Prof. Rydel, also adding that public awareness at the time was based on the belief that the war would soon end. Another important element of his speech drew attention to the way in which research in this

area should be conducted. According to Prof. Rydel, researchers dealing with the history of Polish Jews between 1939 and 1941 face an enormous challenge because they have to avoid perceiving this period through the prism of the events that dominated the following years.

The conference's inaugural lecture was given by Prof. Stephan Lehnstaedt from Touro College in Berlin, who has been researching the Holocaust and the history of the Jews for many years. In his speech entitled 'Through the occupier's eyes. Ordinary Germans look at Poland, 1939–40', Prof. Lehnstaedt analysed photos taken by Wehrmacht soldiers during the invasion of Poland and the beginning of the occupation. The photographs show the representatives of the Jewish community who were of interest to the German military mainly because of their 'distinctiveness'. Prof. Lehnstaedt mentioned the notes made on the backs of the photos, which included phrases about 'Jewish filth' and 'laziness'; these (as he emphasised) were supposed to justify the crimes of the German soldiers and strengthen their conviction that it was necessary to isolate the Jews. The captions to these photographs also included anti-Polish and anti-Slavic statements. As he noted, the Wehrmacht's soldiers perceived their actions in terms of 'restoring order and justice'; this was expressed, for example, by forcing the Jewish population to work, or by supporting the *Volksdeutsche*. In his conclusions, Prof. Lehnstaedt stated that the evidence presented testified to the effectiveness of National Socialist propaganda, and the photographs taken by the soldiers prove that the prevalent stereotypes about Jews were consolidated and deeply entrenched.

The plenary session of the conference was divided into seven thematic sessions. In the first panel, 'Persecution of Jews 1939–41: a regional perspective', specialists from Poland and Israel presented the tragic fate of the Jewish population during the initial phase of the war in selected areas of occupied Poland. The session opened with a speech by Szymon Pietrzykowski, representing the Departmental Historical Research Bureau (*Oddziałowe Biuro Badań Historycznych*) of the Institute of National Remembrance in Poznań; in his lecture, entitled 'Battlefield, internment, return and persecution: the odyssey of Jewish soldiers from the Poznań region (1939–41)', he outlined the wartime journey of the Polish Jews mobilised before 1 September who were residents of those parts of the region incorporated into the Reich in October 1939. The speaker focused on the fate of these soldiers after

their participation in the so-called September Campaign; they were wounded and/or interned in various POW camps, located mainly in Germany, where they experienced worse and more discriminatory treatment in comparison to the non-Jewish prisoners. As Mr. Pietrzykowski demonstrated, they could not return home before the end of 1940, and their fate was marked by other types of persecution, characterised by their conscription into forced labour projects, 'ghettoisation', or deportation onto the territory of the General Government.

The speech by Jakub Chmielewski from the State Museum at Majdanek focused on the situation of Lublin's Jews under the German occupation in 1939–41. The Jewish community in Lublin made up nearly a third of the city's population before the outbreak of the war. The arrival of the German army in mid-September 1939 marked the beginning of a brutal occupation that quickly affected the Jewish population as well. The fact that Lublin was made the district capital meant that the city played an important role in the Germans' demographic plans. The paper discusses the activities of the occupation authorities during the first months of the war; these consisted of the introduction of a number of discriminatory provisions on the territory of the General Government, aimed at excluding and pauperising the Jewish population. Mr. Chmielewski then focused on a detailed presentation of the situation of Lublin's Jews, mentioning the imposition of high taxes on them, the obligation to collect scrap metal, and their forced displacement from their apartments in the better parts of the city. At the initiative of the local civil administration, the Jews were also ordered to wear the stigmatising yellow Star of David, which was soon replaced with a white band with a similar blue symbol. The speaker also mentioned that the Lublin Jews were forced to work in camps run by Odilo Globocnik (the camp on Lipowa Street in Lublin, and the camps on the border with the Soviet Union), as well as in other German institutions and enterprises. The speech also touched upon topics related to the migrations of the Jewish population, the plunder of their property, the occupation authorities' systematic repressions, and the role of the *Judenrat* which, due to the modest financial resources available to it, was unable to improve the situation of the local Jews. The speech's coverage ended at the moment when the ghetto was established, a move which preceded the next stage of anti-Jewish policy, namely the mass extermination as part of Operation Reinhard.

Next, Dr. Lea Prais from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem focused on the issues of small towns in occupied Poland in the context of the testimonies collected by the *Oneg Shabbat* organisation. Analysing the testimonies from the Ringelblum Archive given by Jewish refugees who fled or were expelled from various cities throughout occupied Poland and reached Warsaw, and then went into the ghetto, Dr. Prais was looking for answers to the questions of “how were the first days of occupation in other, smaller towns described, and whether the outbreak of the war came as a surprise to the Jewish communities living there; and what the first signs of damage in those areas were, both at the level of the commune and the Jewish community specifically”. The topics discussed also included issues related to the Jewish leadership’s reactions to the outbreak of the war and the strategies which the Jews adopted to deal with the new reality. The Israeli researcher noted that although the testimonies she analysed were given immediately after the events described (1940–42), it should be remembered that the witnesses were living in the shadow of the fugitives’ trauma and expulsion, becoming refugees in their own country. This reality greatly influenced the nature of their testimony.

The panel closed with a speech by Dr. Tomasz Domański from the Institute of National Remembrance in Kielce, which concerned the scope and form of the anti-Jewish activities carried out by the German occupation authorities in rural areas and in small ghettos in the Kielce powiat (Bodzentyń, Chęciny, Daleszyce). The speaker also mentioned the German occupation structures operating in the area discussed which were directly responsible for the repression and persecution of Jews. Issues related to specific crimes and topics related to everyday life in small ghettos and villages were raised, with particular emphasis on the relations between Poles and Jews during the first years of the German occupation.

In the second panel of the session, papers on selected aspects of the lives of Poles and Jews under the German occupation were presented. In the first, prepared by Alicja Bartnicka from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, issues related to the organisation of forced Jewish labour in the General Government (until 1941) were discussed. The paper focused on recreating and describing the German occupying authorities’ legislative process in this regard. The most important guidelines were briefly presented, such as the decree by Hans Frank of 26 October 1939 on compulsory labour for the Jewish population, which was

the first official directive in this area, issued immediately after the establishment of civil administrative authorities, and the implementing provisions of Friedrich Wilhelm Krüger of 11 and 12 December of the same year, which specified both the age range of the Jews sent to forced labour, the time of their work, and the need to exploit the workforce in accordance with the professions they had been trained in. The paper also referred to further regulations by the German occupation authorities, and raised topics related to the types of labour camps in the GG, the living conditions there, and the role and involvement of the *Judenrat* in the situation of the Jewish forced labourers.

Martin Borkowski-Saruhan from the Georg-August-Universität in Göttingen focused on issues related to the intertwined experiences of Jews and non-Jews during the first two years of German occupation in east Upper Silesia, with a particular emphasis on sports. The author suggested that both groups displayed similar coping patterns in this early period. The case of German-occupied east Upper Silesia showed some peculiarities compared to other occupied Polish territories, primarily the General Government. These differences greatly influenced the chances of survival for both Jews and non-Jews. From a comparative perspective, the speaker claimed, the beginning of the occupation seemed relatively peaceful, apart from local outbreaks of mass violence, such as the executions in Katowice of people considered to be Polish nationalists, or the beating and burning alive of around forty Jewish residents of Będzin in the local synagogue (both events took place in September 1939). The key factor to understanding the events analysed in the paper is the National Socialist concept of east Upper Silesia, which they saw as a truly German territory that needed to be 'liberated'. This belief led the territory to be annexed to the Reich, along with the Dąbrowa Basin and the Żywiec region. In this situation, a significant part of the Jews, who had often already fled from German occupation elsewhere, found themselves in Germany once again, where they did not know how to deal with the situation (proof of which, as the author showed, was the 'Nisko-Aktion'). When reconstructing the eastern border of the former Prussian and Habsburg lands in Upper Silesia, the occupying authorities designated most of the people living in the west of the region as Germans, or those who could be 'Germanised', whereas the Poles and Jews were displaced to the region's eastern part.

This process of 'ghettoisation', as the speaker noted, was by no means comparable to those that took place in places such as Warsaw or Łódź. Many Jews chose to live with relatives and acquaintances in Zagłębie before they were eventually expelled. Isolated ghettos did not exist until 1943 (with a few exceptions). The areas assigned to the Jews were relatively spacious and not densely populated, with much better living conditions and supplies than elsewhere. In these circumstances, which according to Borkowski-Saruhan did not contradict the violence of the occupier, recreational activities such as sports were of key importance for coping with the occupation experience, as we learn from the few sources on this subject. Among many other functions, sport contributed to the building of social ties, linking the Jews with the other inhabitants of German-occupied eastern Upper Silesia. A closer look at the sporting practices of the Jews, Poles and Upper Silesians (based on selected case studies) revealed very similar patterns of socialisation. Moreover, according to the paper's author, the perspective from the history of sport shows that in the early period, the non-Jewish inhabitants of Upper Silesia were more at risk of death due to the conditions of occupation than the Jews living in this area.

The penultimate panel on the first day of the conference focused on issues related to ethnic groups in Poland and the policy of the German occupier towards them. Michał Turski from the Osteuropäische Geschichte/Historisches Institut in Giessen prepared a paper on the German nationality list (*Volksliste*) and the techniques used for classifying and separating Germans and Poles in the Wartheland. The paper focused on the presentation of the National Socialists' ethnic policy in the Warthegau in 1939–41, with particular emphasis on the Łódź region (Łódź itself and the neighbouring towns). It was in the area of the Warthegau that the first *DVL* (*Deutsche Volksliste*) projects were created, which in March 1941 were extended to all the occupied Polish territories. Mr. Turski not only introduced the audience to the regulations related to the adoption of the German nationality list, but he strongly emphasised the impact of the *DVL* Act on the lives of the Germans and Poles in the Warthegau, as well as the resulting clear division between these groups which were visible in various aspects of everyday life. The speaker highlighted the privileges of the Germans, who were the only people permitted to own land, factories, shops and houses in the Wartheland. In addition, he discussed the policy of discrimination towards the Poles and Jews, whose property was subject to requisition.

Issues concerning the persecution of the Roma in Poland in the first period of the occupation were presented by Dr. Alicja Gontarek of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. The topic discussed here represents a kind of a blank spot in the historical research on the fate of the Gypsies in Poland, mainly due to the small amount of archival materials in this area and their dispersion over a very wide area. The presentation focused on identifying the typology of persecution, with a description of the source materials on this subject. The question of the strategies employed to deal with German acts of violence and the consequences of the persecution for this minority's internal social structure was also discussed. According to Dr. Gontarek, the first two years of the occupation were much more important for the Gypsies than for the other persecuted groups, because it led to their internal disintegration and the collapse of their traditional social structures. The final part of her paper focused on characterising the general state in which the Polish Gypsies entered the next stage of German policy, i.e. 'ghettoisation' and subsequent extermination.

The first day of the session closed with a special session attended by researchers from the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, devoted to the new encyclopaedia of the Warsaw ghetto which they have been preparing. Maria Ferenc-Piotrowska, Katarzyna Person and Justyna Majewska, with the support of Prof. Andrzej Żbikowski who was moderating the panel, spoke about the long-term interdisciplinary research project implemented by the Jewish Historical Institute, the aim of which is to develop a virtual encyclopaedia of the Warsaw ghetto. The encyclopaedia's comprehensively prepared entries are intended to be a synthesis of all the work on a complete edition of the Ringelblum Archive, and to encompass the Jewish Historical Institute's other archival collections and the published sources and testimonials about the Warsaw ghetto and the Holocaust. As a result, the final index should include nearly 2000 entries, which can be divided into specific personal, historical, geographical, organisational (political, cultural or youth organisations operating in the ghetto) or characteristic elements of everyday ghetto life, in different subject areas. The project is being carried out by a specialised interdisciplinary research team, and after its completion the encyclopaedia will be made available on the DELET website. The historians involved in its compilation emphasise that the entries will be illustrated by unique and little-seen photographs from the ghetto taken from the collections of the Jewish

Historical Institute. In addition, individual items will also be assigned charts, graphs, references to documents and publications from the collections of the Jewish Historical Institute, as well as tags linking to entries on similar topics. The encyclopaedia is supposed to fulfil both educational and popularising functions. It is also worth emphasising that this work will be targeted not only to the group of researchers dealing with this issue, but (in the intention of its creators) to a wider audience: teachers, lecturers, students or pupils in upper secondary schools. The project is scheduled to be completed in 2023.

The second day of the conference had three sections, devoted in turn to a comparison of Polish and Jewish memories about the events at the beginning of the occupation, the history of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union until 1941, and research into the history of the Warsaw ghetto. This time, the sessions were held at the Zielna Conference Centre, located near the headquarters of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum.

The speakers on the first panel, entitled 'Jewish memory/Polish memory: similarities and differences' mainly based their papers on analyses of selected testimonies and accounts. Andrzej Kirmiel from the Międzyrzecz Regional Museum focused on the history of the Jews who ended up in Zbąszyń after their expulsion from the Third Reich. The transports of Jews which started as part of the *Polenaktion* on 28 October 1939 were mainly directed to railway crossings on the borders. The speaker said that the largest group was sent to Zbąszyń, a large railway junction on Poland's western border. It is estimated that over 6000 people were deported there on 28–29 October alone. This paper, apart from discussing the course of the action itself, the conditions available to those resident in the town and the help they received from private individuals, also referred to the perceptions of these events from the viewpoints of people resident in Zbąszyń today.

The next two presentations focused on analyses of selected Jewish accounts and the presentation of the events outlined in them from the viewpoint of their authors. Prof. Sara Bender from the University of Haifa (whose paper was read by the organisers in her absence) recalled the notes of Simcha Korngold, a member of the Jewish Military Union who fought in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which today constitute an extremely interesting source on wartime events. The first chapter, on which the speaker focuses, is actually a diary describing the life and everyday reality in the besieged city of Warsaw until its fall on 27 September

1939. The paper recalled Korngold's remarkable descriptions of the efforts of tens of thousands of residents as they took all possible steps to prevent the city from falling. Anna Ciałowicz of the Pilecki Institute, on the other hand, discussed Polish-Jewish relations at the beginning of the German occupation (September–December 1939) in the light of the recollections of Reuwen Feldszuh, a writer, journalist and revisionist activist who lived in the Warsaw ghetto during the German occupation. The topic discussed was important, first of all because Feldszuh's book, *Poyn brent* (Buenos Aires, 1960), has not hitherto been used in historical research. It includes notes from the period of the siege of Warsaw (September–October 1939), a description of the first persecution of Jews in the capital and in the countryside (Łaskarzew), a description of the everyday life of Jews and Poles, a description of the changing moods of the people living under German occupation, as well as information concerning the establishment of the *Judenrat* in Warsaw. In the context of the events described by Feldszuh, Ms Ciałowicz discussed the changes in the communities living in the occupied territory, as well as the evolution of the author's own perceptions of the events taking place around him.

In the session entitled 'Polish Jews and the Soviet Union, 1939–41', Daniela Ozacky-Stern from Bar-Ilan University in Israel talked about the activities of the Kibbutz in Vilnius, which was established there just after some members of the *ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir* youth movement escaped eastwards from Warsaw and other Polish cities in early September 1939, along with other Jewish refugees trying to avoid Nazi occupation. After much wandering, they reached Vilnius and Rivne, which were still under Soviet rule. Over time, a large cluster, the Kibbutz, was created in Vilnius consisting of 610 members of *ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir* from Kalisz, Częstochowa, Zbąszyń, Radom, Lublin, Kraków, Sosnowiec and other places. The documents they left behind constitute invaluable historical material that allows researchers to recreate their everyday life, their ideological, cultural and educational views, and to describe the relationships between the members of the Kibbutz in Vilnius and the Jews remaining in the German-occupied areas.

Dr. Andrei Zamoiski, representing the Freie Universität Berlin, presented an extremely interesting paper on how aware the inhabitants of the Soviet Union were of the persecution of the Jewish population in occupied Poland. As he demonstrated, in the period from autumn 1939 to June 1941 Soviet newspapers were silent

on the acts of violence perpetrated against the Jewish population in German-occupied Polish territories. For political reasons, the Soviet authorities and Soviet propaganda did not inform the Jews living in that area about those atrocities. As the speaker showed, in Soviet society, which itself had experienced several waves of terror in the interwar period, the state and secret services monitored all the inhabitants' activities and the circulation of news, so that the Soviet Jews, especially those in Belarus and Ukraine, were not prepared for the events ahead, and did not undertake any activities to evacuate themselves or their families to the eastern regions of the Soviet Union in the early weeks of the German invasion. The Soviet leaders did not take advantage of the reports flowing into the country to protect their people, or even to inform the Jews in the USSR about the National Socialist system's murderous policy towards the Jewish population.

The last panel of the conference's second day was devoted to the integrated perspectives of research into the history of the Warsaw ghetto. Dr. Anna Hirsh of the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne analysed postcards and letters in the Australian archives sent by Warsaw Jews to relatives who had fled to Australia, Japan, and North & South America. The correspondence comes from the period beginning at the outbreak of the war until the Jewish correspondents had been settled in the ghetto. Today, this material – which is completely unknown in Poland – is a legacy that provides information on the occupiers' policy towards the Jews, the regulations imposed on Jewish residents, their living conditions, and the situation of their family and friends. The speaker tried to show how fear and censorship could affect the inclusion or exclusion of key details about suffering within the content of a short letter or postcard.

Daniel Reiser from the Zefat Academic College in Safed discussed the religious leadership of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Szapiro in Warsaw in the first months of the war. An examination of his sermons has shown that he made no direct reference to political or historical events. Szapiro never mentioned the Germans, or later, important ghetto figures, by name; nor did he refer to specific events directly. However, his sermons do contain mention of 'evil-doers', descriptions of physical and mental torments and suffering due to the loss of loved ones, and of crises related to religion and faith. These materials do also contain many indirect references to outside events, especially from the first year of the war, even before the construction of the ghetto. Szapiro mentions the forcible

shaving of his beard, the closing of the synagogues and Jewish shops, the setting up of aid organisations, the persecution and contempt expressed towards the Jews in the street, and the plunder of Jewish property. As Reiser pointed out, the personal tragedy of Szapiro, who lost his entire family in the bombing, influenced his perception of himself as a religious leader who nevertheless served as an example of someone who still believed in God's justice, despite having experienced more suffering than others.

In the last lecture of the panel, Dorota Siepracka from the Institute of National Remembrance in Łódź talked about the scouts' aid for the ghetto, known under the codename 'Akcja Żet', which is today a forgotten chapter in the history of the Warsaw ghetto. Ms Siepracka demonstrated that the scouts provided help in various forms practically from the very beginning of the ghetto's existence. The strictly secret cells ('Żetka', 'Żet') created within the structures of the Grey Ranks [*Szare Szeregi*] were delegated to perform special tasks in this district. There were at least three 'Żet' units, whose members, thanks to passes issued by the City Council, had legal, regular access to the ghetto as employees of various municipal institutions, performing their routine duties as collectors, disinfectors and garbage collectors. While undertaking this 'legal' work they also conducted underground activities, which initially consisted in identifying the topography of the closed district, observing the moods of its inhabitants, and collecting information on the general living situation. The next stage of the clandestine tasks involved making contacts with the elite and intelligentsia in the ghetto, in cooperation with whom the members of 'Żet' were able to lead Jews threatened by the Gestapo out of the ghetto. They also saved many doctors, pharmacists, poets, musicians and actors who were well-known in the ghetto. The audience also learned that two of the three 'Żet' cells were quickly detected and liquidated by the Germans, while the third, which had only two members, continued to operate in the Warsaw Ghetto until its complete liquidation.

Aside from the substantive discussions, one should mention the visit organised during the second day of the conference to the Bersohn & Bauman Children's Hospital in Warsaw, where the Warsaw Ghetto Museum will be housed. The speakers had the opportunity not only to see this historic building, but also to learn more about the place's interesting history. The hospital was built in the years 1876–78, and initially functioned as a small institution treating Jewish children. In the years

1905–12 a pediatrician, Henryk Goldszmit (aka Janusz Korczak), who later founded the Orphans' Home for Jewish children in Warsaw, worked there. At the outbreak of the war, the hospital was already a thriving facility, although in November 1940 it found itself within the boundaries of the Warsaw Ghetto, and from February 1942, the doctors who worked there took part in research on diseases linked to starvation. After the liquidation of the small ghetto, on 10 August 1942 the entire hospital on Sienna Street was moved to its headquarters at the intersection of Leszno and Żelazna Streets. Three days later, its location was changed to the school buildings on Stawki Street. On 11 September 1942, the employees of the hospital and their patients were deported to Treblinka. The abandoned hospital buildings between Sienna and Śliska Streets became the seat of the Children's Clinic, which operated until the Warsaw Uprising. This facility was the only professional medical point in the centre of Warsaw during the rebellion. After the end of the war, the headquarters of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland were located in the hospital buildings, and later, when the building had come into the hands of the state and been reconstructed, it housed the 'Children of Warsaw' Provincial Hospital for Infections in Children. In 2015, the hospital building was abandoned. On 7 March 2018, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture Piotr Gliński announced that the building would be designated as the seat of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum. The participants of the November conference had the opportunity to look at the buildings, where renovation work will soon begin in connection with the ongoing permanent exhibition, which is scheduled to open in 2023.

The conference 'The beginnings of the Nazi occupation. Continuity and change in Polish and Jewish life 1939–41' was an opportunity to present research, exchange experiences and make new scientific contacts. The speakers' papers not only demonstrated their familiarity with the areas discussed, but also presented new research challenges, as was widely discussed in the summary by Prof. Daniel Blatman from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The discussions showed a wide range of specialisations related to the history of the Poles and Jews in the first years of German occupation, and also indicated the need to make ever closer ties of cooperation between the people and institutions who deal with these issues.

Dorota Budzińska
Dąbrowa Białostocka

STILL READING THE ASHES – IN THE FOOTSTEPS
OF DĄBROWA BIAŁOSTOCKA'S JEWS

I couldn't even save
a single life

I couldn't even stop
a single bullet

so I wander around cemeteries
which are not there
I search for words
which are not there
I run

for help not called for
for rescue too late

I want to get there
even if it's too late.¹

¹ Poem by Jerzy Ficowski from the volume *Odczytanie popiołów* (1979) (transl. by J.T.).

A small volume of poems by Jerzy Ficowski inspired me to undertake several years of efforts to restore the memory of the Jewish community of Dąbrowa Białostocka. Regarding the title of this essay, I chose to use a continuous verb form, because I assumed that looking for information about the Jews of Dąbrowa Białostocka would be a long and perhaps unfinishable process.

When I entered the Jewish cemetery for the first time, which at that time was simply a rubbish dump, I understood that it would be necessary to take care of this place – to clean it up and restore its proper character to it. The historic 19th-century necropolis is the only material trace of the Jews of Dąbrowa Białostocka. I realized that although there are no more Jews in Dąbrowa, they are still present through these graves. The *matzevahs* are the witnesses of the past. The living have disappeared, but the dead remain.

The cemetery is surrounded by a solid brick wall, decorated with a commemorative *matzevah* and sealed by a wrought-iron gate, which proves that someone did try to take care of this place. Who was still interested in the Jewish cemetery after so many years? I found out more from a book by Michael Nevins commemorating the *shtetl* in Dąbrowa.² Two Jewish women from here, the sisters Rena and Lilly Schlachter (Szlachter) collected money and asked a school friend, Jan Zarzecki, to organize the construction of a wall around the cemetery. In 1995, they and their families, together with Michael Nevins and others, came to Dąbrowa for a modest ceremony commemorating the town's Jewish inhabitants.

Large Jewish communities had lived in Dąbrowa and the surrounding towns for centuries. World War II and the Holocaust wiped them out; time and people erased the traces of the past. Very few of them survived. I have included the youth of the high school where I work in my projects. Education through activities, work, meetings and projects helps the young people to learn about their local history, brings the past closer, shapes active attitudes in them, and teaches them tolerance and an understanding of the world.

In 2015, at my initiative and with the involvement of students participating in the 'Przywróćmy pamięć' [To bring memory back] project of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, and in cooperation with the Dąbrowa

² M.A. Nevins, *Dąbrowa Białostocka: memorial to a shtetl*, River Valley (NJ) 1982; second edition from 2000 available at https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/dabrowa_bialostocka/dabrowa_bialostocka.html, accessed 5 June 2021.

Town & Commune Office and the Municipal & Communal Cultural Centre, the cemetery was cleaned, and photographic documentation of 178 preserved *matzevahs* and an interactive map of the cemetery were prepared; these can be found online at 'Odczytywanie popiołów – Dąbrowa z niepamięci wydobyta' [Reading the ashes – Dąbrowa recovered from oblivion].³

I was an originator of the project to commemorate the cemetery. The town authorities funded a commemorative plaque on the gate and a sign indicating its location. On 24 May 2016, the plaque was unveiled by the mayor, Mr. Romuald Gromacki, and the aforementioned Michael Nevins, himself a descendant of Dąbrowa's Jews. The restoration of the cemetery was the first action I undertook together with the students of the Gen. Nikodem Sulik School in Dąbrowa Białostocka as part of our original project 'Odczytywanie popiołów – śladami dąbrowskich Żydów' [Reading the ashes – Following in the footsteps of the Jews of Dąbrowa].

An outline of the history of Dąbrowa Białostocka and the history of its Jewish community

The location of the village of Dąbrowa was established by King August II granting it market privileges on 8 March 1713. This may be considered as having granted it certain municipal functions, but unfortunately these did not include full municipal rights. Dąbrowa did not receive them from the Lithuanian treasurer Antoni Tyzenhauz either, even though he contributed greatly to its development. In the years between 1768 and 1775, it became the centre of local administration; a market was laid down there, and several brick houses were built.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Jews in Dąbrowa owned a synagogue, a school, a bathhouse and a cemetery. They probably had their own religious community.

As Tomasz Wiśniewski writes in *Bóźnie Białostoczczyzny* [The synagogues of the Białystok region],⁴ the main synagogue was built with funds raised by Rabbi Menachem Mendel. It was a large, brick, one-story building with a gable roof. A characteristic feature was the semicircular windows in the main prayer room. The vestibule with four smaller windows housed the entrance for women to the gallery on the first floor. The synagogue was given to the faithful in 1874,

³ <https://www.dabrowabial.pl/>, accessed 5 June 2021.

⁴ T. Wiśniewski, *Bóźnie Białostoczczyzny*, Białystok 1993, p. 149.

and the Jews of Dąbrowa used it only on Saturdays and important holidays. It was destroyed by the Germans in 1941, and the ruins pulled down after the war.

Dąbrowa's privileges from King August II allowed for weekly markets and four annual fairs, and granted freedom to its Jews. Nevertheless it was a poor town whose livelihood was based on agriculture and crafting; the Christians mainly dealt with the former, while the Jews did the trading and crafting; the latter predominated numerically in the town.⁵ Residents of the surrounding villages flocked to Dąbrowa for the three annual fairs and weekly markets. Here horses, cattle, pigs, grain, fruit and vegetables, dairy products and the handicraft products needed on the farm were traded.

In 1904, there were 1800 inhabitants in Dąbrowa, 78.2 per cent of whom were Jews. This was the highest per centage of Jews in the entire Grodno governorate and one of the highest, if not the highest, in the Russian Empire. The Poles (19.2 per cent), Russians (0.7 per cent) and Tatars (1.7 per cent) living there were clearly in the minority.

In the interwar period, there were two post offices in the commune (*gmina*), which were called Dąbrowa by Grodno (Dąbrowa k. Grodna) and Różanystok by Grodno (Różanystok k. Grodna). On the other hand, the town of Dąbrowa itself, under an ordinance of the Minister of the Interior of 1937, was formally endowed with the adjective *grodzieńska*. In the town there were motor-powered mills, windmills, tile factories, a carding mill, a dye-works, an oil mill, a dairy cooperative, a Jewish People's Bank, a Stefczyk financial office, a post and telegraph office, a police station, a pharmacy and two medical practices. Several social organisations were also active there. However, the town had neither electricity nor running water. The nearest hospital was in Sokółka, the powiat seat, although people more usually went to Grodno, about 20 km away. It was a much larger town than Sokółka, so it offered the opportunity to settle various matters, and also offered agricultural products at more attractive prices. People usually went to Grodno on foot or in a cart. The wealthier people travelled by train or bus.

For Dąbrowa, World War II began with a German bombing. On 1 September 1939, a German plane flew over the town and dropped three bombs, although fortunately they did not cause much damage. The first German troops reached the town on 17 September and stayed there for three days. On 21 September, units of the Red

⁵ Dąbrowa was never a town modelled on the 'Magdeburg law'; it was typical of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the so-called small town (*miasteczko*). See G. Ryżewski, *Powiat sokólski. Dziedzictwo historyczno-kulturowe*, Sokółka 2020, pp. 73–74.

Army entered the area after the Germans abandoned it, as the result of previous agreements between Germany and the USSR. Dąbrowa thus came under Soviet occupation, which resulted in the deportations of Poles and Jews, among others.

On 22 June 1941, German troops re-entering Dąbrowa came under fire from several town residents, and a German officer was killed. As an act of revenge, the Germans set fire to buildings in the town and in nearby Juryzdyka. The buildings were made of timber and thatch, and it was a dry and hot summer, so the straw and wood caught fire easily. People woke from their sleep, ran out of their homes and saved their livestock. Most of their clothes, bedding and household items were burned. Those caught in the aftermath lived in free-standing vaults or with their friends and relatives in the surrounding villages. The stumps of the burnt houses' chimneys remained standing. Up to a dozen families lived in the few brick houses remaining. The vaults adapted for residential purposes were heated with small stoves, the so-called 'goats' (*kozy*). The facilities in Różanystok were commandeered by the Germans for their own needs, including as warehouses for storage.

The Jews of Dąbrowa also found themselves in a tragic situation. Hitler's anti-Semitic policy had excluded them from society in the occupied territories. After the destruction of Dąbrowa, they sought shelter among the ruins of their homes, as well as in the villages of their Christian friends. Hiding a Jew was punishable by death; nevertheless, many Poles took this risk. The fate of Zygmunt Sutuła from Brzozów, who was shot in front of his house for hiding the Boruch brothers was one tragic example of what could happen. It should be added that one of his own neighbours denounced him to the Germans.

The fate of the Jewish community in Dąbrowa was sealed on 2 November 1942, when the Germans deported the remaining local Jews to the extermination camp in Treblinka, where all of them perished. Only those who had emigrated before the war, those who had found refuge in Polish homes, or otherwise survived the war in the East, made it to the end of the conflict.

The information contained in this chapter comes from an article by Tadeusz Ciszkowski published on the website 'Historia Dąbrowy k/Grodna' [The history of Dąbrowa by Grodno].⁶

⁶ T. Ciszkowski, *Historia Dąbrowy k/Grodna*, <https://dabrowabial.pl/pliki/Dabrowa.pdf>, accessed 5 June 2021.

Descendants

The first source of information on Dąbrowa's Jews I found was Michael Nevins's book, which I discovered online. I wrote to the author explaining that I was looking for information about the Jews of Dąbrowa; this is how our acquaintance, which continues to this day, began.

At the mayor's invitation and mine, Dr. Nevins, a descendant of the Niewiadomski and Zabanów (Caban) families, visited Dąbrowa twice in 2016 and 2018. These visits were of an unusual nature, because he met the local authorities, students and residents of the town, which was an important step towards rebuilding relations between the inhabitants of Dąbrowa and their descendants who were returning to their ancestors' *shtetls* after so many years. Unfortunately, unpleasant incidents of a disruptive or even openly anti-Semitic nature also took place. Vulgar inscriptions were written on the mural displaying the *matzevah* and the cemetery wall, and several historic *matzevahs* were desecrated with similar inscriptions. Less drastic incidents included throwing candles and littering the cemetery.

Nevins's book is a memorial of Jewish Dąbrowa, but also one of the most important sources of information about this community more generally. A professional translation of the book into Polish by Elżbieta Smoleńska is available on the above-mentioned website.⁷

Kaddish for Dąbrowa Białostocka by Marek Podwal

Dąbrowa is the subject and inspiration of a series of prints by Marek Podwal, whose mother Devora (Dwora/Dwojra) Epelbaum came from the town. Podwal is not only an outstanding doctor and lecturer in New York, but also a respected and world-renowned graphic artist and painter. Many prestigious galleries and museums around the world have hosted his works. Privately, he was a longtime friend of Prof. Eli Wiesel. Inspired by a visit to his mother's family *shtetl* and Tomasz Wiśniewski's film *Nieobecna rodzina* [Absent family], of which more later, he created a series of eighteen prints, which were published as an album in 2018. The artist came to Dąbrowa for the second time in June 2018 and took part in the promotion of the book and a project (based on a grant from the Forum for Dialogue) to build relations

⁷ M. Nevins, *Dubrowa. Dąbrowa Białostocka. Upamiętnienie sztetla*, transl. E. Smoleńska, <https://dabrowabial.pl/pliki/dubrowa.pdf>, accessed 5 June 2021.

between the descendants of Jews and the inhabitants of the town. The students who were carrying out the project prepared a walk around pre-war Dąbrowa, told the Jewish history of the town, and showed guests and residents the places where the most important Jewish institutions and objects related to religious worship had been located before the Holocaust. *Kaddish for Dąbrowa Białostocka* was exhibited in the Great (Choral) Synagogue in Grodno (May 2017), at the Ludwik Zamenhof Centre in Białystok (August 2017, in cooperation with the Poland-Israel Center for Citizenship Education), and in Łomża (April 2019).

Marek Podwal donated this series of works to the Gen. Nikodem Sulik School in Dąbrowa, although in accordance with the artist's wishes, the work remains in my care.

Kiki Harary, the great-granddaughter
of Rabbi Moshe Gershon Mowshowitz

I found Kiki Harary through a translator, Mr. Krzysztof D. Majus, whose business card I accidentally found at the town hall. The great-granddaughter of Dąbrowa's rabbi lives in Israel with her father Yehuda (Juda), who is now over a hundred years old. He, together with his late brother, were the only ones of their large family to avoid the Holocaust by emigrating to Palestine before the war. We met for the first time in Jerusalem in 2016, when I learned the interesting story of the Mowshowitz family, which was blessed with many well-educated people – intellectuals, rabbis and journalists. It was Kiki Harary who, during her visit to the town of her ancestors in 2018, addressed the assembled residents in Hebrew – a language that no-one had used in Dąbrowa since 1945.

The search for the descendants of Dąbrowa's Jews led to more visits by their families. Some arrived on their own initiative (such as the twelve-member Carp-Krupiński family from Australia); others learned that someone in Dąbrowa was maintaining the cemetery and organising events and commemorations (such as the brothers David and Neil Wilkof, descendants of the Volkov family). I have also received letters from other people whose great-grandparents, grandparents or parents came from this town. The flow of information is aided by the profile I run on Facebook, the English-language version of Tomasz Wiśniewski's film *Absent Family*, and the websites of the Public Museum of the Jews of Białystok and District, as well as the website devoted to the Jews of Dąbrowa mentioned above.

I have met with great understanding and kindness from the oldest inhabitants of the town and the surrounding area, who were very eager to talk about their Jewish schoolmates and neighbours. Based on their accounts, a film was made by Dr. Tomasz Wiśniewski, an outstanding expert and researcher on the history of the Jews of Podlasie. His film *Nieobecna rodzina. Odczytywanie popiołów – śladami dąbrowskich Żydów* [Absent Family: Reading the Ashes – Following in the Footsteps of the Jews of Dąbrowa] premiered on 24 May 2016 during the visit by Michael Nevins and Marek Podwal to their ancestors' hometown.

Inspired by the film and driven by the desire to learn about the town's history, my students Mateusz Czarkowski, Julian Malinowski and Paweł Masłowski made their own film entitled *Odczytywanie popiołów – śladami dąbrowskich Żydów* [Reading the Ashes – Following in the Footsteps of the Jews of Dąbrowa], which told the history of pre-war Jewish Dąbrowa. Waclaw Kułak, a Witness to History, leads the students in the former inhabitants' footsteps, and shows them the locations of the Jewish synagogue, school and bathhouse. In 2018, this film won a distinction in the *Nasi sąsiedzi – Żydzi* [Our neighbours the Jews] National Competition in Chmielnik, and took second place in the Podlaskie voivodeship (the Białystok Branch of the Institute of National Remembrance was one of the competition's partners).

On 5 April 2017 in the Gen. Nikodem Sulik School in Dąbrowa Białostocka, an agreement was signed on cooperation between the school and the Karski Junior High School No. 1 in Grodno, Belarus – a partner in the 'Mosty wielokulturowości. Zrozumieć przeszłość – tworzyć przyszłość' [Bridges of multiculturalism. Understanding the past, creating the future] international project, funded by the PZU Foundation, which represents one of Central and Eastern Europe's largest financial institutions.

Together with Mrs. Jolanta Konstańczuk, we wrote a project aimed at young people from both schools, the aim of which was to integrate them, help them to get to know and work with each other, and shape attitudes of tolerance within them.

During the project, the students learned about the multiculturalism of the Podlasie and Grodno regions, and went on several trips, including to Tykocin, Knyszyn, Bohoniki, Kruszyniany and Grodno; they also met representatives of various cultures and religions, both Jewish and Muslim. Through photo and film competitions, they preserved the richness of their 'little homelands', renovated historic Jewish cemeteries in Dąbrowa and Grodno, and restored *matzevahs*.

I believe that the most important effect of the project was their getting to know each other, developing their linguistic competences, and coming to understand national and religious diversity as a value that enriches life.

For several years I have been a member of the Forum for Dialogue, the oldest organisation in Poland dealing with Polish-Jewish dialogue. The Forum's flagship project is the School of Dialogue (*Szkoła Dialogu*), in which several dozen schools from all over Poland participate each year. We started the project in 2018. Young people participate in workshops conducted by the Forum for Dialogue's mentors, and learn about the history of the Jewish community, as well as its culture, customs and the principles of Judaism. The result of the project was a unique trip in the footsteps of the Jews of Dąbrowa as prepared by the students – exceptional mainly because the descendants of Jewish families, Kiki Harary, Michael Nevins and Marek Podwal, participated in it. The walk around 'pre-war' Dąbrowa engaged the local community: the elderly added some information and talked eagerly about how they remembered the former inhabitants of the town.

The students who devised the project were nominated for the main prize in the category of 'Impact on the local community', and the school won the honorary title of 'School of Dialogue 2018'.

I am very interested not only in the town's Jewish history, but also in Polish-Jewish relations more generally, especially in connection to the Holocaust. During a conversation with my colleague Celina Łazuk-Woroniecka, I found out that she was the granddaughter of a couple who were deemed Righteous Among the Nations: Anna and Stanisław Krzywicki from Dulkowszczyzna near Lipsk. It happened that I had just returned from the Summer School of Teaching about the Holocaust, a seminar organised by the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of European Studies, so I was even more interested in the subject of Poles saving Jews.

This friendly conversation marked the start of these various activities, which have been going on for more than four years now, consisting of restoring the memory of the Righteous in the local community. This includes meetings between young people in Dąbrowa and Lipsk and the children of the Krzywicki family, Józef and Janina, who helped their parents hide the Trachtenberg family of three refugees from the Grodno ghetto. Józef Krzywicki met the descendants of Dąbrowa's Jews during the latter's visit to our town in 2016.

Students, including Krystian Hećmańczuk (a great-grandson of the Righteous), Mateusz Czarkowski and Paweł Masłowski shot a film entitled *Historia mojej rodziny* [The History of My Family] (2019), which won the 'Our neighbours the Jews' National Competition in Chmielnik in 2019. It was also shown at the school on several occasions. The young people had the opportunity to learn about the history of a family that helped their Jewish friends during the occupation.

The screening of the film in Lipsk (on 13 December 2019) was attended by over twenty members of the Krzywicki family and – in my opinion – did much to help commemorate the Righteous. The involvement of the mayor of Lipsk, Lech Łępicki, and the parish priest, Canon Waldemar Sawicki, gives hope that there will also be a memorial plaque in honour of those inhabitants of the area who saved their Jewish neighbours.

During the celebration of the 23rd Day of Judaism in the Catholic Church in Poland (17 January 2020), another screening of the film *The History of My Family* was held, and the invited guests, including representatives of the Jewish communities from Grodno and Lida (Belarus), could watch a fictionalised interview with the daughter of the Righteous, Janina Hećmańczuk, and talk to their granddaughter Celina Łazuk-Woronecka and great-grandson Krystian Hećmańczuk. Many participants in the ceremony saw the medal and honorary diploma from Yad Vashem for the first time.

It is very important to involve young people in the above-mentioned activities, as in this way they learn history, are given role models, and are encouraged to learn about and research the history of their own families and the people living in their localities. Young people need heroes, and can, for example, find them within their own families.

For four years, I have been organising commemorative activities with the students related to the Day of Judaism in the Catholic Church in Poland. This is the only event of its type in Podlasie. Since my interest in the Jewish past of the town and its vicinity has aroused (and continues to arouse) various emotions, often negative, I hoped that the initiative of the Polish Episcopate of 1997 would find the understanding and acceptance of the community. During the events, through lectures, concerts, film screenings and the guests invited – including Catholic clergy, representatives of Jewish communities from Poland and Belarus, and members of the Białystok Society of Friends of Jewish Culture – I have tried to bring the relationship between Judaism and Christianity closer to the young

people, residents and civic authorities of Dąbrowa. I hope that these events build mutual knowledge and understanding, and help to shape attitudes of tolerance.

The most important element of the commemorative events is the joint prayer in the Jewish cemetery between the followers of these two religions, which are so close to each other. Two years ago, I added a different kind of commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust: young people read aloud the names and surnames of the Jews murdered in Treblinka, and in this way they are restored to the place where they were born, lived, educated, traded: quite simply, they live again.

In October 2019, in cooperation with the WITALIS Association and the 'Young Citizen' Civic Club from Lisew Malborski, represented by the lecturer and teacher Michał Romanowski, as well as young people from the schools in the Żuławy area, we started a project to commemorate the Jewish families from Dąbrowa. After preparing the appropriate stencils, the young people painted the names on the cemetery wall. In this way, through this collaborative work, an important and very significant commemoration of twenty names of Jews from Dąbrowa was created. Each surname is a symbol of a family, so each of them 'captures' several or up to a dozen people.

The exchange of experiences between students from different schools, the development of manual skills, learning local history through activities, and the recollection of the Holocaust as a warning for people today are also important. The mayor of Dąbrowa, Artur Gajlewicz, also participated in the project.

As a teacher I try to participate in seminars and trainings. In this way, I not only deepen my knowledge, but I also learn new methods for working with students, I make friends, and I search for ideas and inspiration.

During the 2nd TOLI (the Olga Lengyel Institute) seminar in Warsaw (June 2019), I had the opportunity to participate in classes conducted by Cheryl Rattner Price, an American artist and one of the originators of the 'Butterflies' project, which is an unusual way of commemorating the youngest victims of the Holocaust.

Each ceramic butterfly tells the story of a Jewish child murdered during the Second World War. The children were helpless, weak, unattended, lost and suffering. While participating in the project during the seminar, I thought that I should organise this type of activity at school, but that the disabled should also be included. On 16 December 2019, in cooperation with the charges of the Occupational Therapy Workshops in Dąbrowa and the students, we painted butterflies – not

only in memory of the murdered children, but also for ourselves, in order better to understand other, often sick and handicapped people. Earlier, with the help of the English teacher Mirella Stupak and the students, we translated short biographies of the children and the sentences on the cards with the biographies of the victims. As we painted the butterflies, we read the information about each child being commemorated. Most often this was done by the school students, because some of the disabled people participating in the project cannot read. The painted butterflies were placed on a specially prepared board. It was a unique experience and truly enlightening for all participants in the project.

The students also participated in the 'Daffodils' project, commemorating the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. We always go beyond the school and the local community with our activities. The young people present films, tell stories, and describe their achievements outside Dąbrowa; we also work with teachers and students from neighbouring schools. We hope that we will encourage young people to learn about the past, and to look for witnesses to history and the traces of the Jewish past.

Thanks to a grant for local activities (2019), I was able to launch the website 'Odczytywanie popiołów – Dąbrowa z niepamięci wydobyta' [Reading the ashes – Dąbrowa recovered from oblivion]. On this website I collect all the information, photos, maps and descriptions of events related to the Jewish past of the town, as well as contemporary ones such as the contacts with the descendants of Dąbrowa's Jews (<https://dabrowabial.pl/index.php>).

For over three years I have been running a Facebook profile called 'Reading the Ashes – Following in the Footsteps of the Jews of Dąbrowa', whose aim is to promote knowledge about the Jewish community of Dąbrowa, report on important events, and to exchange, commemorate and document experiences.

The history of Jewish Dąbrowa is a 'microcosm' of the history of Central and Eastern European Jews. Dąbrowa and all the nearby *shtetls* had a similar past. Have we succeeded in restoring the memory of the past, its people and events? I think this memory will endure. It is continually being supplemented with more information, memories, photos, visits by the descendants, the students' activities, and by education and changes in the local community's perception of 'Jewish matters'.