Jewish Presence in Absence
The Aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland, 1944–2010
This volume is partly based on the lectures presented at the international conference “The Aftermath of the Holocaust: Poland, 1944–2010,” which was convened by the Diana Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the Shoah at the International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem.

The conference was conceived by the late Eli Zborowski, Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem, and was supported by him and his family, the Gertner Center for International Holocaust Conferences, the Gutwirth Family Fund and the Polish Institute in Israel.
Jewish Presence in Absence
The Aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland, 1944–2010

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The International Institute for Holocaust Research
The Diana Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the Shoah
This book is dedicated to the blessed memory of Eli Zborowski and his wife, Diana.
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Preface

I am convinced that readers taking this book in the hand will be richly rewarded. For one, the October 2010 Jerusalem conference at Yad Vashem, where articles of this volume were first presented and discussed at an international forum, contested the traditional time frame of Holocaust scholarship. The Polish scholars went beyond the time border of the defeat of Nazi Germany, and raised the problem of what happened to Jewish survivors in Poland after the country had been liberated from the German occupation, a condition which can only be understood through the prism of wartime experience. How various aspects of “Jewish problems” were handled in post-war Poland, likewise, must be contextualized. Historiography of the Holocaust, in other words, does not stop in 1945. This awareness, such a push beyond the customarily drawn time limits, puts in sharp relief yet another neglected aspect of the entire period, showing convincingly that the Holocaust is a central theme of Polish history.

Solely on account of such intellectual openings we would be justified in welcoming this volume as an important breakthrough. But it is a revelation in yet another, perhaps the most important, sense, as it provides English-speaking readers for the first time — if I am not mistaken — with a collection of excellent studies about the Holocaust and its aftermath authored by 26 scholars from Poland and one from Switzerland. Those in the know could easily add another group of names of Polish academics currently writing brilliantly on the subject.

The Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw where this volume was prepared and the Polish Center for Holocaust Research at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, created in 2003, are the mainstays of scholarship in this area. However, our authors are also dispersed among many other universities and research centers located all over the country. This is a radically new development auguring well for the future. Half a century after the war, the history of the Holocaust in Poland is finally being written according to the highest standards
PREFACE

of scholarship by Polish academics, and it is being integrated into the main-stream narrative of Polish history. The foremost value of this volume is to show how this is being done.

Jan T. Gross
Princeton University
Introduction

This book is the result of an interdisciplinary research project carried out by a team of 28 researchers—historians, sociologists, ethnographers, anthropologists, literary historians, demographers, and lawyers—associated with five Polish universities, one university in Switzerland, three research institutes, two museums, and the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland.¹ This collective book attempts to cover issues that have long been the subject of heated public as well as private historical debate, often in the context of Polish-Jewish dialog, both in Poland and abroad. In brief, this is an attempt to examine the effects of the Holocaust and the Nazi occupation on the few Polish-Jewish survivors and Polish-Jewish relations. Very few Jews remain in Poland today, as compared to the Jewish population in Poland before the Second World War, which was the largest in Europe and, second only to the United States, in the world.

The results of this teamwork are addressed to specialists, as well as to a broader audience. This is the first publication in English that deals on an extensive and wide-ranging scale with the impact of the Holocaust on the post-war lives of the few remaining Jews in Poland and their relations with the national majority. As an example of a study on the short- and long-term impact of the Holocaust on a Jewish community in a single country, it is hoped that this book will promote similar work on other European countries.

Intense discussions at monthly seminars, held between 2007 and 2009 at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, served as the backdrop to this book. These meetings provided an opportunity for scholars spanning different generations from various academic centers involved in Holocaust research to exchange ideas, cooperate, and share their experiences. In their papers, many researchers employed sources and studies rarely used before, including some in Yiddish, the everyday language of most Polish Jews before the Holocaust.

In every country affected by the Holocaust, some people saved Jews condemned to death by the Third Reich or tried to help them, while others

¹ See the Notes on Contributors at the end of the book.
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collaborated in various ways with the Nazis’ genocidal program. In some cases, collaboration and the desire to profit from the situation went hand in hand. Nevertheless, in the early post-war decades, for various reasons, in most European countries, attention was not focused on the collaborators in the genocide or those who risked their lives to save Jews. There was an unofficial conspiracy of silence between the rulers and most of the ruled. Indeed, only in the last two decades has there been a greater interest in the consequences of the Nazi genocidal plan on the moral state of the general population in the countries where it was carried out. In this book, Poland is used as an example to illustrate these processes.

Readers are introduced to the Jewish world and Polish-Jewish relations in post-war Poland, starting with summer 1944, until the first decade of the twenty-first century. The dividing line is not between Poles and Jews, but between those who considered Jews as equal citizens and those who were totally indifferent to their Jewish co-citizens’ fate or wished to complete the ethnic purge perpetrated by Hitler’s Germany against the Jews.

The book is divided into four sections, which reflect, to a large extent, the crucial stages of Jewish life in post-war Poland and how Jews are perceived by most of Polish society. The main concerns in these successive periods may be summarized as follows: estimating the losses; hopes, rebirth, and rebuilding lives; taboos and erased memory; and, last but not least, the situation of Jews in Poland today.

The historical account with which the book opens focuses on two topics: demographic estimates of the genocide carried out by Nazi Germany on the Jews in Occupied Poland; and problems relating to survivors’ attempts to return to their hometowns and cities or in general, to countries where they had been citizens.

Going back to their hometowns and countries was not easy, but returning to these familiar places was the first impulse of most Jewish survivors in Eastern and Central Europe after they were able to leave the concentration camps, slave labor centers, partisan units, forest bunkers, hiding places in cities and villages, or give up their assumed “Aryan” identities, exile in the Soviet Union, or their positions as demobilized soldiers in the Allied armies. They mainly wanted to find out whether any of their relatives had survived, and sometimes hoped to recover their houses, apartments, and belongings left for safekeeping with non-Jewish neighbors. For most survivors, return became an extension of the wartime horror, since they usually found out that none of their close relatives had survived.

The survivors’ pre-war Polish neighbors rarely greeted them with open
arms. They were usually surprised at the sight of returning Jews, and few expressed any joy. Often, when survivors tried to recover their houses or workshops, the new owners were not eager to return the property to the rightful owners. Not infrequently, such returnees were secretly murdered. The perpetrators rarely faced justice as these mysterious disappearances were surrounded by a wall of silence, built on the complicity of profiteers and the reluctant, or even hostile, attitude toward the returning Jews, also characterizing much of the local Communist administration, police, and judiciary system. According to various estimates, in Poland, during the early post-war years, from 1945 to 1947, 1,000–2,000 Jews were murdered, either secretly or in pogroms. Many survivors from small towns and villages escaped to larger centers to save their lives, and the next stage was emigration, often into the unknown.

The motives behind this exodus varied: Some could not imagine living in their loved ones’ cemetery; others did not feel safe after the wave of pogroms, especially the Kielce Pogrom in July 1946, and the hidden murders of Jews. Still others did not want to stay in post-war Poland because of the Communist system imposed there. Many left Poland because they wanted to contribute to building the Jewish State in Palestine. Besides, with each passing year, especially since the late 1940s, the Communist authorities withdrew more and more of the broad cultural and political autonomy granted to Jews between 1944 and 1947. The last major Jewish exodus took place during the brutal antisemitic campaign, unleashed by the Communist authorities in 1967/1968.

Despite certain limitations, Jewish organizations, institutions, and schools continued to function until 1968. At present, only about 6,000 people in Poland consider themselves Jewish. Very few ethnic Poles born after the war are aware of the fact that, in mid-1946, there were 250,000 Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust, mostly in the Soviet Union. Therefore, this book attempts to present the multifaceted endeavors to rebuild Jewish life in the 1944–1968 period, including the care and education of Jewish children. In spite of various restrictions, Jewish cultural life was rich. The Yiddish literature by authors who managed to survive is meaningful, both with reference to the Holocaust and the return of survivors, indicating what Jewish life in Poland might have looked like today were it not for the waves of emigration after the war, culminating in the exodus of the late 1960s.

The next group of articles describes what was left behind in terms of both material culture and preservation of memory. They describe how this memory, initially manipulated and silenced, was gradually restored.
INTRODUCTION

The final section consists of articles dealing with the situation of the tiny Jewish community in Poland today and the general state of Polish-Jewish relations after the Holocaust. These subjects underwent profound changes in the first decade of the twenty-first century, which are reflected in this book. Post-war generations of Poles display a growing interest in the Jewish presence. Almost all the major universities in Poland have departments of Judaic studies. Physical traces of the many centuries of Jewish presence are increasingly cared for and preserved, including Jewish cemeteries and Holocaust-related sites. Open discussions take place on topics previously considered taboo, for example, the national debate over the Jedwabne Massacre, in which a large group of Polish inhabitants murdered their Jewish neighbors in July 1941. The Museum of the History of Polish Jews opened in Warsaw in April 2013. Teaching about the Holocaust is obligatory in Polish schools.

The desire to integrate the narrative of the catastrophe of the Holocaust into the mainstream history of Poland was an important motivation behind this book. Literature about the Holocaust frequently stops at the end of the Second World War. Many Holocaust museums around the world end their stories with the fall of the Third Reich and dramatic photographs of the liberated prisoners in the Nazi camps, showing piles of corpses and skeleton-like human beings. Some exhibits end with the Nuremberg Trials. School textbooks also present a similarly simplified and incomplete picture of the Holocaust.

It is our belief that the Holocaust narrative should be expanded to include the return of survivors, their reception by their non-Jewish neighbors in their native lands, first of all, in their former places of residence. For many survivors, this was the moment when they confronted the reality of what had actually happened, and made decisions about what to do with their own lives and whether to stay or leave.

It is our hope that this book, the Polish version of which was published in June 2011, will inspire further studies on the consequences of the Holocaust in Poland and other countries.

* * *

This research project would not have been possible without the help of several individuals and institutions. The late Mr. Eli Zborowski, Chairman of the New York-based American Society for Yad Vashem and member of the Directorate of the Yad Vashem Institute of National Remembrance in Jerusalem, was the moving spirit behind this project since the very beginning. Born in the town of Żarki, he was saved from the Holocaust by his Polish neighbors. A philanthropist based in New York for decades, he supported numerous causes, particularly in Poland. His role in bringing this project to realization was truly exceptional, in terms of both financial and moral support. As he repeatedly stressed, such comprehensive research projects should be undertaken in all countries touched by Nazi genocide and wherever survivors settled.

Thanks to Mr. Eli Zborowski and Mr. Avner Shalev, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate, we had the opportunity to present this project at the international conference “The Aftermath of the Holocaust: Poland, 1944–2010,” at Yad Vashem, which took place in October 2010. At the conference, organized by the International Institute for Holocaust Research and the Diana Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the Shoah, the idea of publishing this volume by the Yad Vashem Publications Department was born.

We would also like to express our gratitude to Mrs. Nancy Brumm, who founded and has since chaired the American Society of Jewish Heritage in Poland. She realized the importance of our project, and the society supported it throughout.

The intergovernmental Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research also recognized the significance of this project and helped to fund it. We also extend our thanks to Mr. Zygmunt Rolat, an industrialist and philanthropist. During the Nazi occupation of Poland, he was a prisoner in a ghetto and slave labor camp, both in his hometown of Częstochowa. After the war, he settled in the United States, but maintains active contact with Poland, where he supports many cultural initiatives.

We are also grateful to Professor Jerzy Tomaszewski of the University of Warsaw, who reviewed the Polish version of this book and made several useful comments; Mr. Tim Levenson, who read and edited the English translations by Mr. Grzegorz Dąbkowski and Ms. Jessica Taylor-Kucia; Dr. Havi Dreifuss, for reviewing the manuscript; and Dr. Anat Plocker, Dr. Rifkah Goldberg and Gayle Green, for their extensive editorial work. We also wish to thank Ms. Magdalena Prokopowicz, dedicated secretary of the project.
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and one of the copy editors of the Polish version, who devoted a great deal of time to this project.

Last but not least, our most sincere thanks go to Dr. Bella Gutterman, one of the main organizers of the conference at Yad Vashem, without whose enthusiasm and dedication the English version of this book could not have been published.

Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska
On behalf of my family, my wife, Diana Elizabeth, and our children, Lilly Zborowski Naveh and Murry Zborowski, I am pleased to greet all of you and thank you for participating in this historic event.

This conference would not have been possible without the support, hard work, and inspiration of Avner Shalev, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate; Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council; Dr. Bella Guterman, Director of the International Institute for Holocaust Research; Zeev Mankowitz, Director of the Diana Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the Shoah; Professor Feliks Tych, Director of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; and the dedicated research done by 27 scholars from Poland and one from Switzerland.

In the commonly accepted narrative, the Holocaust began in 1939 and ended with the Third Reich’s defeat in 1945. However, looking at the Holocaust as what happened to the Jews, its impact will be felt for many generations to come. The aftermath is as much about how future generations, including the survivors, treat the Holocaust, as it is about the direct impact of this event.

After Germany’s defeat, when the Holocaust, in conventional accounts, came to an end, the surviving Jews in Europe should have been as jubilant as their Gentile countrymen. The Jews thought that they could return to their homes, take up their former roles in society, and were looking forward to resuming their normal lives. However, this was not to be. Unfortunately, antisemitism continued to rage, driving most of the remaining Jews away from Eastern Europe.

This conference is dedicated to the history of the survivors in that period. It considers how they were received by their non-Jewish neighbors on returning to their native countries, and then by the host countries where they settled.

These scholars, researchers, historians from Poland, together with the staff of the Diana Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the
Shoah, as part of Yad Vashem’s International Institute for Holocaust Re-
search, are making history. This work is expected to stimulate similar re-
search in other countries, including the USA and Israel, where most sur-
vivors have settled. Immediately following the war, survivors encountered
a range of challenges and problems in resettling in their host countries.
While the local Jewish communities were welcoming, the horrific details
of the Holocaust experience made them uncomfortable at best. Sadly, there
were some who even shunned survivors and treated them in a derogatory
manner. Insufficient research has been done on this period. The Center’s
task is to make this a priority and, especially, to take advantage of the survi-
vors’ valuable first-hand experiences.

As a survivor, I am both a narrator and a witness from this community.
Born in Żarki, Poland, close to the German border, I bore witness to the
dark clouds of the Holocaust. At 13, I saw the first day of the German on-
slaught and the subsequent reactions of the Polish people. By the time I was
16, I was acting as a courier between the Radomsko, Częstochowa, and Pi-
lica Ghettos and the non-Jewish partisans in the surrounding countryside.
As I observed, for many anti-Nazi fighters, their genocidal impulses did not
dim their own innate antisemitism in the slightest. During this period, my
father was murdered by the Poles. Nevertheless, my family was hidden by
Polish Christians, whose fundamental humanistic impulse was undaunted
by the threat of death to them and their families.

In September 1945, eight months after the liberation of our region of
Poland from the Germans, three grenades were thrown into our home,
where my mother, my brother Marvin, and my mother’s sister and brother
were living. Soon after, they left Poland along with many other Polish Jews,
bringing our generations-long ties with our hometown of Żarki to an end.

After the liberation, I was sent to Feldafing, a displaced persons (DP) camp
set up by the Allies in West Germany. In 1952, I arrived in New York, speak-
ing no English and with meager financial resources. Despite this inauspi-
cious start, I built a business, had a family, dedicated my life to the Jewish Com-
munity, and gave my heart and soul to the cause of Remembrance.

From the participants’ viewpoint, it seems that the opportunities for
study of the Holocaust will never be exhausted. How can we possibly un-
derstand how there were some Poles who murdered Jews — including my
father — while there were others who risked their lives every day to save
Jews — including myself, my mother, and my siblings?

The Holocaust survivors built families. Seeking a new reality and new
sources of self-esteem, in time, some became extraordinarily successful,
especially compared to other immigrants facing similar obstacles. How did they achieve this? What distinguished the most successful from the least successful? How did the various factors in the new environment affect the distribution of success among the survivors? Most importantly, how did the Holocaust influence their experiences?

My interest in the research and study of the aftermath of the Holocaust began many decades ago. I was deeply influenced by the story of my late wife’s survival. Diana spent the final war years hidden under a sofa in the family maid’s home. Diana survived, but liberation was bittersweet for her. She was reluctant to leave her hiding place. She was totally alone. There was not a single person with whom she could share her joy. I have often wondered, “How does a person like this ever recover and move forward?” Every survivor had or has a story to tell about his or her emergence from the Holocaust’s ashes.

In 2006, Professor Feliks Tych and his colleagues at the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland launched an interdisciplinary program to explore the aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland. This project was a concerted effort to resist closing the book on the Holocaust with the Third Reich’s defeat. I was aware of this pioneering work and encouraged Yad Vashem to invite Professor Tych and his colleagues to present their material at the inaugural conference at the Diana Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the Shoah. At the international conference “The Aftermath of the Holocaust: Poland, 1944–2010,” Professor Tych and his colleagues presented a collection of papers documenting and analyzing the Holocaust’s extended impact on Poland.

The lamp was lit with respect to the importance of the post-Holocaust period, and previously ignored, overlooked or hidden facets are being revealed. Through these non-judgmental studies, we are, at last, beginning to understand not only the full dimensions of the Holocaust’s aftermath, but also the reasons behind this particular path. To give the Holocaust its proper place in history, it is essential to document, understand, and accept the ongoing influence of the world’s greatest crime.

Realizing our bold declaration, “Never again!” can only come through the efforts of researchers like those who participated in this conference. This work promises to create a model for future study on survivor communities worldwide, primarily in Germany, the United States, and Israel. This objective is both critical and urgent: *V’im lo achshav, az matai?* (“And if not now, when?” *Ethics of the Fathers*, 2:21).
Post-War Landscape
Polish-Jewish relations during the early post-war years set the pattern and determined the fate of Jews in Poland for decades to come. Most of the Jewish survivors were not on Polish soil at the end of the war, when Polish territory was liberated. Many did return and many of them then left once and for all, sometimes after only a very brief stay. Leaving after a few months, or even weeks, was common throughout 1945. In the next year, 1946, reconstruction of the Jewish community in Poland was expected to begin. These hopes were based on a sweeping repatriation of Jews from the Soviet Union, where most of the surviving Polish Jews were located. However, events took a different turn. The Kielce Pogrom of July 4, 1946 triggered panic-driven mass emigration, or rather flight, of most of the Jews then residing in Poland. It was a time when earlier expectations and plans failed. What were the relations between the Polish Jews who had survived and the rest of Polish society between August 1944 and July 1946? The Kielce Pogrom — the most tragic and landmark event in the post-war history of Polish Jewry — was, after all, only the culmination of many earlier incidents with much higher numbers of Jewish victims. According to Janina Bauman in *Nigdzie na ziemi* (Nowhere on Earth), during the war, everything was rather transparent, the enemy had a name, attitudes were more or less explicit, and goals were defined. After the war “I think it was difficult for Polish Christians to relate to Jewish fugitives as their countrymen. They...reminded them of something they would rather forget” — namely the relations between Jews and Poles.

1 For more information, see Andrzej Żbikowski’s article, “The Post-War Wave of Pogroms and Killings” in this volume.

during the occupation. Jan Tomasz Gross’s major claim in his book *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* is that post-war Polish antisemitism was only possible due to the significant involvement of Polish society in war-time events, especially those related to the Holocaust; they reaped large benefits from the “disappearance” of the Jews. While the war was still going on and shortly afterwards, a significant part of the property, first and foremost, and the belongings of those murdered (and also of those who remained alive) ended up in Polish hands. The Holocaust was accompanied by the confiscation and looting of property belonging to those Jews sent to the ghettos, and subsequently murdered, and also by the destruction of their cultural heritage and religious objects and symbols. In accordance with the Nazi doctrine, Jews, and everything relating to them, had to cease to exist. Poles found themselves in possession of objects and personal property, which Jewish neighbors had given them for safekeeping. If they turned out to be dishonest when confronted by survivors, extremely perilous and conflict-laden situations arose. This was a major reason for many acts of violence and murders in post-war Poland:

In those days, when a person who was already a corpse in people’s eyes, with whom one did not have to keep up appearances, suddenly came to life, a most awkward situation would arise.... Since most Jews — those who are still alive — describe similar experiences..., namely that people whom they would never suspect would rush to grab their belongings while they were still around, one may say that the number of embarrassing situations was similar to the number of Jews who survived. Moreover, numerous individuals who are supposed to hand over property belonging to returning Jews — be it a house, land or a shop — feel wronged. “How come 95 percent of those who hold some Jewish property do not have to hand it over and I do, just because it’s my bad luck that my (let us say) Rosenbaum managed to survive?” Some do not want to and will not hand over the deposits. This is one aspect of the

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current antisemitism, probably not the most important, but inevitable nevertheless.\textsuperscript{5}

The middle class, which mainly consisted of Jewish townspeople, “disappeared” from towns and cities. This included hundreds of thousands of craftsmen, manufacturers, traders, and members of the intelligentsia. They were replaced by Poles. “New craftsmen emerged — shoemakers, tailors — and took the Jews’ places. Because all the Jews were already gone! And they were not missed by anyone!”\textsuperscript{6} Of course, nearly three million Jews did not just “disappear.” They were murdered in the immediate vicinity and in the presence of Poles, as well as Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Belarusians, who not only witnessed the unprecedented murders but were often co-perpetrators or, much less frequently, rescuers of the doomed. The war by no means reduced or discredited deeply rooted prejudices and stereotypes. It did not make the Poles sympathize with victims of the Holocaust or show solidarity with them. Indifference of the majority remained the prevailing attitude, and distance turned into hate. Immediately after the war, these events provided the background for reluctant and often hostile behavior toward the Jews. As a result, most Jews left Poland. A major part of Polish society displayed a strong and, at times, brutal and ruthless antisemitism, intensified by the influence of the wartime German propaganda, and often driven by guilt feelings toward the murdered Polish Jews. In this context, researchers point out the corrupting impact of the occupation on Polish society, leading to the structural breakup and traumatization as a result of the atrocities of war.\textsuperscript{7}

Critics of Gross’s views mainly emphasize the complexity of post-war political relations. Many Jews decided to leave because they were unwilling

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{5} Helena’s letter (family name unknown) to “engineer Bażykowski,” most probably written in the summer of 1946, quoted from Zofia Borzymińska, “‘I ta propaganda zapuszcza coraz nowe korzenie...’ (Listy z Polski pisane w 1946 r.),” \textit{KHŻ}, no. 2 (2007), pp. 229–231.
\item \textsuperscript{7} Marcin Zaremba, “Trauma Wielkiej Wojny. Psychologiczne konsekwencje drugiej wojny światowej,” \textit{Kultura i Społeczeństwo}, vol. 2 (2008), pp. 3–42. The author points out the cultural repercussions of the trauma in Polish society: intensified religious devotion, spread of magical thinking, dualism of values, atrophy of moral bonds, culture of manipulation and indifference, strengthening of family solidarity and national bonds, rise of antisemitic sentiment manifested in strong fear, aggressive behavior, and alcoholism.
\end{itemize}
to build a new life “in the graveyard,” which was how they perceived Polish soil at that time.\(^8\) It should be borne in mind that not only Polish Jews had perished there, but also about three million European Jews. Death camps and also thousands of mass and individual graves, unmarked and desecrated, dispersed among fields and forests, became their last places of rest. Too many things kept reminding the Jews of the loss of their dearest ones and their entire pre-war world. Their old world had ceased to exist. Thus, the assessment of the post-war period shifted the main focus from antisemitism, which was very widespread in Poland\(^9\) before World War II, to its consequences, regardless of who was responsible for those [consequences] that affected the Jews. After all, the clash of the two opposing positions dominating this debate is only too apparent. Unquestionably, most Polish Jews made the decision to leave Poland for good. While they were influenced by both antisemitism and the Holocaust experience, each factor alone may have been more than sufficient. However, during wartime and the post-war period, they emerged at the same time and reinforced each other.

Other causes and components of the Jews' post-war situation identified by researchers, such as economic, religious, and political conditions, were only of secondary importance. Primarily, Jews wished to escape from Poland and Europe where their tragedy had played out, and the majority of people there did not offer them either compassion or assistance. Many Jews left for Palestine to take part in establishing a new Jewish state.\(^10\)

We were liberated and went back to our town — the houses were burnt, there were only ten people left.... At a garbage dump, two kilometers away from the town in a huge cave.... [there were] 1,000 people with their heads pointing in one direction like a brick wall.... We saw it all with our own eyes during the excavation of their graves. This compelled

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us to flee as quickly as possible from this blood-soaked soil where we had lost our parents, our relatives, etc., in order to join our brothers and sisters who care for our survival and fate.\textsuperscript{11}

The following was written by Jakub Rozenberg, former concentration camp inmate and Jewish committee activist in Dzierżoniów, in a letter dated July 12, 1946, to the historian, Professor Jakub Szacki, who had been living in the United States since 1922:

In the meantime, a situation arose which made me decide to leave as quickly as possible, and I shall most likely embark on my journey around August 1. I shall head for Italy, where I am supposed to receive an exit permit. However, if I do not receive it by August 1, I shall leave anyway. Jews are leaving in great numbers: They do not want to and cannot stay here any longer. The fate of the remainder of Polish Jewry is tragic. Wherever one turns one...stumbles upon memories and shadows of one’s dearest ones. Not to mention this horrible hatred, as manifested in the quiet but negative attitude of the Polish intelligentsia (which is so, despite all the claims to the contrary) and the active...[brutality] toward us recently shown in Kielce.... Hatred of Jews (regardless of the reason — whether emotional, economic or political) and the horrific memories are driving us out of here. We are attracted by the longing for a modicum of human feelings and kindness.... We are profoundly and intensely disillusioned....\textsuperscript{12}

Fradla Złoty wrote a letter to her cousin in the United States in the same vein:

I live among strangers, people whom I don’t know. It seems to me that I shall have to return to Białystok. Jews are leaving Białystok daily. What is most important is that you take steps to bring me and my grandson to America. As you can most probably imagine, I am very lonely and


\textsuperscript{12} Borzymińska, “I ta propaganda zapuszcza coraz nowe korzenie...,” pp. 231–232.
getting weaker by the day. The sooner you get us away from here, the better. This is the only thing I wish for.\textsuperscript{13}

We are talking about a community that was decimated and went through the ordeals of resettlement, expulsion, homelessness, hiding, extreme exhaustion and hunger, illness, poverty, inhuman fear, and, last but not least, the loss of relatives. They went through these experiences and many others, straining physical and psychological stamina to the extreme, for six years or more,\textsuperscript{14} with only a few managing to escape and survive.\textsuperscript{15} Post-war records and statistics characterize Jews not so much according to “mode of survival,” but rather their last place of residence before liberation. For the wartime history of each Jew was a composite of many situations, environments, and places, such as ghettos and camps; hiding on the Aryan side (where Jews were forbidden to reside on pain of the death penalty), in forest camps and hide-outs, or with partisan units; and finally, wandering throughout the Soviet Union. For most Jews, the return to Poland meant traveling hundreds, sometimes thousands, of kilometers. According to the data in the Central Register of Jewish Holocaust Survivors,\textsuperscript{16} established by the Central Register of Jews in Poland, 59.52 percent did not state their last place of residence, 31.12 percent stated the USSR, 4.78 percent — camps, 3.87 percent — the Aryan side, 1.52 percent — the army, 1.13 percent — ghettos, 0.69 percent — other places, and 0.43 percent — the Resistance.\textsuperscript{17}


\textsuperscript{14} For more information on this topic, see Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak’s article, “The Adaptation of Survivors to the Post-War Reality from 1944 to 1949,” in this volume.

\textsuperscript{15} “I believe that this term is very much off the mark. I do not consider myself as someone who survived the post-war confrontation. This term would be appropriate to describe someone who was saved in a closet, attic or pigsty belonging to one of the Righteous... [and] not saved by anyone. For no reason at all, history took away my life and, for no reason at all...only history makes it last longer. Is it [good] luck or bad luck? Simply, by coincidence, I have not been ‘finished off.’” Kazimierz Zybert, “Niedobity” in Marian Turski, ed., \textit{Losy żydowskie, świadectwo żywych} (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Żydów Kombatantów i Poszkodowanych w II Wojnie Światowej, 1999), p. 391.

\textsuperscript{16} AŻIH, Wydział Ewidencji i Statystyki, Centralna Kartoteka Żydów w Polsce 1946–1950, file no. 425.

\textsuperscript{17} These data are from 298,740 records in the electronic database of the Central Register currently under preparation. At present (January 2011), they comprise all the cards from the letters A to Ż. Lack of information about the manner of survival applies to 177,740 records.
These data show, first and foremost, that of the Polish Jews who survived, the vast majority had been in the Soviet Union.

**Survivors from the East**

Jews living in the Polish Eastern Borderlands (Kresy Wschodnie) during the war had either lived there before or were fugitives from central and western Poland, which was occupied by the German army. There were around 300,000–350,000 Jews there. Very few of them returned to the areas occupied by the Germans. Most of the Jews who survived in the east, in one way or another, found themselves on the Soviet side of the front after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war. Among them were approximately 80,000 who had been forcibly resettled in June 1940, in 269 labor camps. In total, a few operations resulted in the forced resettlement of several hundred thousand Polish citizens, mainly those considered “politically unreliable,” for example, fugitives from western and central Poland. Tens of thousands of Polish Jews were deep inside Russia in militarized labor battalions, which was another form of forced and extremely hard labor. They mostly worked in construction and mining, and after a few months many of them returned to their former places of residence in the USSR. Approximately 24,000 Jews wound up in Soviet jails and some of them were subsequently incarcerated in Soviet labor camps. Most of them were murdered shortly before the invasion of the German Army. An unknown number of Polish citizens, including Jews and others, were drafted into the Red Army. Taking part in mass flight and evacuation transports from lands occupied by the *Wehrmacht* and *Einsatzgruppen*, the remaining Polish Jews found themselves deep inside the USSR after it was invaded by the Nazis on June 22, 1941. The fate of the fugitives roaming Russia, and especially those sent to

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19 They were “one of the most repressed groups of the Stalinist system.” Ibid., p. 108.
20 Ibid., pp. 102–103.
21 Entire factories and plants, mostly those manufacturing for the war effort, and many offices and institutions, were evacuated.
forced resettlement sites, was tragic.\textsuperscript{22} For many of them, their forced stay in deportation sites ended with the amnesty for Polish citizens declared under the so-called Sikorski-Mayski Pact on July 30, 1941. Then, in a chaotic and disorganized fashion, large population groups moved toward the southern regions of the USSR, searching for the recruitment centers of General Władysław Anders’s Polish Army and a much more benign and hospitable climate. Nevertheless, they continued to die in great numbers from illness and hunger. A typhoid epidemic claimed a particularly large number of victims, and the majority of the population suffered from advanced dystrophy\textsuperscript{23} and was therefore unable to work and function independently. Only a few of these deportees managed to extricate themselves from that “inhuman land” while the war was still going on, by attaching themselves to General Anders’s Army, which was leaving the Soviet Union.

Some 4,300 Jewish soldiers\textsuperscript{24} and a few thousand civilians, including 871 Jewish children, left the USSR with General Anders’s Army. Until the end of the war, those who remained were dispersed across the USSR in over 6,000 locations, in small groups of up to 50 people.\textsuperscript{25} As of the summer of 1943,\textsuperscript{26} the Union of Polish Patriots (Związek Patriotów Polskich — ZPP), founded in Moscow, took care of them; and after July 1944, by the ZPP-affiliated Organization Committee of Polish Jews (Komitet Organizacyjny Żydów Polskich — KOŻP), chaired by Dr. Emil Sommerstein, the pre-war Zionist member of the Polish parliament. Already in September 1944, the


\textsuperscript{23} Symptoms of dystrophy include major tissue and organ changes, and sometimes even destruction, caused by malnutrition.


\textsuperscript{26} In the spring of 1943, the revelation of the Katyn Forest Massacre led to the breaking of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and the Polish government-in-exile. As a result, the Polish Embassy in Kuybyshev, which was involved in the aid work, was closed.

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Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego — PKWN) signed repatriation agreements with the Soviet Socialist Republics of Byelorussia, Lithuania, and Ukraine. The voluntary repatriations would include Poles and Jews who had held Polish citizenship until September 17, 1939. The agreement with the USSR was not signed until July 1945, and repatriation from deep inside Russia did not start until February 1946. “The family home in Poland, which apparently was lost forever, seemed to be...within reach again.” 27 From a formal point of view and in reality, the entire repatriation operation was conducted by the State Repatriation Office (Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny — PUR), which made all the decisions about the transports and their eventual destinations. While cooperation of representatives of Polish Jewry with the PUR was most probably harmonious at the higher levels, it was a lot more problematic at the local level. The Repatriation Department files contain a note dated January 29, 1946, from the head of repatriation for Lower Silesia in Rychbach (Dzierżoniów), which constitutes evidence of significant shortcomings in the organization of this complex operation. 28 The first transport of 1,186 repatriates reached Chelm in the Lublin region, which included some 500 Jews, but only 199 29 of whom were registered. They were received at the station by Jewish committee representatives. 30 A total of 25 people on

27 *Wolna Polska* (the main organ of Związek Patriotów Polskich — ZPP) 1946, no. 21–22, p. 7.

28 “In order to prevent misunderstandings or duplication, operating procedures must be agreed upon with the PUR without delay. The PUR has no official guidelines relating to cooperation with the Jewish committees to promote harmonious cooperation in various localities, due to lack of instructions in some cases and misunderstandings in others. Instructions ought to establish the forms and limits of cooperation and coordinate joint assistance efforts. I, personally, still do not know whether Jewish repatriates should be received by the PUR and, subsequently, by the Jewish committees or by the Jewish committees bypassing the PUR. Should the PUR pay allowances to Jewish repatriates directly, or through the Jewish committees indirectly? Should food be delivered by the PUR for a certain period of time and, later [by] the committees? How long should the repatriates be supported by the PUR or the committees, and how long will they be allowed to stay at the hostels, etc.?" AŻIH, Wydział Repatriacji, file no. 30/V/19.

29 There is no mention of the type of registration; perhaps these records are from the Union of Polish Patriots (ZPP) and Organization Committee of Polish Jews (KOŻP).

30 The documentation of the Repatriation Department, kept at the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (AZIH), bears witness to the scarcity of funds for these purposes. At the time, no funds had yet been forthcoming from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. The CKŻP managed to raise PLN 5 million within its own
this transport remained in Chełm — their pre-war hometown. The material condition of the repatriates was described as bad or alarming. They did not even own such basic items as spare clothes, shoes or underwear. Many of them were ill and extremely exhausted. Those on other transports were in a similar situation.

In addition to the repatriation carried out by the Soviets and the PUR, from the fall of 1944, people started returning of their own accord, since crossing the rather “porous” eastern border was not a major problem. Illegal repatriation there took place on a fairly large scale. Many repatriates, on hearing about the liberation of more Polish territories, refused to wait any longer. They also feared Poland would become the next Soviet Republic, with collectivized agriculture and nationalized industry, where Jews would not be citizens with equal rights and their safety would not be guaranteed. There were also afraid “that only the Poles would be taken back into Poland and that Jews would remain outside.” As well as civilians, some 13,000–20,000 Jews returned to Poland wearing the uniforms of Polish military units formed in the USSR. Some 20,000 Poles and Jews were demobilized in 1945 immediately after the end of the war. There were several war invalids among them and people who had lost their families.

In the beginning of 1946, a KOŻP delegation arrived in Poland to prepare for the return of Jewish repatriates. The Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce — CKŻP) established a special Repatriation Department to deal with matters pertaining to the reception of repatriates, finding temporary accommodation, assisting in settling down permanently at selected locations, granting allowances, and ensuring information and assistance with regard to a great many other matters at hand. In terms of percentages, Jews returning from the USSR constituted a rela-

community from the so-called Repatriation Fund, which was announced nationwide among Jews registered in the different committees. In total, the sum of approximately PLN 36 million, mainly from government subsidies, was spent on the repatriation operation. Moreover, food (rye, flour, preserves, and herring) was provided by the Supply Ministry and equipment allocated by the PUR, such as beds, mattresses, tents, and ten barracks were provided by the Ministry of Reconstruction.

31 For example, 19–30 percent of Polish citizens left southern Kazakhstan in this way. Ninety percent of them were returning Jews. People returned on their own until 1948. See Albin Glowacki, “Czy i dokąd wracać? Dylematy repatriacyjne Żydów polskich w ZSRR (1944–1946)” in Jasiewicz, Świat Niepożegnany, pp. 179–180.

32 AŻIH, Repatriation Department, CKŻP letter dated November 3, 1945, to Marshal Michał Rola-Żymierski, file no. 303/V/7.
tively insignificant group. Poles from the Borderlands were in a different economic situation than Jewish refugees who, in 1946, were returning from deep inside the USSR. However, regardless of who was “returning” (or being resettled), it was a long and arduous trail. These people were coming back to a country already in the process of establishing new laws and order, and with new administrative structures and institutions in place, which, for almost two years, had been governed by different rulers than those who had been in power before the war. On their return, people whose houses and apartments had not been destroyed had to face the fact that they were now occupied by others. The percentage of inhabitants of former central and western Poland (refugees from 1939) was the highest among Jews returning to Poland. This is corroborated in the lists of repatriates, which partly remain in the files of the Repatriation Department of the CKZP, and contain the repatriates’ pre-war addresses. Thus, they were the most affected by the problem of recovering their property, mainly real estate. This was also one of the most significant reasons why the transports were directed to the so-called Recovered Territories in the west of Poland that belonged to the Third Reich before the war. Vacant apartments were available there as a consequence of the resettlement of the German population. It was estimated that several million people could settle in those areas. The majority of Jews returning to Poland in 1946 were actually repatriates, i.e., people headed for their motherland, which they had been forced to leave at some point. They were going to Poland — their homeland — but not returning to

33 Ukrainians and Byelorussians who were leaving Poland headed east, and Poles, mostly from the areas beyond the Bug River, were arriving in Poland. In the years 1944–1948, more than 1.5 million people were resettled in Poland from deep inside the country and the Eastern Borderlands of the former Second Polish Republic.

34 The former were allowed to take part of their property with them (two tons per person) including furniture, tools, and other possessions, as well as livestock. Practically speaking, the latter had no property, but they had saved their lives.

35 See Barbara Kubis, Poznawcze i kształcące walory literatury dokumentu osobistego (na przykładzie relacji Polaków wysiedlonych z Kresów Wschodnich oraz Niemców wysiedlonych ze Śląska w latach 1944–1946) (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2007).

36 The planned mass resettlement of Germans from the so-called Recovered Territories began in the spring of 1946 after the signing of appropriate agreements with the authorities in the German occupation zones. At the same time, repatriation transports from the Soviet Union arrived in Poland. See Witold Sienkiewicz et al., eds., Wysiedlenia, wypędzenia i ucieczki 1939–1959. Atlas ziem Polski. Polacy, Żydzi, Niemcy, Ukraińcy (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Demart S.A., 2008), pp. 182–199.

37 Latin repatrio — returning to the homeland.
their homes, which they had had to leave as a result of resettlement. Repatriation from within Russia commenced on February 8, 1946, and ended on July 31, 1946. The total number of legal repatriates in the first half of 1946 stood at 157,420. Throughout the entire period of repatriation, despite the planned referral of people to various centers all over the country, “we witnessed people constantly searching for a suitable place to settle down.”

The repatriates were entitled, at the request of the CKŻP, to free use of all means of transportation, and local authorities were obliged to offer them assistance. These rights were not always respected. In this context, a no less essential and relevant issue was “safety for Jews which, unfortunately, leaves a lot to be desired — especially in smaller towns.” This topic will be discussed more fully later in this article.

Did the age range and professional and social profile characterize the group of repatriates from the Soviet Union? Only some of the answers are known. It was estimated that in the group of those who had survived in the east, children up to the age of 16 represented 20 percent or more (approximately 30,000). Some 20–30 percent of the repatriates were not fit for any kind of work — they were ill, old or disabled. As compared to Jews who survived on the Aryan side and in the camps, the repatriates from the east did not lose their families to the same degree, and, more often than not, they were returning with their dearest ones, even though the latter had suffered severe hardships. Often, more than 50 percent of the family members died from hunger or succumbed to various diseases. Men made up 54.5 percent of the registered repatriates. With regard to education and profession, we have only rudimentary data in the form of a poll carried

38 AŻIH, CKŻP, Repatriation Department records of transports of repatriates from the Soviet Union. Annex no. 1 to the report pertaining to the repatriation operation of Polish Jews from the Soviet Union, undated, file no. 303/V/3. At that time, more than 200 transports arrived carrying a total of 214,210 repatriates, including 136,579 Jews. A total of 86,563 people in 124 transports were sent to Lower Silesia and 28,324 in 39 transports to Szczecin. In Silesia, most people ended up in Warsaw (13,057), Rychbach (10,356), Wałbrzych (7,466), Bielawy (4,769), and Legnica (4,140).
39 AŻIH, CKŻP, Repatriation Department, file no. 303/V/4.
40 AŻIH, CKŻP, Repatriation Department, report on the repatriation of Polish Jews from the Soviet Union, file no. 303/V/3.
41 Ibid.
42 Most probably, there were some 5,000 Jewish orphans or semi-orphans living in Polish orphanages in the Soviet Union.
43 See table “Repatrianci zarejestrowani według wieku i płci w pierwszym półroczu 1946 (Repatriates registered according to age and gender in the first half of 1946), in Zarys
out by the Polish Embassy in Japan among 1,656 Jews, fugitives going to the eastern voivodeships (provinces) of Poland’s Second Republic.\textsuperscript{44} Their social structure was as follows: 40.2 percent in the liberal professions, 32.6 percent manufacturers and merchants, 13.5 percent white-collar workers, 11.1 percent craftsmen, 1.8 percent army staff of various ranks, 0.7 percent farmers, and 0.1 percent clergy. Only a few people could afford a trip to Japan. It was estimated that, as a consequence of their stay in the Soviet Union, the percentage of people with professional skills increased from 30 to 70 percent. They acquired skills in professions until then rarely carried out by Jews, for example, miners or steel mill workers. According to recurring views in reports by KOŻP (and, subsequently, CKŻP) representatives, Jews in the Soviet Union had already gone through a process of “becoming more productive” and were highly skilled craftsmen and workers in various fields. Actually, these data may also be viewed in a different light, namely, as proof of professional and social degradation.

The claim relating to the Jews’ “unproductive way of life” was one of the most durable elements of antisemitic stereotypes in Poland. Professional structure of the Jewish population differed from the general Polish society and therefore, one of the main objectives of the state authorities’ and CKŻP’s policy was “productivization” of Jews, which was understood as training many of them for “productive” professions — an idea shared by both communists and socialist-Zionists — but did not include trading. According to one view that was voiced:

Antisemitic sentiments are present even among the progressive element in the working class.... In order to combat all-pervasive antisemitism in Polish society, antisemitism among workers, farmers or members of the intelligentsia has to be countered. The lack of productiveness of Jews in Poland is a breeding ground for antisemitic incidents.\textsuperscript{45}

Anticipating problems against this backdrop, members of the Union of Polish Patriots (Związek Patriotów Polskich — ZPP) claimed that “Jewish
\textsuperscript{44} See Elżbieta Hornowa, “Powrót Żydów polskich z ZSRR oraz działalność opiekuńcza Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce,” BŻIH, no. 1–2 (1985), pp. 107–108.
\textsuperscript{45} Roman Zambrowski’s statement on pogroms. Minutes of the session of the Central Committee of the Polish Workers’ Party held on August 16, 1945, Zeszyty Historyczne (Paris), vol. 24 (1973), p. 142.
citizens returning from the Soviet Union wished to leave for Poland, where they would demonstrate they were a creative element of a new Poland.”

In reality, as a result of the abrupt changes in various aspects of life due to the war, a relatively large number of people had to change their professions. Indeed, some professions from before World War II had practically disappeared. However, during the period from August 1944 to July 1946, Jews were very often discriminated against in the labor market in state enterprises on racial grounds. This is evidenced by numerous official letters, complaints, and grievances submitted by the concerned parties from all over Poland. The Lower Silesia voivode reported on “the opening of various institutions but only for those without a strikingly Semitic appearance.”

Officials at various levels described “work-shirking elements” in offices and workshops in Jewish circles and “a general propensity for lucrative trading.” On the one hand, in a major company, Polish workers opposed hiring Jews, but, on the other hand, “people were rounded up on the streets for work in mines” in some places, and granting available apartments to repatriates was made contingent on their consent to work in the mines.

During the initial period, there was an additional problem in Lower Silesia due to the Germans who still lived there, and, more often than not, held high-ranking positions in various enterprises. Harassment “and discrimination of Jews in the area of employment” was an everyday occurrence.

Jews who survived in Russia mostly managed to preserve their tradition, religion, and command of Yiddish, which they spoke among themselves:

Most Polish Jews speak Yiddish and consider Yiddish to be their mother tongue, but at the same time they feel attached to Poland, support the struggle for its liberation, are committed to the ZPP’s ideological platform, and want to return to their homeland.

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46 AAN, Związek Patriotów Polskich, no. 216/34, sheet 44.
48 Natalia Aleksiun, “Nielegalna emigracja Żydów z Polski w latach 1945–1947,” BŻIH, no. 2–3 (1995–1996), pp. 71–79. In a letter dated May 28, 1946, a Repatriation Department official reported about “unheard of things” happening in Łódź because of PUR employees: repatriates were stripped of their identity papers; their luggage was taken away; and they were put in isolation in warehouses. They also received the promise that, as skilled laborers “selected” on the basis of their occupation, they would be sent abroad to the West. See AŻIH, CKŻP, Wydział Repatriacji, file no. 303/V/4.
50 Głowacki, “Czy i dokąd wracać,” p. 165.
“Those who survived in the east”51 included a substantial group of teachers, writers, journalists, artists, actors, and social and political activists. They were mostly employed by the Jewish institutions and organizations in Poland.52

What did the survivors from the east know about what was going on in Poland and what was the source of their knowledge? They were the only ones among the survivors who were not eyewitnesses to the Holocaust and were beyond its immediate reach. Certainly, the facts reaching them were hard to grasp, and psychological defense mechanisms made full comprehension impossible. In such circumstances, the homeland (image, memories, longing, and expectations) was idealized. Their point of reference was the image of pre-war Poland, and they could certainly not imagine a new Poland “without Jews” and the processes that had led to this. The facts about the Holocaust were too shocking, drastic, and unbelievable to be absorbed and “accepted,” and the information disseminated was ascribed to Soviet propaganda. Mosze Berger reminisced:

A friend showed me a newspaper piece in which the Jewish writer Ilya Erenburg describes the horrible atrocities committed by the Nazis. He writes about the mass extermination of Jews, death camps, crematoria, gas chambers, where entire transports of displaced people — men, women, and children — were annihilated. We reread the article a few times and could not believe it. We knew the Nazis were vile, but such mass crimes? We were of the opinion that this whole thing was just dirty Soviet propaganda. We were angry with Ilya Erenburg for giving in to the Soviet authorities and writing such hard-to-believe stories. Nevertheless, this article kept us sleepless at night. In the sovkhoz (state-owned farm), everybody had already heard about this article and people walked around with their heads hanging low. And what if it was true?53

The same author claimed that the news stemmed exclusively from the Soviet Information Agency, TASS.54 Therefore, everybody had very up-to-

53 Mosze Berger, W taigach Sybiru (Olkusz: Drukarnia NEON, 2005), p. 34.
54 The State Archive in Rzeszów contains a significant collection of letters written by Pol-
date information about the westward advance of the Red Army, and news from the front about the liberation of various regions and cities reached the sovkhozes very quickly. Parcels and letters, all carrying some information, started arriving from Poland and also letters from soldiers at the front. The Organizing Committee of Polish Jews had no branches in the field or an organized network of local committees. Consequently, the main source of information from Poland was from articles printed in Wolna Polska, the main organ of the ZPP, as well as in periodicals such as Nowe Widokręgi, Patriot Polski, and later, in the Biuletyn — a KOŻP publication published also in Yiddish (only a few editions were printed in Polish). It provided information about the CKŻP, the situation in ravaged Poland, the great hardships, and also the pogroms in Rzeszów and Kraków. Although this was far from encouraging news, it did not deter the majority from making the decision to return, but, as a result, some people viewed Poland as only the first stage of their post-war wandering. Those who returned to Poland were offered assistance “but just a modicum due to the shortage of necessary funds.” Once again, Mosze Berger recalls:

Painful sights. Burnt-out houses, ruins. East-bound trains ride past us. Mostly soldiers. Train stations swarm with people. Frightened children ask for alms.... We cross the border. We are already in Poland.... At the station in Radom (near Olkusz), where the train made a stop, a local policeman beat up a Jew with a beard from our transport. They mocked us. Where have you been since Hitler did not manage to burn you? Our hearts are full of anger, disappointment, and humiliation.

Jews returning from Russia and other places were received reluctantly. We can read about it in official reports and accounts: “...they do not encounter any warmth after many years of wandering.”

ish Jews from deep inside the Soviet Union to the local municipal authorities inquiring about their families. Among others, it was mentioned in these letters that the news about the liberation of Rzeszów had been given by TASS.

55 A few copies of Biuletyn have been kept by Bernard Mark. See AŻIH, Bernard Mark’s legacy, part II, file no. 397. The small number of copies (200) made it impossible to reach everybody, although the Biuletyn was posted in the ZPP offices and read aloud in public.


57 Berger, W tajgach, p. 138.

58 AŻIH, CKŻP, Repatriation Department, minutes of the Regional Jewish Committee
train with the repatriates was arrested for his antisemitic behavior. Since then, the Security Police (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa — UB) would send guards whenever a new transport arrived. “59 “[PUR employees] refuse to issue free tickets to Jewish repatriates traveling west... some officials indulge in unworthy and mocking remarks aimed at Jewish applicants.”60 Many of the returning Jews’ memories and narratives refer to the Poles’ “greetings” as characterized by negative bafflement and surprise: “So you are still alive?” “Still”— meaning in spite of everything, unexpectedly, and unnecessarily. So it was a most embarrassing situation. One of the descriptions of the experiences of returning Jews touches on a most significant aspect from the point of view of inter-human relations, namely nonverbal contact:

Going quite a distance from the unharmed Praga neighborhood through nightmarish and weird ruins of Warsaw, I was once again convinced that such “glances” were not only present at the airport and in dreams. They were accompanied by a cynical grin and a comment. The Polish nation honored Jews who had miraculously escaped the clutches of the Nazi beasts and their Polish helpers by calling us “leftovers,” uttered with particular derision and disdain.61

The repatriates were returning to Poland in a period described as “pogrom-like.”62 It is estimated that, after the war, the so-called train incidents alone resulted in the death of approximately 200 Jews.63 The perpetrators of these crimes escaped punishment. Two accounts follow of experiences on repatriation trains arriving in Poland. This was the extra “luggage” Jewish survivors had to carry, in addition to building a new life and shaping their relations with Polish society:

conference with the director of the State Repatriation Office, citizen Krysa, on February 20, 1946, file no. 303/V/13.
59 AŻIH, Repatriation Department, minutes of meeting, May 8, 1946, file no. 303/V/13.
60 AŻIH, CKŻP, Repatriation Department, file no. 303/V/7.
On January 8, 1946, we were traveling from Lwów on a repatriation train to Kraków. Each carriage had some 18–20 passengers. There were four Jews in our carriage. In Tarnów, a gang of young people burst into the carriages looking for Jews. They beat people unconscious and robbed their property. The person in charge of the train was a middle-aged Jew, an attorney whose name we did not know at the time. The hoodlums swung round and threw him out of the moving train and robbed his property — a few suitcases.64

As for me, in Płaszów, I wanted to move to another carriage where I had friends. On the platform, while walking alongside the train cars, somebody suddenly hit me on the back of my head with his fist and I heard yelling: “Beat the Jews.” Instinctively, I started running forward but they chased me and kept on beating me. I turned around to reach my car but at this very moment they held me back, knocked me down onto the ground, beat and kicked me. My glasses fell, they hurt my nose, my forehead and head were swollen. Right next to me stood a Płaszów policeman on duty at the station and a railroad guard armed with a rifle but they did not even attempt to help me.... I was supposed to go on to Katowice, but I was afraid, so I got off in Kraków.65

Returnees from the Camps

The second-largest group of survivors consisted of camp inmates who had been either liberated from forced labor or concentration camps located either on former General Government (GG — Generalne Gubernatorstwo) territory, or in Germany or Austria.66 The number of fugitives from death

64 AŻIH, Testimonies, Mordko Berger’s testimony, file no. 301/1357.
65 AŻIH, Testimonies, Dawid Grünbaum’s testimony, file no. 301/1357.
66 Small groups survived in camps located elsewhere, for example in Czechoslovakia. The Jewish Information Agency reported the return to Bialystok of a group of more than 150 Jews from camps in Eastern Prussia. See BŻAP, no. 20/30, March 25, 1945.
camps (Chelmno nad Nerem, Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka) was extremely low and, furthermore, each one survived until the end of the war under different circumstances, but mostly hidden by Poles. Jews were imprisoned in labor and concentration camps from the very beginning of the occupation. The exploitation and physical destruction as a result of hard labor was one of the “fundamental components of the anti-Jewish German policy in the occupied territories.” On GG territory, all Jews aged 14–60 had to do hard labor, but the age limits could vary according to the German’s discretion and needs. On GG territory alone, there were at least 491 labor camps to which Jews were sent. These camps were operated by the GG

Only a few survived in the Chelmno camp: Szymon (Szmul) Srebrnik from Łódź, Mieczysław (Mordka) Żurawski from Włocławek, Michał (Mechel) Podchlebnik from Koło, and Abram Roj from Izbica Kujańska. After the war, some of them submitted testimonies and were witnesses at the trials of the camp staff. A few other fugitives from Chelmno did not survive until the liberation. Among them, most well-known was Jakub Grojnowski (Szlama Ber Winer) alias “Szlamek,” whose testimony is in the Ringelblum Archive. He perished in Bełżec.

Only three Jewish fugitives from the camp lived to see the liberation: Rudolf Reder (he left behind an extensive testimony), Chaim Hirschman, and Rabbi Israel Szapiro. The latter spent only three days in the camp and then managed to escape by hiding under a pile of clothes being sent out of the camp. Hirschman was shot dead after the war in circumstances never conclusively clarified. See Dariusz Libionka, “Losy Chaima Hirszmana jako przyczynek do refleksji nad pamięcią o Zagładzie i powojennymi stosunkami polsko-żydowskimi,” Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i Materiały, vol. 7 (2006), pp. 5–23.

The names of 58 Jews, ex-Sobibór inmates, who survived until the end of the war, are known. Obviously, they included not only Polish Jews. This group is made up of members of the camp resistance movement who, on October 14, 1943, organized a rebellion and succeeded in escaping. Among them was one of the leaders of the uprising, Leon (Lejb) Felhendler, who was shot dead in Lublin on April 2, 1945 by unknown perpetrators and for unknown reasons. See Adam Kopciowski, “Zajścia antyżydowskie na Lubelszczyźnie w pierwszych latach po drugiej wojnie światowej,” Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały, vol. 3 (2007), pp. 191–193.

It is estimated that some 100 male Jews, among them 14 Poles, may have survived the camp. A precise list of names was never drawn up. Just as in Sobibór, they almost all participated in the armed rebellion that broke out on July 2, 1943. Before that, very few individuals had managed to get out of the camp. Among them was Jankiel Wiernik, author of an extensive testimony that was published during the war.


administration (including the Labor Office), the police, and the SS to serve the needs of the armaments industry and the military in general, the Ostbahn (Eastern Railroad), and companies in various branches of industry. Jews earmarked for work in camps “were selected” for extermination from among ghetto inmates and those arriving on transports. Through selection, only young people and those in their prime, consequently fit for work, were left alive. Often, such selections on GG territory would also take place during ghetto liquidation operations in the framework of the “Reinhardt operation” (1942). Those left alive would be massed in so-called secondary ghettos (residual) or dispatched to work camps. A Jewish work camp survivor described “how he was torn away from his wife and children by the Germans. They were taken to the ovens while he was sent to a work camp.”

In 1943, approximately 45,000 Jews were workers in SS-operated companies on GG territory. However, over time, the number of work camps employing Jews decreased due to the high mortality rate among them because of the grueling work pace they were subjected to, and the living conditions that did not provide even the most basic needs, which were part of the Nazi policy aimed at achieving “a Final Solution to the Jewish question.” The residual ghettos were gradually liquidated and all the surviving and “superfluous” Jews were shot in mass executions. On November 3 and 4, 1943, approximately 42,000 Jewish inmates and forced laborers from the Lublin district were murdered in Operation Erntefest (Harvest Festival). Basically, after this date, there were no more Jews left in the Majdanek concentration camp. Only inmates holding fake Aryan identity papers or who had managed to escape at an earlier stage survived. There were also people with fake Aryan papers in the other camps. Thus, the only reason some of the Jewish inmates survived was because the camp authorities did not realize they were Jewish. Another insignificant yet specific group of survivors — Jews posing as Aryans — who were unable to find shelter because they were hounded by blackmailers, volunteered for work on Third Reich territory.

Polish Jews were held in concentration camps on GG territory (e.g., Lublin, known as Majdanek), on territories annexed by the Third Reich (e.g., Auschwitz-Birkenau), and on Third Reich territory (e.g., Gross-Rosen and

73 Berger, W tajgach, p. 142.
The main reason that camp inmates were moved from one camp to another was overpopulation at the mother camp and a lack of on-site work for the inmates. Thus, during the occupation, thousands of Jews and Poles ended up at Buchenwald, Mauthausen-Gusen, Dachau, Neuengamme, Natzweiler, Flossenbürg, Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, Bergen-Belsen, and many other camps. Toward the end of the war, thousands more arrived there on evacuation transports called “the death marches.” Some inmates were deported to Gross-Rosen sub-camps in Lower Silesia and concentration camps in Germany. A significant number of them perished during the last months of the war. The total number of Jewish inmates from Poland who were held and liberated in the various camps (forced labor camps as well as concentration camps) on former GG territory and in other countries is not known, since research to establish these figures has not been undertaken to date. The current data at our disposal are only estimates and more accurate data are only available for several camps. It is assumed that in concentration camps outside Poland (the 1939 borders), some 50,000–80,000 Polish inmates were liberated, including Polish Jews. Based on Krystyna Kersten’s research, it is known that Jews from various countries, including Poland,

76 From Majdanek, only a total of 46,000 inmates left for work in camps in Germany. Zofia Leszczyńska, “Transporty więźniów z obozu na Majdanku,” Zeszyty Majdanka, vol. 5, p. 131.

77 These marches were the most tragic chapters in the history of the camps. The SS men who were escorting the evacuation columns would indiscriminately murder inmates en route, under various circumstances. For some, the evacuation ordeal would last up to a couple of months, during which they would be sent from one camp to another. On Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler’s orders, the “death marches” took place during the harsh winter of 1945. The order given to all concentration camp commanders was: “Surrender is not an option. The camp must be evacuated. No prisoner must fall into the hands of the enemy,” quoted by Danuta Drywa, Zagłada Żydów w obozie koncentracyjnym Stutthof 1939–1945 (Gdansk: Wydawnictwo Gdańskie, 2001), p. 297.

78 Only a few of the Stutthof inmates who were evacuated by sea reached Germany, Denmark, and Sweden. The others perished in the waters of the Baltic Sea.


80 For example, 9,000 Polish citizens were held in Dachau, 3,800 in Buchenwald, and 3,600 in Mauthausen.
constituted the majority of inmates in all the camps. However, how many returned and how many remained in displaced persons (DP) camps in Germany and emigrated from there to other countries is not known. One of the CKŻP Repatriation Department’s documents quotes the figure of newly arrived “former camp inmates” as 16,000, registered in various voivodeship committees in mid-1945. Consequently, tens of thousands of Polish Jews were freed from German camps. Most of the surviving Jewish forced laborers had worked in the gunpowder and ammunition factories that belonged to the huge, privately owned company Hugo Schneider Aktiengesellschaft (Hasag). There were factories in Skarżysko Kamienna and Kielce, with four in Częstochowa. Actually, due to the swift offensive of the Red Army and the liberation of approximately 5,000 prisoners from the Częstochowa Hasag in January 1945, immediately after the war, Częstochowa became one of the cities with a large Jewish population. In August 1945, 3,470 people were registered there. In camps in Lower Silesia, approximately 15,000 Jews lived to see the liberation. Some of them set off on the journey back to their homes, which they had left behind in various Western European countries, whereas some 7,000 came from Poland. In Dzierżoniów, these Jews immediately organized the Mutual Aid Committee of Former Inmates (also known as the Aid Committee for Jews from Concentration Camps), which, subsequently, became the Jewish Committee. As early as June 1945, the first conference of Jewish committees in Lower Silesia took place. The memorandum to this conference claimed that “their aspiration was to start

81 AŻIH, CKŻP, Repatriation Department, file no. 303/V/7, document dated June 2, 1945. Someone wrote by hand the number 5,300, and the total number of camp inmates was 22,200. These data are quoted in Albert Stankowski’s article, “How Many Polish Jews Survived the Holocaust?” in this volume.

82 The total number of Jewish inmates employed there between 1942 and 1945 exceeded 42,000. Before the end of the war, some of the workers were deported to Buchenwald, Gross-Rosen, Ravensbruck, and to Leipzig, where the Hasag Company (Hugo Schneider Aktiengesellschaft Metalwarenfabrik) was situated. See Jacek Wijaczka and Grzegorz Miernik, “Żydowscy robotnicy przymusowi w zakładach zbrojeniowych HASAG w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie w czasie II wojny światowej” in Jacek Wijaczka and Grzegorz Miernik, eds., Z przeszłości Żydów polskich. Polityka-gospodarka-kultura-społeczeństwo (Krakow: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2005), pp. 181–203.

83 According to the AŻIH, CKŻP, WEiS Numerical register of Jews in Poland dated August 15, 1945, file no. 44, the figures were: Łódź (16,801), Kraków (4,262), Lublin (3,400), Warsaw (2,392), and cities and towns in Lower and Upper Silesia: Sosnowiec, Rychbach (Dzierżoniów), Wałbrzych, Będzin, and Katowice.

84 On the premises of the “Sport Schule” concentration camp.
a new, creative, and useful life.” 85 Those who were strong enough set off on the journey back to Poland almost immediately after liberation of the camp, returning alone or in small groups, without money and in striped camp garb. They returned on foot, on horse-drawn carriages, in military vehicles or by train. Halina Birenbaum, 15 years old at the time, and liberated from the Neustadt-Glave camp, reminisced:

The Russian Army [soldiers] who liberated the camp provided us with bread and meat. We were also ordered to set off as soon as possible.... I walked in a group of some dozen former female inmates. It took a few weeks. At times, we would hitch a ride with Russian soldiers and, at other times, we would manage to lay our hands on a German horse-drawn carriage.... We would sleep in barns by the road — huddling tightly together to protect ourselves from being raped. The soldiers were intoxicated by victory and numbed by alcohol.... Finally..., with Celina, my friend from Auschwitz, I got on a train to Warsaw. Once again, I was standing on a Warsaw street.... 86

A great many people made their way to Kraków. There, at the voivodeship office, a Special Commissioner’s Office for Relief to Concentration and Labor Camp Inmates 87 was formed. After May 1945, a few hundred needy former camp inmates arrived in Kraków daily. The task of organizing the returnees from the West was eventually also placed in the hands of the PUR (from June 23, 1945). Nevertheless, it still considered dealing with repatriation from the Soviet Union and the displacement of Germans as a top priority. The PUR had to get a few aircraft, trucks, and special sanitary trains for shuttle transport between Poland and Germany’s occupation zones. 88 However, according to Zofia Wóycicka, “official records bear witness to organizational chaos and public administration inertia in this respect.” 89

87 Other administrative bodies and initiatives were also established, for example, the Inter-Ministerial Commission of Care for Concentration Camp Ex-Inmates, or the Committee for Assistance to Those Returning from Germany.
89 Zofia Wóycicka, “Przerwana żałoba. Spory wokół pamięci i upamiętniania...
Evidently, the issue at hand was to continue to provide care for people getting out of prison and camps, and organize their return. She also writes that “contrary to our contemporary perception, concentration camp survivors were not always considered the group requiring the most immediate assistance,” and she continues:

Lack of organized transports caused many former inmates and forced laborers to feel embittered and strengthened their conviction that their mother country took no interest in them. Numerous complaints and grievances were lodged with Polish authorities in this matter.

CKŻP representatives, who had very limited funds at their disposal, also sounded the alarm:

As a matter of fact, the wave of returning former camp inmates caught us unawares and completely unprepared for their arrival. Thousands of barefoot, famished, and ragged people have already flooded the country’s cities and we are unable to offer them even the most basic assistance.

“Complete indifference” of Polish society toward people returning from the camps, regardless of their nationality, was also observed. In the meantime, a significant number of inmates were not able to leave the camps on their own, let alone commence a new life and start working in the free world. More than half of them required comprehensive care and immediate medical treatment, as they were extremely exhausted and emaciated. They were not even able to move on their own. We know that a number of them died shortly after liberation. Huge provisional hospitals were set up on the grounds of the camps, as, for example, in the former Auschwitz-Birkenau


90 By an Act adopted by the Ministry of the Provisional Government of the Polish Republic on May 16, 1945, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare was entrusted with the mission of organizing reception points at the border and stop-over points throughout the country. Assistance was also organized by the Polish Red Cross (Polski Czerwony Krzyż — PCK); AŻIH, CKŻP, Wydział Repatriacji, file no. 1.


92 AŻIH, CKŻP, Repatriation Department, CKŻP letter dated June 2, 1945 (without a specified addressee), file no. 303/V/7.
concentration camp. It was managed by Russian sanitary services and the Polish Red Cross. Some 4,500 inmates were admitted, mostly Jews, 960 of whom were Polish citizens.93 After a few months, they left the camp hospital on a few scores of transports organized by the Soviet military authorities.

Until 1959, no thorough research was carried out in Poland concerning the former inmates and their situation. A medical team from Kraków, led by Antoni Kępiński and Stanisław Kłodziński, was the first to initiate such research and publish the results. They described a sequence of psychosomatic symptoms, defined as the “concentration camp syndrome.”94 The most widespread disease among former inmates was tuberculosis, which, in most cases, due to the lack of access to medication, was incurable. After returning to their cities and towns, Jews were left to fend for themselves and had to rely on assistance from local Jewish committees.95

I remember this group very clearly because we passed by there every day.... The Jews would sit in front of the house, gaunt and pale. It was pitiful to see. How many were there? In front of the house, they were about ten.96

They were subjected to the same kind of harassment and exclusion, or at least physical and psychological isolation, as all the other Holocaust survivors. They were neither wanted nor accepted by most of Polish society.

A group of Jews numbering 20 people who had survived the Auschwitz death camp returned to Rejowiec, which was their hometown. After a few days’ stay, these Jews received written threats to leave Rejowiec immediately. Fearing that the threats would be carried out, the Jews left and currently live in Chelm in the [Jewish] committee house.97

Jews returning from the camps attempted to join various all-Polish organizations and associations of war veterans set up after the summer of 1944. The largest of them, the Polish Union of Former Political Prisoners in Nazi Prisons and Concentration Camps (Polski Związek Byłych Więźniów Politycznych Hitlerowskich Więzień i Obozów Koncentracyjnych — PZBWP), was formed during the founding congress on February 2–3, 1946. The Union had a few hundred thousand members, enjoyed the patronage of Józef Cyrankiewicz, and its press mouthpiece was the periodical Wolni Ludzie. Admission criteria were not clearly defined, and “lack of clarity with regard to the rules of admission to the Union could be and was most certainly used on several occasions to discriminate against persons of Jewish origin.”

For example, Zygmunt J., a former Mauthausen inmate, received an answer to the effect that inmates like him “who were taken from the ghettos to the camps would most probably not be verified but it was not yet quite certain.” As a matter of fact, a Jew residing in Wejherowo and former Stutthof inmate received a negative answer with the words: “Do not verify.” The grounds for the decision to ban him from joining were as follows: “because the candidate is of non-Aryan origin.” Furthermore, he was informed that this was in compliance with the Union’s new charter. The Dziennik Bałtycki daily newspaper reported on this, under the meaningful title “Wykonawcy testamentu Götha” (Executors of Göth’s Will). It did not mean a complete and irrevocable exclusion of Jews from the organization, however admission was conditional on providing evidence that a candidate had spent more than three months in a camp, and that, before imprisonment, had manifested an unfriendly and hostile attitude toward the Germans. Prior to imprisonment in camps and under penalty of severe retribution or even capital punishment, all Jews were forced to reside in closed-off ghettos. PZBWP activists pretended to be unaware of this fact. Consequently, Jews formed their own organizations and only on very rare occasions would they participate together with Poles to celebrate anniversaries or other ceremonies.

98 Wóycicka, “Przerwana żałoba,” p. 91.
99 Ibid.
100 Leopold Amon Göth (Dec. 11, 1908–Sept. 13, 1946), Hauptsturmführer-SS and the Commandant of the KL Płaszów near Kraków, who was sentenced to death by hanging after the war by the Supreme National Tribunal of Poland.
Those Who Survived on the Aryan Side

Substantial literature is available on those who survived on the so-called Aryan side and on various aspects of the fate of those who managed to survive in spite of German regulations: punishments, round-ups, ambushes, denunciations, and betrayals. It is not possible to establish the exact number of people who lived on the Aryan side during the war, i.e., on the forbidden area. In this way, probably tens of thousands survived on GG territory, maybe some 30,000–60,000, but certainly fewer than the survivors in labor and concentration camps. This group of survivors, first and foremost, included those who continued using their Aryan papers after the war and did not revert to their former family names. Sometimes they would conceal their identity even from the people closest to them. After the war, they chose not to register with any Jewish institutions, breaking with their tradition and opting to become Polish. They were motivated by fear, a drive to protect their dearest ones, often their children, from suffering a similar fate. Franciszek Morgenstern would remember the moment when he was about to reveal his and his closest ones’ identities to Capt. Eichenbojm, one of the Russian soldiers who liberated them:

“We are Jewish,” I said. He looked at me incredulously, but regained his composure and said, “Take my advice and become Polish.”

There were other Jewish survivors who were not included in any statistical records of Jewish institutions and were assimilated before the war to such an extent that they did not feel any dilemma about belonging to the Polish world. They were just themselves — while they did not deny being Jewish,


102 All the percentage indicators of “the mode of survival,” which are accessible thanks to the CKŻP’s Department of Registration and Statistics, show that those who survived in the camps were the largest group.

they also did not outwardly manifest this fact. Thus, approximately 6–10 percent of the survivors did not appear in any statistical records. There was yet another group, the size is hard to assess, which functioned on “the borders of both worlds.” Among Poles, they would use their Aryan personal data from their time spent in hiding, while, at the same time, registering with the Jewish committees, where they would give both their Polish and Jewish names.104

All studies concerning those who survived on the Aryan side list “requirements” they had to meet in order to do this. Among these requirements was a “good” appearance, which meant looking non-Jewish (for example, light-colored hair for women, blue eyes, and a mustache and other Slavic facial features), contact with Poles (the closest and most trustworthy were the safest), and money. In addition, those who had survived on the so-called “surface,” using documents with a false name and lived like Poles under the German occupation, had to have an excellent command of Polish and be familiar with Catholic traditions and customs. This required completely concealing their real identity and entailed considerable psychological stress, the consequences of which often persisted long after the war.105 Those hiding “under the surface,” the generally accepted terminology coined by Emanuel Ringelblum106 during the war, had to overcome many difficulties and obstacles, such as looking for hiding places, making money or finding food. All these people were “easy prey” for Gestapo snitches, the Blue Police, common extortionists (szmalcowniks), and blackmailers who were particularly numerous in Warsaw.107 Those who depended in some way on the assistance or mediation of Poles experienced both human goodness and also meanness. They encountered many varied and, at times, extreme reactions and attitudes. Did surviving among the Poles have any effect on this group’s desire to remain in Poland after the war and to try to reconstruct their lives there? Were the decisions to settle down in post-war Poland completely unrelated to their experiences during the occupation and to how and where they survived? As a rule, these decisions were individual and not collective.

104 See Melchior, Zagłada a tożsamość.
105 Ibid.
Yet another group of survivors in GG territory shaped their destiny and saved their own lives by hiding in shelters and family camps in forests or by forming partisan groups. Individual shelters and family camps were formed in the second half of 1941 in the Borderlands and the partisan movement developed in the spring of 1942, often in cooperation with Soviet units in the Lublin, Galicia, Vilna, and Byelorussia provinces. Several groups (although smaller numbers than in the east) operated in the forests of the Kielce province. As a rule, the Polish resistance movement did not admit Jewish partisans. As a matter of fact, some units of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa — AK) or National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne — NSZ) would even go as far as murdering Jews hiding in forests and on farms.\footnote{Yisrael Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski, Unequal Victims: Poles and Jews during World War II (New York: Holocaust Library, 1986), pp. 120–134; Aleksandra Bieńkowska, “Partyzantka polska lat 1942–1944 w relacji żydowskiej,” Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały, vol. 1 (2005), pp. 148–164; Alina Skibińska and Dariusz Libionka, “Przysięgam walczyć o wolną i potężną Polskę, wykonywać rozkazy przelożonych, tak mi dopomoż Bóg. Żydzi w AK. Epizod z Ostrowca Świętokrzyskiego,” Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały, vol. 4 (2008), pp. 287–323.} Based on recent research, the same applies to the Polish Peasant Battalions (Bataliony Chłopskie — BCh) and People’s Army (Armia Ludowa — AL). However, there were some extremely rare exceptions like the GL/AL units, which did accept Jews. Independent Jewish units, usually numbering up to a few score members, faced severe scarcity of provisions because farmers would not voluntarily provide them with food. As a last resort, Teresa Prekerowa writes, theft became the order of the day, often at gunpoint, “which often led to fights and rows.”\footnote{Teresa Prekerowa, “Wojna i okupacja,” in Tomaszewski, ed., Najnowsze dzieje Żydów, pp. 364–370.} There were also internecine skirmishes among groups of partisans from different political factions and Jewish units were attacked because they were considered to be Communist. In addition, members of the Jewish Fighting Organization from Warsaw and Częstochowa were in the forests. In areas liberated as early as 1944, Jewish partisans very often left the forests, joined the Polish Army, and went on fighting, while some were assigned to serve with the Civic Militia. This was the case in Lublin, where Israeli researchers claim that 2,000 armed partisans (in GG territory, and 3,000 people wandering about in the forests held out until the end of the war. The rest perished.\footnote{Ibid., p. 369.} According to Prekerowa’s estimates, the number of Polish Jews who survived in
partisan units and in family shelters in the forests did not exceed 15,000. After the war, they formed their own organizations of veterans, the first of which was the Union of Jewish Partisans, in November 1944. In April 1947, the first nationwide convention of the Union of Jewish Participants in the Struggle against Fascism took place. Two years later, this organization was dissolved and their members were automatically incorporated into the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację –ZBOWiD). Among them were also other Holocaust survivors, for example, Jewish officers who had been taken prisoner and held in German POW camps. “They were not subject to extermination but only...discrimination.”

Post-War Everyday Life

The scale and ruthlessness of the murder of Jews in the early years after the war baffle many researchers, along with the attitude of the Polish Catholic Church toward the Jewish problem, the issue of equal rights for Jews, and the reaction of Polish society to it. All these concerns are naturally related to the Poles’ attitude (of various social or professional strata, centers of power, institutions, and organizations) toward Jewish Holocaust survivors. How did the Jews assess it? Survivors’ experiences, feelings, impressions,

111 A complete register of the members of the Union of Jewish Partisans was not preserved and the list of names at the AZIH contains 272 names. See Zygmunt Hoffman, “Związek Partyzantów Żydów,” BŻIH, no. 2 (1975), pp. 49–55.
112 August Grabski, Żydowski ruch kombatancki w Polsce w latach 1944–1949 (Warsaw: Trio, 2002).
113 An organization that came into being in 1949 through forced unification of 11 organizations of war veterans and former inmates of Nazi camps that existed at the time and were active from the end of the war. Until 1989, it was politically and organizationally subordinated to the Polish United Workers’ Party.
114 See Danuta Kisielewicz, “Żydzi polscy w obozach jenieckich Rzeszy Niemieckiej w czasie II wojny światowej,” BŻIH, no. 3 (1999), pp. 3–11.
115 See Andrzej Żbikowski’s article, “The Post-War Wave of Pogroms and Killings,” in this volume.
On returning from the camp, I found our town completely deserted. I saw houses that were not houses, streets that were not streets, and people who were not people. There was also a goat that was not a goat, a bony nag that was not a nag, flowers that were not flowers, and a sky that was not a sky. I wandered down streets that were not streets, walked around a non-market square, with a non-church, a non-city hall and only one non-bench. On Grobelna Street, there was a synagogue that was not there, but it was the only one that existed for me like our one-story house, which was not there. On the road that led to the village of Zagródek I met myself.

Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska analyzed descriptions of returns to hometowns in many accounts published in Jewish memorial books. The picture that emerges is gripping and at the same time full of nostalgia. Former places of residence had become a permanent fixture in memory, imagination, thoughts, and feelings. The most recurrent terms in these descriptions are empty, burnt-out, destroyed, defiled, desecrated, alienated, cold, homeless, lonely, lost, and several others with a similar emotional connotation. As the author writes:

To return was a natural impulse. People returned to find out whether any family members or friends survived, to see their homes, to decide what to do next.... The lack of familiar Jewish faces [in the streets] makes most survivors feel alien and out of place. Some declare that these towns no longer exist for Jews.

Most often, people would travel by train, sometimes they would walk for days, and, not infrequently, for the sake of safety, would travel incognito or “disguised as Poles” outright. There were descriptions of short returns, visits lasting just a few days, and failed attempts to stay. The main reason people

120 Ibid., p. 5, 9.
returned was a great longing for their place of birth, the family home, and familiar streets. But they were met by stillness, emptiness, an absence of Jews, a lack of people, and ruins — “only cats, dogs, [and] chickens.” A sheet of paper was preserved among the Central Jewish Historical Commission (Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna — CŻKH) documents containing a list of towns that were “alive” and inhabited by Jews and “dead” towns without any Jews left. Desecrated synagogues, ritual baths, and cemeteries made a shocking impression on those returning. This led to astonishment, anger, sadness, regret, and, sometimes, a desire for retribution and revenge for their unfair fate. In an account recorded right after the war for the CŻKH, Andrzej Czajkowski (whose real name was Andrzej Krauthamer), an extremely sensitive and talented teenager at that time, described his feelings in an unusually mature manner:

The [war movies] fill me with fear — terrible fear from which I shall never be cured.... I have a very clear recollection of those sleepless nights so full of apathy. However, under this apathy there was desperation, under the desperation there was jealousy, under the jealousy hate and under that rebellion.... I wish I was adult and able to exact revenge for my mother, for that boy [who was murdered by Germans], for all the misdeeds I have witnessed.123

The author mentions his most intense experiences during the war — separation from his mother, the burning of Warsaw, and his feeling of helplessness at the sight of Jews being beaten up by Germans. In an article dealing with the cultural repercussions of World War II, Alina Cała refers to what is described by ethnologists as one of the most primal cultural reactions in situations of violation or breakdown of social order, namely the urge for revenge. This urge forms the foundation of legal concepts that the guilty should be punished. If the guilty party is not accessible, “a scapegoat” or “substitute enemy” is punished.125

122 AZIH, CKŻP, Central Jewish Historical Commission, file no. 239, b.d.
123 AZIH, Andrzej Czajkowski’s (Andrzej Krauthamer), testimony, file no. 301/3617.
124 René Girard, Kozioł ofiarny (Lodz: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1982).
The difficulties in finding employment, which were also connected, directly or indirectly, with people’s accommodation problems and finding safe places to live, have already been mentioned. Regional research confirms that low-level officials of public and self-government institutions also adopted discriminatory policies toward Jews. As a result, the voivodes sent out guidelines banning anti-Jewish activities. In turn, they received instructions on how to improve Polish-Jewish relations from top-level people in the Public Administration Ministry’s Political Department. However, this did not prevent local communal and municipal officials from ignoring these upper-echelon directives. For example, the starosta (district governor) of Biała Podlaska arbitrarily attempted to prevent Berusz Aurbach from performing the function of a rabbi, and refused to register Jews as residents of the town because “they indulge in illicit trade, acquiring all sorts of objects from passing-by Soviets, which adversely affects the economic, social, and cultural relations of all Biała Podlaska’s inhabitants.”

These rather inefficient attempts at getting rid of the Jews were seconded by the Polish anti-Communist underground, who killed Jews in several neighboring towns (Biała Podlaska, Międzyrzec, Janów Lubelski, Łuków, Siedlce, and many others). After these events, Jews left the Podlasie region of their own free will, going first to Lower Silesia, and then emigrating from Poland. Jews were murdered in more than 150 places all over the country, and the victims were often entire groups (including women and children). In many cases, this was done with particular cruelty. These murders, not unlike those during the occupation, were accompanied by theft of the victims’ property. Regardless of the perpetrators’ motivation, it is worth remembering with regard to each specific case that the Jews were defenseless victims throughout this period. Assaulted and terrorized, they could not expect any assistance from those around them. All researchers stress the symptomatic fact that quite often representatives of the state security branches,

128 Author’s estimate based on publications and archival sources.
129 “The fact that the victim was Jewish or considered Jewish constituted one of the causes of aggression, but, most often, not the only one.” Krystyna Kersten, Narodziny systemu władzy. Polska 1843–1948 (Warsaw: Kantor Wydawniczy SAWW, 1990), p. 192, 195.
acting independently — the Police, Civic Militia Voluntary Reserve (Ochotnicza Rezerwa Milicji Obywatelskiej — ORMO), State Security offices, and individual soldiers and officers of the Polish Army, whose duty it was to protect citizens and ensure their safety — were involved in crimes against Jews. Judges in investigations and court proceedings against Polish citizens for criminal acts committed against the Jewish population also behaved unfairly. As a result of the judges’ questioning, Jews, injured and appearing as witnesses during these trials, would be ridiculed. There were several penal cases pertaining to events during the occupation period, in which Jewish witnesses refused to appear in court for fear of further harassment and threats by the Poles. Under such circumstances, Jews necessarily felt threatened, intimidated, deprived of any protection, and had no choice but to rely on their own ability to defend themselves.

One would also come across regulations similar to those issued by the Biała Podlaska local authorities in other locations, for example, Słomniki in the Kraków province. In Irena-Dęblin, Jews were informed they could only settle legally in three locations, namely, Lublin, Włodawa, and Żelechów. In July 1945, in Jodłowa, a session of the People’s Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe) adopted and implemented a resolution to expel Jews from the town. In Łódź, two different registration cards were issued — white for Poles and yellow for Jews, Germans, and Gypsies; in Sanok, temporary identity papers were stamped with the letter “Ż”; in Będzin, Jews were given referrals by the employment office stamped with the sign “Ż” inside a circle; in Międzyrzec Podlaski, the mayor prevented a Jew from opening a medical practice; and in Chrzanów and Ostrowiec, the authorities called on Jews to show up for work in official letters addressed to the Jewish committees. “In Miechów, the starosta Smólski declared he would not deal favorably with any Jewish matters for fear of being called “a Jewish lackey.” Anti-Jewish policies were applied by local authorities in the Kielce and Lublin regions in a significant number of cases. The examples mentioned here and others based

130 Letters written by Jews who described such cases and asked for help and assistance are in the files of the legal department of the CKŻP, AŻIH.
131 Gross, Strach, p. 59.
132 Ibid., p. 73, 109.
133 Aleksiun, Nielegalna emigracja, p. 84.
on the literature describing the behavior of people “in official [and other] positions” bear witness to the mentality of the majority of Poles, who, like during the German occupation, treated Jews as outlaws. Ironically enough, almost everyone shared the widespread views that Jews enjoyed privileges granted by the Communist authorities and held lucrative positions in the state administration. Last but not least, the myth about the Jews’ excessive wealth once again became standard fare.

The Holocaust survivors’ return to a normal life was enabled, or at least facilitated, first and foremost, by the Central Committee of the Jews in Poland, established in November 1944, as well as other Jewish institutions, parties, and organizations. Many of the committee’s departments, sub-committees, and other very important organizations, for example the Health Care Society, were operating at that time. A Social Court was formed to clarify the cases of suspected collaboration with the Nazis and other disreputable behavior during the war. Jewish committees were formed in places with sizeable Jewish populations after the war. It was a natural instinct for Holocaust survivors to stick together, and the offices of the Jewish institutions and organizations performed an exceptionally important and, most of all, protective function. People registered at these offices and looked for relatives; were offered concrete assistance, accommodation, and work; submitted accounts documenting the Holocaust; and simply socialized. All these initiatives and activities, aimed at reconstructing Jewish life in post-war Poland, deal with these issues, as well as education, Yiddish culture, and the religious life in the Jewish community.

The Problem of Safety

After the war, from the Jews’ point of view, the most important aspect of life was personal safety. For research on Polish-Jewish relations during this period, it is essential to know about the ideology of the post-war anti-Communists and the independence-seeking resistance movement and the propaganda leaflets they distributed. Some information is available about

135 See in this volume the following articles: Grzegorz Berendt, "A New Life: Jewish Institutions and Organizations in Poland from 1944 to 1950"; Helena Datner, "Children in the Polish-Jewish Community from 1944 to 1968"; Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikov and Magdalena Ruta, "Yiddish Culture in Poland after the Holocaust"; and August Grabski and Albert Stankowski, "Jewish Religious Life in Poland after the Holocaust."
the content of these leaflets, as well as announcements, various resistance publications, action programs, and reports on activities in the Kielce and Lublin provinces. Although research on this material has just begun, we already know that antisemitic expressions occurred there, and sometimes even overshadowed all other topics. Ryszard Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki, who analyzed material relating to the post-war Polish Home Army resistance movement in the Kielce province, mentions several documents with content and rhetoric that are as virulent as Nazi antisemitic propaganda, and the existence of “a Jewish-Communist ruling elite” is a recurrent theme. The authors of this material obviously viewed themselves as the most loyal and faithful “sons of this land,” who fought for Poland’s freedom and honor using intimidation and the killing of Jews, among other methods. Jan T. Gross himself suggested the new term “katoendek” (Catholic and National Democrat) to denote them. Reading the post-war clandestine publications might cast some light on the origin of Polish society’s deeply held conviction and stereotypical view that Jews played a part in establishing the new Communist order. Neither memories, nor accounts of alleged comprehensive collaboration of Jews with the Soviets in the Borderlands, nor the persistence of the stereotype dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century, nor, finally, actual participation of some people of Jewish origin in the new ruling class, provide sufficient reason for the intensity and ubiquity of this conviction. The insufficiently investigated range and effects of anti-Communist propaganda make it impossible to formulate any definitive conclusions in this regard. However, most likely, precisely this propaganda constituted the main source of post-war views on Jewish-Communist conspiracy. As Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki writes:

One might suspect that any contacts of the Jewish community with the Soviets and their special services (which, as far as the Jews were concerned, were meant to ensure their personal safety) would often be

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137 Gross, _Strach_, p. 185. Gross suggested the use of this term to describe “the particular case of a Catholic and a National Democrat,” meaning a person who defines himself as a Catholic and to whom “Judeo-Communism” is a reality and a worldview explaining all other problems.

138 After occupation by the Soviet Army, on September 17, 1939.
viewed by the nationalist underground intelligence units as visible links with foreign and hostile forces.\textsuperscript{139}

Actually, as early as 1942, the Nationalist Armed Forces clearly stated their position on the place of Jews in post-war Poland:

Those who want to shelter Jews must be condemned and declared as traitors of the Polish cause. It is evident to every Pole that both Germans and Jews should not have a place in a reborn Poland.\textsuperscript{140}

Below are excerpts from a few post-war leaflets and articles from the clandestine press, distributed in the Kielce and Lublin provinces:

Soldiers! Your officers are mainly Russian or Jewish.... They tell you that you have a Free Poland but this is not true because Poland is ruled by the NKVD and the Security Services, which are in the hands of Communists and Jews.... Power has been usurped by a gang of corrupt Jewish Communists who do the bidding of the red Tsar Stalin.... In Siberia, and right next to you, in prisons, the best sons of the Motherland keep on dying under terrible torture inflicted on them by Communist ruffians and Jews!\textsuperscript{141}

Poles! Do you want the occupation of Poland to continue?.... Do you want the Polish intelligentsia to be replaced by Jews? Do you want workers to become slaves of Soviet Communist-Jewish authorities?\textsuperscript{142}

The tears and blood of fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and orphans will be revenged. \textit{Heil Hitler} [for killing Judeo-Communists]!\textsuperscript{143}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{139} Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki, “Podziemie antykomunistyczne wobec Żydów,” p. 252.
\item \textsuperscript{140} \textit{Propaganda Centralna} (PC), a publication of the National Armed Forces, no. 14/29, 1942, quoted by Grabowski, \textit{Ratowanie Żydów}, p. 9.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki, “Podziemie antykomunistyczne wobec Żydów,” p. 264. Leaflet “Do Żołnierzy Żymierskiego” (To the Soldiers of Żymierski’s Army), dated July 29, 1945, and signed by D.O.W.S, a post-Home Army partisan group.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Leaflet signed by “Wolność i Niezależność” (Freedom and Independence) and distributed in the Lublin province prior to the referendum in June 1946, quoted in Cała and Datner-Śpiewak, eds., \textit{Dzieje Żydów w Polsce 1944–1968}, pp. 36–37.
\item \textsuperscript{143} Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki, “Podziemie antykomunistyczne wobec Żydów,” p. 268, Leaflet of the Związek Zbrojnej Konspiracji (Union of Armed Underground) entitled
\end{itemize}
There is no room for our people, but there are certainly Jewish-Communist flunkeys here striving with all their might to consolidate Communist rule in Poland.... And what does our Jewish-Bolshevik government promise us?\textsuperscript{144}

[The Security Office] is represented by uniformed and plainclothed police, among whom there are a great many Jews and NKVD officers, who, together with their flunkeys and under their leadership, serve the Judeo-Communist authorities.\textsuperscript{145}

To the Jewish community in Jedlińśk: It is clear that many Jews work in the intelligence services on behalf of the present government, which was brutally forced on us and thus, seriously damages Polish society. As a spokesman expressing the Polish society’s view, I urge all Jews to leave the territory of Radom city and county by August 15, 1945. Violations of this deadline and applications for assistance directed to the present authorities shall be severely punished.\textsuperscript{146}

Leaflets with similar content distributed in many locations generally caused Jews to leave.\textsuperscript{147} Previous events served as sufficient proof that such threats could be carried out. Many documents corroborate the post-war regularity: Jews who were returning to their “small motherlands” — villages, cities, and towns — were met with a hostility, felt unsafe, and quickly left for the major cities where they would strive to live together, for example, in buildings belonging to local Jewish committees,\textsuperscript{148} which made them feel safer. This was also the case in Kielce. Paradoxically, in this way, they also became an easier target for assaults.

In many ways, life immediately after the war was similar to that of the

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., p. 270. An article entitled “Rosja bolszewicka” (Bolshevik Russia) from the newsletter WiN to Wolność i Niezawisłość (WiN Means Freedom and Independence), dated June 14, 1947.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., p. 270. Leaflet entitled “Co to jest Urząd Bezpieczeństwa w Polsce?” (What is the State Security Office in Poland?), undated.
\textsuperscript{147} The USHMM Collection in Washington, DC contains a leaflet with the same wording and a blank field for recording locality.
occupation period. It was a brutal society, devoid of any clear social and moral standards, impoverished in every possible way, and in the throes of anarchy. Just like during the war, Jews felt excluded, harassed, discriminated against, unwanted, and even hated. People who were good, well meaning, and genuinely helped the Jews survive the nightmare of the war, usually shared their fate after the war. In order to avoid harassment and assault, they would conceal their noble deeds, since, according to the Catholic Nationalists’ cultural code, helping Jews was a reprehensible, shameful, and criminal act, whereas “getting rid of them” was an act of patriotism.

In the so-called Aryan society, there are many people who help Jews and defend them ... But, officially, no one would admit this. They do it on the quiet and in secret, as during the occupation.\textsuperscript{149}

Anna and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz were among these noble characters. In the writer’s diaries, there is an account on this topic, which is extremely rare in Polish memoirs:

The first person to arrive from Brwinów was Olek, a handsome young Jew who would call on us from time to time to have some soup. Sometimes, he hid in the ice cellar. He is safe and sound, and he even has a bike that he captured from a German; he throws himself at me and starts kissing my hands.... And then an entire procession of saved people.... The flighty Mr. G.,\textsuperscript{150} who would write letters in a very fancy style, came to kiss the “hem of the [my wife’s] garment.” In the evening, at Pola’s, we have a good laugh about it and... I have a few other good reasons to rub my hands and say: “This is life! This is what I like!”\textsuperscript{151}

In Jewish memoirs and accounts, there are often reminiscences about people who welcomed them warmly, showed authentic joy, and helped them. However, they are laconic and refer to individuals as opposed to social settings. They often refer to people who were previously total strangers to them. They note friendly gestures toward Jews, understanding their situation, a spon-

\textsuperscript{149} Helena’s letter (NN), quoted from Borzymińska, “‘I ta propaganda zapuszcza coraz nowe korzenie...’,” p. 231.

\textsuperscript{150} Gelbart — a Jew saved by Anna Iwaszkiewicz.

\textsuperscript{151} Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, \textit{Dzienniki 1911–1955} (Warsaw: “Czytelnik,” 2007), p. 261 (entry from January 18, 1945). In January 1988, Anna and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz were posthumously awarded the “Righteous Among the Nations” medal by Yad Vashem.
taneous willingness to offer disinterested assistance, and giving their hands outstretched in friendship. Following are some of these brief accounts:

The Poles received us well, they gave us food and drink.” 152 “A certain Kaduk Franciszek invited us to eat, set us up for the night, gave us water so we could wash ourselves, and gave us fresh underwear.” 153 “We arrived at Piotrowska’s. She received us very warmly, happy to see us alive.” 154 “Dobrowolski came out to meet us and said: ‘Come with me to the apartment, don’t be afraid.’” 155 “I didn’t have a place to stay. Fortunately, I met our pre-war Polish neighbors. They recognized me, were pleased to see me and took me in.” 156 “But I was also touched by three meetings with Poles. The first, when an old member of the Polish Socialist Party, I think Opolski was his name, hugged me and kissed me; the second, a warm welcome by the new mayor, Walczak, who used to be a simple factory worker in a paint factory; and, finally, once when I was walking down the street, someone yelled out: ‘The butcher’s wife’s son!’ …. He burst out crying…” 157 The same authors also note instances of aggressive, very unfriendly behavior toward them. They write about their fear when they left their hideouts, the fear of every person they encountered, and their worries about returning to their hometowns. The reactions and feelings of some Holocaust survivors were so strong that they never got around to visiting their hometowns or villages, preferring to remain with their memories. According to Menashe Opozdover’s account, walking around his hometown of Pruszków and visiting various locations there was only possible if he was not recognizable as a Jew. Most Holocaust survivors were shocked by the scope of destruction and deeply disappointed by the Poles’ attitude, and realized there was no future for them in post-war Poland.

Jewish and Polish recollections of those years are different. Similar to various accounts and diaries, in the survey carried out by Irena Hurwič-Nowakowska in 1947, Polish antisemitism was the main topic in the respondents’ statements, 158 and remained the central component of memories

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152 AŽIH, Diana Grünbaum’s testimony, file no. 301/54.
153 AŽIH, Dalek Ruder’s testimony, file no. 301/88.
154 AŽIH, Helena Drobner’s diary, file no. 302/233, p. 65.
155 AŽIH, Jochwed Kantorowicz’s testimony, file no. 3012/2493.
156 AŽIH, Josef Malczyk’s testimony, file no. 301/2088.
of post-war Poland among Jews who left the country at that time. The Poles considered the surviving Jews as, first of all, “co-responsible for establishing the political system that threatened the Polish nation.”\textsuperscript{159} To an increasing degree, post-war generations of Poles and Jews and moral elites from the older generations assumed the task of overcoming all the stereotypes in this regard and the tragic legacy of the wartime years. Their efforts and activities, last but not least, in the academic and educational field, do not seek to escape the truth or distort it; rather, they aim at building bridges of understanding based on a broader array of attitudes from both sides, also recalling those who offered assistance to Jews.

\textsuperscript{159} Szaynok, \textit{Problem antysemityzmu}, p. 239.
Judeo-Communism” (“Żydokomuna”), a stereotype exploited in political engagement, but also a well-worn phrase suggesting that virtually all Jews were advocates of Communism, was widespread in the thought and language of many Poles from at least the mid-1930s. It provided for certain strata of society a moral alibi, aside from “ordinary antisemitism,” justifying their passivity toward the murder by the Germans of almost three million Polish Jews. It motivated more than 10,000 others to take an active part in the murder. After the Germans were driven out of Poland and, in spite of the mass extermination...
of the Jews by the occupying forces from 1942 to 1944, this stereotype re-emerged with unprecedented force. It was used this time to generate enmity toward the 250,000 surviving Jews, who were attempting to find their loved ones, to put their material affairs in order before leaving the country, and/or to rebuild their lives alongside their Polish neighbors. The Poles neither expected, nor wanted, the Jews to return. The murder of Jews committed by Poles in the years immediately after the war failed to provoke effective condemnation or decisive reactions from society, in general, or the new Communist authorities, in particular. Justification was afforded to the murderers, claiming the Jews had become a pillar of Communist rule and were cooperating with the Security Police (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa — UB) on a massive scale. Effectively left to fend for themselves, the Jewish survivors reacted to the wave of murders with a widespread sense of vulnerability, and perhaps an exaggerated conception of their scale, and ultimately by fleeing the country in panic.²

How do these two conceptions — mass Jewish collaboration with the Communist security apparatus, on the one hand, and murders of Jews running into the thousands, on the other — fit in with the post-war reality? The Jewish community was certainly largely unprepared for this new existential threat. In the Polish provinces, Jews were greeted with hostility, partly — and possibly chiefly — due to fears that they would attempt to reclaim their property. Hence, Jews returning to places where they had once lived felt vulnerable. The behavior, even of Poles who had been their neighbors before the war and with whom they had enjoyed friendly or at least civil relations, made them feel they no longer belonged there. The sense of danger increased with every reported murder of a Jew. The returnees moved to

² The “Judeo-Communism” stereotype did not cover the full gamut of antisemitic prejudices among Poles after the war, but it did strike a chord in society because it provided an easily accessible context, within the new circles in power, for accusations against people of Jewish descent. Revival of the sinister blood libel legend was a parallel phenomenon in terms of “Jewish conspiracy theories” in Poland at that time. This sometimes took the medieval form, and sometimes a “modernized” one, whereby the blood of Christian children was allegedly needed for transfusions given to Jews worn down by the occupation. Some participants in the bloody pogroms, including the largest, the Kielce Pogrom on July 4, 1946, in which 42 people were murdered, were undoubtedly convinced of the truth of these rumors. Others repeated them uncritically, as a kind of battle cry, an incitement to violence. See Marcin Zaremba, “Polski naród socjalistyczny — legitymizacja nacjonalistyczna w okresie stalinowskim,” Kultura i Społeczeństwo, no. 4 (1997), pp. 118–136; idem, “Mit mordu rytualnego w powojennej Polsce. Archeologia i hipotezy,” ibid., no. 2 (2007), pp. 90–109.
larger towns and cities where they did not feel threatened, they tried to live together in larger groups, or concealed their background.

All over the country there were houses, stores, workshops, mills, and sawmills abandoned by Jews during the occupation. Many of these had been appropriated by their Polish neighbors, who now wanted to legalize their ownership. Not all of them were willing to give them back to the surviving rightful owners or their relatives. The legacy of smoldering pre-war antagonism on economic grounds became the key context for post-war Polish-Jewish relations. More extensive research into the court cases brought by survivors regarding determination of ownership or recognition of inheritance rights might enhance understanding of the social tensions that led to the wave of anti-Jewish pogroms, such as those in Rzeszów, Kraków, and Kielce, and, subsequently, the mass emigration of the Jews.

There is no way of accurately establishing the number of Jews murdered in the years after the war. Participants in the debate on Polish-Jewish relations during and after the war, initiated by Jan Tomasz Gross’s book Fear and continued with the publication by the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation of Wokół pogromu kieleckiego (Around the Kielce Pogrom) and Atlas polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego 1944–1956 (Atlas of Polish Resistance 1944–1956), led to an even more acrimonious discussion among historians in Poland than was the case after the publication of Neighbors. What lies at the core of this dispute? Part of the argument concerns whether, after the end of the war (which some date from the liberation and others from the end of the Soviet Russian occupation), the Poles’ actions and attitudes precipitated emigration of the surviving Polish Jews, even though they were Polish citizens, many of whom were fully integrated into Polish culture and tradition.

After the war, the desire for an “ethnic purge” — to make permanent the ethnic landscape produced by the Holocaust — was an important aspect of the political agenda of various Polish political circles and organizations. They wished to rid Poland of Jews, though such unequivocal language was rarely used in official political declarations. This conception was based on the pre-war convictions of Polish nationalist circles. The main slogan of the nationalist camp, “a Poland without Jews,” was reinforced by the popular

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experience of the efficacy of the Nazi “Final Solution to the Jewish question” during World War II. In order to appropriate someone else’s property, it sufficed to force the owner(s) to depart rapidly out of fear for their own and their families’ lives. Naturally, the greatest fear was provoked by news of frequent murders. Through their own terrifying experiences during the murderous anti-Polish campaign conducted by the armed Ukrainian nationalist underground in Volhynia and Galicia, the leaders of the Polish anti-Communist units knew how effective this method was.

To establish whether the developments in post-war Poland constituted ethnic cleansing of Jewish Holocaust survivors, many aspects should be examined, such as the scale of the murders and, whenever possible, the perpetrators’ motivation. It is also important to establish to what extent the Poles and especially Jewish survivors knew about the murders committed by ethnic Poles on surviving Jews. A further issue is how the social circles of the murderers and their sympathizers viewed this matter, and the direct and indirect reactions of the Communist authorities. These murders, irrespective of whether they were committed on racial (antisemitic) or political grounds, or even if they occurred during the course of armed robberies were, of course, only the apex of a broad-based pyramid of torment, humiliation, blackmail, and extortion committed against the unwanted Jews.

Many testimonies make reference to the widespread sense of vulnerability across the community of surviving Jews. The primary aim of this study is to assess the scale of the phenomenon and the frequency of murder of Jewish Holocaust survivors. Many scholars have addressed this matter. So, for example, this article does not refer to the triad described in the literature: Rzeszów, June 12, 1945 (no victims in Rzeszów itself, but several people killed in places nearby); Kraków, August 11, 1945; and Kielce, July 4, 1946.4

There are two possible ways of profiling and assessing this phenomenon which occurred across a wide area and over at least three years following the war: (1) to use source testimonies of murders of Jews and people thought to be Jews; and (2) to rely on numerical estimates, the basis of which is often no longer possible to recreate fully. Such estimates are sometimes based on views expressed during the period when the murders were committed, or on the analysis of historians and journalists researching that period. Other

estimates may be hypotheses constructed around fragmentary, document-
ed data for a given region, subsequently extrapolated to the whole coun-
try. Estimates in the historical literature vary from a few hundred murder
victims to 1,500, and even several thousand. Gross in *Fear* cites a general
view of the period by Emmanuel Mounier, who visited Poland in the spring
of 1946. On his return, he wrote about the lack of security for Jews in the
provinces, and over 1,000 murders of Jews in the preceding nine months,6
only a few of which took place in large towns. The value of all such views is
often questioned by contemporary historians and journalists.6

Another important task is to build up a list of reasons for killing Jews
and to rate them in order of importance: ideological or political reasons
(antisemitism), or strictly economic grounds. Some scholars, such as Marek
J. Chodakiewicz,7 suggest that most Jews were simply victims of armed rob-
beries. Were the Jewish Holocaust survivors in Poland between 1945 and
1947 living in a state of constant danger and fear for their lives? Is their
mass emigration from the country of their birth proof of this? Scholars are
divided about this. Suffice it to compare three of them: David Engel’s study,8
referred to below; Gross’s *Fear*, and Natalia Aleksiun’s interesting book, *Dokąd dalej? Ruch syjonistyczny w Polsce (1944–1950).*9 Engel’s assessment

5 “L’orde regle-t-il a Varsovie?” *L’Esprit* (June 1946), p. 999.
6 See author’s review of Marek J. Chodakiewicz, *Po Zagładzie. Stosunki polsko-żydowskie
wicz’s theory? The author believes it goes as follows: The Jews who were saved fabricat-
ed lies in their accounts and later in their published reminiscences in order to conceal
their true intentions. They present a false image of the post-war reality because in spite
of the links they forged with the Security Police (UB), they failed to gain full power
over the post-war structures of authority, and after 1956, were gradually forced to re-
linquish the positions they had occupied. Is this not a conspiracy theory of history?”
Objecting to Chodakiewicz’s deliberate falsification of post-war history, the author
also wrote: “The UB, neither the NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs)
nor the entire ‘people’s power’ structure could protect the Jews; even if they had really
tried [...] And the fact that hostility toward Jews was widespread at that time [...] may be
deducted from two main types of sources: direct accounts written by Jews for internal
use by Jewish institutions, and general pronouncements at the time by representatives
of milieus and institutions attuned to society’s moods (i.e., the clergy and left-wing
democratic circles).”
7 Ibid.
8 David Engel, “Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944–1946,” *Yad Vashem
9 Natalia Aleksiun, *Dokąd dalej? Ruch syjonistyczny w Polsce (1944–1950)* (Warsaw: Trio,
2002).
of the antisemitic climate prevailing in Poland in the early years after the war is more cautious than that of other scholars. He cites those working for the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce — CKŻP), who claimed that support from the new authorities would gradually overcome the pogrom atmosphere hanging over Poland. But did they really believe this, or were such statements designed to pander to the Communist authorities? The CKŻP is known to have been headed chiefly by people who were keen for Jews to remain in Poland. According to Engel, acts of violence against Jews were not reported after the fall of 1946. The authors of the article “Morderstwa Żydów w latach 1944–1946 na terenie Polski,”11 based on research of 301 testimonies of Jewish Holocaust survivors in the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego — AŻIH), came across three incidents of murder after July 4, 1946. These occurred in September and December 1946. The latter is most probably the “railway campaign,” known to historians, in which Jews were thrown off trains and murdered by their fellow passengers or armed anti-Communist underground units for no reason other than being Jews. Dozens of Jews were murdered on the railways in 1945–1946. The incident in question here is the murder of Salomon Liber- man, who was thrown off a train at a station in Przemyśl in December 1946. The author also knows of another murder in the region that occurred after the Kielce Pogrom and the concurrent “railway campaign.” This was the murder of Rachela Jabłonka on November 6, 1946, near Kaluszyn.

Aleksiun, in her book, devotes relatively little attention to the post-war murders and pogroms. She sees the main reasons for the mass emigration as reluctance to “live in a cemetery,” in isolation with limited possibilities of contact with people sharing the same religion, traditions, and language, a predominant antipathy toward the Communist system, and young Zionists’ dreams of building a state of their own in the Land of Israel. These motivations are somewhat removed from a sense of an existential threat. Aleksiun’s angle on this issue, which the author agrees with, is noteworthy, but

10 A statement issued after a meeting of the voivodeship and district committee chairmen on January 18, 1946, emphasized that the Western press commented on “reactionary rumors” to the effect that the growing wave of pogroms was causing a mass exodus of Jews from Poland; AAN in Warsaw, MAP, CKŻP, file no. 788, sheet 43.
does not detract from the need for further studies on the post-war murder wave of Jewish Holocaust survivors.

For many scholars, Gross being foremost among them, fear was the dominant tone of Jewish life after the war and the main cause of the mass, panic-driven flight, rather than the mere departure of Jews from Poland. This seems to be a somewhat exaggerated stance based on the repercussions of the Kielce Pogrom in the press and Polish political life. Irena Hurwić-Nowakowska, author of the first analytical work on the psychological state of the community of Polish-Jewish Holocaust survivors, held a similar view. She conducted a sociological survey among survivors between 1947 and 1950. Although she sent out 13,000 questionnaires, she received only 817 responses. It is not known whether the relatively small number of responses was because the majority of the addressees had already left the country, or whether those keenest to speak out feared the wartime and post-war antisemitism. As such, the respondents to her questionnaire limited the validity as a representative sample according to present-day standards in public opinion research. As she herself notes in a foreword written several years later, the central theme of her survey from the respondents’ point of view was the “problem of antisemitism among Poles, a problem that proved particularly tragic for the Jews during the war.” She believes the reasons for this were to be found in the nature of life in the years immediately after the war, when personal experiences were reinforced on a daily basis by “opinion... in Jewish circles.”

Hurwić-Nowakowska formulates very cautious conclusions regarding the level of awareness of the group she studied. “I do not believe that the post-war Jewish population of Poland may be called a group. They are the remnants of an exterminated body. This fact has immense consequences. To a certain extent, it is a pathological community, burdened with complexes and scars, and prone to collective psychoses. The period directly after the war (up to and including the Kielce Pogrom) intensified the mood of panic and caused waves of emigration.”

13 Ibid., p. XI.
14 Ibid., p. XII.
15 Ibid., p. 56.
repatriated from Russia. In her view, “there is a widespread conviction that Polish antisemitism is incurable [and there was a] sense of alienation in Poland.” She cites many statements supporting this thesis.

That “sense of alienation” often went hand-in-hand with “a conviction that Polish society shared responsibility for extermination of the Jews. Majdaneks and Auschwitzes could have existed only in Poland, and Jews condemned to crematorium ovens were brought to Poland from all over Europe are arguments constantly repeated in interviews.”

Of particular interest are the reports written periodically from September 1, 1944 by Dr Szlomo Herszenhorn, Head of the Department for Jewish Affairs at the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego — PKWN), the provisional Communist government. He had taken up this position on August 8, 1944, when there were only some 300 Jews living in Lublin, 15 of whom were locals. By September 1, there were already 1,200 Jews in the city, who were without any resources, while ten aid committees were active in the provinces. Regarding the security of the Jews, he wrote:

If in terms of security, the Jews in Lublin feel relatively happy, the Jews in the provinces, with minor exceptions, are living in constant fear. There have been cases of Jews who were murdered since the Germans left. These recur sporadically and are now driving the remaining Jews to despair, while a relatively large number of Jews are still afraid to leave their hideouts.

His second report refers to the period between September 1 and 17, 1944, and was sent to PKWN Chairman Edward Osóbka-Morawski. The number of Jews in the city and the surrounding province had doubled, but reports from the provincial territory suggested that “security conditions [are] unstable. In many smaller localities, the Jews are constantly under threat. There are still sporadic murders of Jews.” In his third report (September 28–October 10), according to Herszenhorn, owing to a lack of security, many Jews were not admitting to their background. He added: “The Jews had to leave Kock owing to the hostile attitude of society. In Otwock, there were 750 Jews; 350 of whom left [...] for reasons of safety.” His fourth report (for October 11–31) contained a similar comment: “In Izbica, Sandomierz, and

16 Hurwic-Nowakowska, Żydzi polscy, p. 145.
17 AAN, PKWN, file no. XI/6, Department for Jewish Affairs, activity reports 1–7.
Tarnobrzeg, local people are treating Jews with hostility, and because of this, they want to leave the country.” As another report points out: “The state of Jews’ personal security in the provinces still leaves much to be desired.” He also mentioned two cases of murder (involving one man and three women) in the vicinity of Kraśnik. “In both cases, the murder victims were dragged off the horse-drawn wagons in which they were traveling in the company of Christians.” In Łosice, a grenade was thrown into a Jewish home, and two people were killed in other localities.

In his fifth report (November 1–25), he reported that “security conditions have still not stabilized,” and mentioned the killing of four Jews. The tone of his report for December 1944 was similar: “The matter of security still leaves much to be desired. Murders of Jews are still occurring.” He reported four fatalities. In his last report in January 1945, there was no mention of the murder of Jews.

As these reports clearly indicate, in the early days of the new Poland, the position of Jews emerging from their hideouts was very uncertain. Nevertheless, the murder of 12 Jews noted in these reports did not cause panic. It seems that Herszenhorn, and probably also other Jewish activists, thought the authorities would quickly eradicate the problem; this would seem to be indicated by his repeated references to “sporadic” murders. Yet, this was an exceptionally unsettled time. In the region known as the Kresy (Poland’s former Eastern Borderlands) and “Lublin Poland” (the liberated part of Poland as far west as the Vistula River), the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del — NKVD), with the assistance of the Polish UB, arrested and deported deep into the USSR 10,000–20,000 members of the underground connected with the Polish government-in-exile in London. Thousands more were killed in ambushes and skirmishes between armed Polish underground formations and Soviet troops or the Ukrainian Insurrectionist Army (UPA). There were also cases of common thuggery and thievery, as reports by the new authorities indicate. Jerzy Sztachelski reported on January 3, 1945, that 40 murders were committed in October, in his region, and another 14 in November. He did not mention whether they were Jews. Six of the murders were committed by Soviet marauders, and three small-scale farming families (13 people in all) were killed in unexplained circumstances by the Polish underground for accepting land under the agrarian reform.19

18 Ibid.
19 AAN, PKWN, file no. 287, sheet 210: Out in the provinces, the end of the war did
From the very first “Lublin” months of People’s Poland, i.e., from as early as the summer of 1944, there were pogroms and murders of Jews. Many Jews undoubtedly feared for their lives, and it is hard to imagine how they could have been effectively protected at that time. From the beginning of the Red Army’s winter offensive in January 1945, the armed campaign on the part of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa — AK) and the National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne — NSZ) in the liberated territories was re-activated. Within a few months, their partisan units numbered somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 members. Radical nationalist underground formations, such as the NSZ, are known to have been hostile toward Jews who were in hiding throughout the Nazi occupation. During this period the NSZ murdered scores of Jews, motivated by antisemitism. The extreme right-wing nationalist clandestine press reiterated throughout the occupation, even when the Warsaw Ghetto was burning in the spring of 1943, that the solution to the “Jewish question” was the emigration of the entire Jewish population from Poland. As in Hitler’s Germany, they would have no rights to claim compensation for assets left behind in Poland. It is thus understandable that, after the war, those Jews who survived saw the nationalist underground as their main threat. Some historians and journalists suggest that the collective murder of Jews committed by these groups after the war was directed only against Jews employed by the Communist authorities. Alina Cała is one of few scholars who emphasized that Jews were relatively rarely killed for strictly political reasons (though she does cite a number of murders of former Jewish partisans who joined the UB after liberation).
Some post-war murders were described as the outcome of “unexpected events.” In one such instance, three Jews were killed on February 2, 1946, when an armed unit of the anti-Communist partisan force, Freedom and Independence (Wołność i Niezawisłość — WiN), took and briefly held the town of Parczew. These murders came about following the denunciation by Christian neighbors, who told WiN that the Jews were members of the Civic Militia Voluntary Reserve (Ochotnicza Rezerwa Milicji Obywatelskiej — ORMO), an auxiliary para-police force. As the unit’s own records indicate, the attack on Parczew was, to some extent, politically motivated, but looting also took place.\(^{22}\)

The best-known mass murder of Jews aside from the Kielce Pogrom took place on May 2, 1946, near Krościenko,\(^ {23}\) and was most likely the work of the anti-Communist partisan formation commanded by Józef “Ogień” Kuraś. That night, uniformed partisans stopped a motor truck carrying 26 Jews attempting to leave Poland illegally; they shot 11 dead and wounded seven.

In official UB statistics, which are the main source of historians’ information, there are no records of various mass murders of Jews by anti-Communist partisans, which are known about from other sources. In the Execution Log for AK District no. 5\(^ {24}\) (Wysokie Mazowieckie), the entry from February 17, 1945, reads:

Five Jews and two Jewesses liquidated in Sokóły. Patrol commander received order to liquidate four Jews, NKVD spies, but when patrol

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\(^{22}\) AAN, MAP, file no. 786, information from the Jewish Committee in Lublin, dated February 8, 1946, including an account of the events of February 5 in Parczew.

\(^{23}\) AAN, MAP, file no. 787, information from the voivodeship Jewish committee in Kraków: A letter from the Polish Red Cross with an Austrian visa for returning Austrian citizens found on the bodies of the deceased (Wnuk, ed., \textit{Atlas}, p. 318) describes how five Jews were shot in Nowy Targ by Józef “Ogień” Kuraś’s unit on April 20, 1946, and another 12 by the same unit on May 2–3, 1946.

\(^{24}\) Archive at the IPN in Warsaw, Ministry of Public Security (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego — MBP), AK, 574, Białystok (January 1, 1943 — May 2, 1945), sheet 16, 34, last entry, no. 137. The author is grateful to Dr. Dariusz Libionka for this information.
entered the Jews launched a defense, charging at patrol with axes, so all the Jews who did not manage to escape were shot. There were approximately 20 Jews. Some kind of meeting was in progress.

The patrol was part of a unit under Kazimierz “Huzar” Kamieński. The next entry describes another operation by the same unit:

On March 24, 1945, the following spies were liquidated in Czyżewo: one Jew, eight Jewesses, and a Soviet lieutenant who came to their defense. The Bolsheviks warned the Jewish spies by firing shots, enabling some of them to escape. Three other Soviet and German spies were also liquidated on the same night.

There were several other similar operations by the independentist underground, about which historians have only learned in recent years. On April 24, 1945, in Kanie near Lublin, an NSZ partisan unit under “Szary” (Capt. Mieczysław Pazderski), shot five Jewish soldiers in the Polish Army. In Leżajsk, during the night of February 18–19, 1945, a joint unit of the NSZ and the National Military Organization (Narodowa Organizacja Wojskowa — NOW), under Józef “Wołyniak” Zadzierski, killed two NKVD officers, a soldier in the Polish Army, and “nine individuals of the Jewish race suspected of collaborating with the NKVD.” In all probability, the murder of three Jews and the wounding of another on August 12, 1945, in Sanok, was carried out by “Żubryd” unit members. Further information

25 The daily Rzeczpospolita carried a mention of the funeral in Białystok of the victims of the tragedy in Sokoly on March 29, 1945, copy in AŻIH, CKŻP, Department of Culture and Propaganda, file no. 303/XIII/821. The murderers were referred to as “Nazi agents.” For a description of these events from the Jewish perspective, see account by Michał Majek in Yiddish: AŻIH, Relacje (Accounts), file no. 301/977; see also Anna Pyżewska, “Tragedia w Sokolach — 17 lutego 1945 r.,” Biuletyn IPN, vol. 12 (2005), pp. 76–79; in subsequent issues of Biuletyn IPN, Kazimierz Krajewski and Tomasz Łabuszewski polemicized with Pyżewska, and Libionka and Żbikowski subsequently took up the debate with them.


27 AAN, MAP, file no. 786, sheets 17–21, report for the MBP by F. Stoliński, Head of the Social and Political Department at MAP, entitled “Występkí przeciwko ludności żydowskiej przewidziane w art. 154, 164 i 240 Kodeksu Karnego.” Capt. Antoni “Zuch” Żubryd commanded the Independent Operative Battalion, which was subordinate to the Kraków District of the NSZ, Wnuk, ed., Atlas, p. 180. The authors of Atlas do not record this incident. According to Ryszard Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki (Podziemie poa-
on the mass murders of Jews by NSZ units has not been found, to date, in archival sources.

A CKŻP report\textsuperscript{28} for MAP dated January 13, 1946, mentions that there were still attacks and murders of Jews:

In this period, 38 Jews have died at the hands of NSZ bandits, and several have been wounded. There have been cases where the thugs beat up the Jews, robbed them, and ordered them to leave their places of residence within 24 hours.

In one instance, after the Jews were murdered, several local residents plundered their homes.

The Jewish population continues to complain about the antisemitic mood in certain strata of Polish society. These murders and attacks are making the Jewish population very unsettled, and panic and a desire to emigrate are increasing.

In many cases, the fact that the murderers were members of anti-Communist organizations was of secondary importance to the Jews. The main issue affecting them was that the Poles had murdered their kinspeople. This is true in the case of Antoni Kosmaczewski, who, together with Zygmunt Skrodzki, murdered Dora Dorogoj in Słucz in the summer of 1941, and her brother and father in the same village in January 1945.\textsuperscript{29} During the investigation, Kosmaczewski testified that his friends told him that "the Jewish

\textit{kowskie na Kielecczyźnie w latach 1945–1948}, [Krakow: IPN, 2002, p. 255]), the NSZ unit under Capt. Władysław “Żbik” Kolaciński also committed the murder of Jews: seven or eight people in Przedbórz in May 1945. According to Kolaciński, they were officers of the security service. Kruszelnicki does not record this incident in Atlas.

\textsuperscript{28} AAN, MAP, file no. 786, Political Dept., National Division, report for the period from October 1, [19]45 to January 1, [19]46, sheets 30–35.

\textsuperscript{29} The author analyzes the circumstances surrounding the death of Dora Dorogoj in great detail in his article "Pogromy i mordy ludności żydowskiej w Łomżyńkiem i na Białostocczyźnie latem 1941 roku," in Machcewicz and Persak, eds., Wokół Jedwabnego, vol. 1, pp. 235–237. Of course, it is possible to call into question the document "Protokół przesłuchania podejrzewanego Antoniego Kosmaczewskiego przez oficera śledczego Powiatowego Urzędu Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego w Grajewo Kazimierza Tchurza" (transcript of an interrogation in Grajewo, April 6, 1948, in ibid., vol. 2, pp. 916–920), on which the author based his reconstruction of both murders.
Dorogojs family have a Nagan 9 and will shoot you dead with it.” Therefore, he claimed:

I was frightened and I went to my company commander, because I was a member of the illegal AK, to ask what to do with those Jews, and I told him the whole conversation with Skrodzki and Ramotowski. The commander said to me, “If you have witnesses to it, then pop them.” The commander’s name was [Antoni] Bojnarski, from Radziłów, but he is dead now.

Whether that was really the case, or whether this was merely Kosmaczewski’s attempt to defend himself, is hard to say. In any case, the next day, January 28, 1945, he lay in wait for the Dorogoj family with an ax, took them by surprise, and murdered them in cold blood. It was obviously an act of individual license, yet it was sanctioned and recorded in the official AK-AKO (Citizens’ Home Army — Armia Krajowa Obywatelska) organizational reports. After the war, Kosmaczewski was saved from punishment by the residents of Słucz and Radziłów, who expressed neighborly support for him by collectively defending him. The prosecution’s primary witness, Franciszka Kopańczyk, did not recognize him as one of Dora Dorogoj’s murderers, while other witnesses testified to his insanity. The session of the District Court in Elk in January 1949 did not examine the murders of Dora’s father and brother.

Most historians accept that some 200 people were killed in attacks, staged chiefly by NSZ units, targeting Jews traveling on trains carrying repatriates — Polish citizens returning from the USSR. The Jews were dragged off the trains and killed without any attempt to establish whether they were involved in establishing the Communist order in Poland. Most of the repatriations took place in the first half of 1946, peaking in May and June, when 3,000–4,000 people were returning to Poland daily. From the CKŻP’s “Sprawozdanie z akcji repatriacyjnej Żydów Polskich ze Związku Radzieckiego” (Report on the Operation to Repatriate Polish Jews from the Soviet Union) dating from the end of the summer of 1946, it was calculated that between January and the end of July 1946 a total of 136,579 Polish Jews came back from the USSR, where they survived World War II. (Before the war, most of them had lived in eastern Poland, in the territory annexed to the USSR in September 1939.) For security reasons, most of the returnees

30 See Cała, “Kształtowanie się.”
(86,000) were sent to Lower Silesia, which belonged to Germany before the outbreak of the war. The report notes:

> It was also important to take into consideration the Jews’ security, which unfortunately leaves much to be desired, especially in small towns [within pre-war Polish borders].

The CKŻP informed the Ministry of Public Administration (Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej — MAP) of attacks on trains carrying repatriates on June 8 and 23, 1946. This may have been the first such notification. It is not known whether there were any fatalities. According to another source, on June 13, Dawid Fichtelbaum was killed at the station in Gródek during an ambush of a train on the Parczew-Siedlce route.

As Chaim Orimland testified to the Jewish committee in Łódź, on June 23, 1946, a train traveling from Russia was halted at 10 p.m. at the border station in Terespol by an NSZ unit. The attackers pulled Józef Lapidus, the head steward of the train, out of his carriage, beat him, and took him away, most probably to kill him. Shortly afterward, the same train was stopped again in Łuków and two uniformed men led away two demobilized Jewish soldiers, Chaim Gelante and Chuna Kosmajewicz, toward an unknown destination.

There are many reports of incidents on trains passing through Kielce on July 4, 1946, where the largest post-war pogrom of Jews occurred that day. As Rachela Grunglas, a repatriate traveling by train from Wrocław to Kielce, stated in her testimonies, at one station outside Kielce she saw the bodies of two Jews. On July 19, the district Jewish committee in Częstochowa reported further tragic events, also on July 4, on a

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31 AAN, MAP (Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej), file no. 788, sheet 113.
32 AAN, MAP, file no. 786, letter from MAP Director Grabowski to the Government Repatriation Plenipotentiary. Further information comes from this and the next file (787) for the MAP unit. Little is known about previous attacks on Jews on trains. İchchak Szajder and his brother Mejer were attacked on May 22, 1945, in a train traveling from Warsaw to Ostrołęka. The train was stopped by the “Iskra” unit, and Mejer was taken off and probably murdered. This drew applause from the train’s Polish security personnel (AZIH, file no. 301/1976). Information on the ambush of a train carrying repatriates from Lwów is given in a joint testimony by Mordko Berger, Dawid Grinbaum, and Sara Grinbaum. The attack occurred when the train stopped in Tarnów on January 8, 1946. Jews in each wagon were beaten and their belongings stolen; the head steward of the train, also a Jew, was thrown off it (AZIH, file no. 301/1357).
33 Ibid., file no. 787.
34 AAN, MAP, file no. 786, sheet 35.
train traveling from Lublin to Wrocław (on the stretch between Kielce and Częstochowa), in which six people were killed. This information was based on testimonies by Mindla Rozenwajg and Michał Klein: Soldiers traveling on the same train shot at Jewish passengers, abetted and incited by fellow passengers.35

Leja Rakowska informed the Jewish committee in Łódź of similar incidents that occurred just a few days later, but in a different part of the country. On July 8, just outside the station in Czyżów, near Małkinia, some NSZ members stopped a train traveling from Białystok to Warsaw. The partisans disarmed the military personnel traveling on the train, and one of the passengers shouted out that there were Jews on the train, and called on the Poles to remove them, or else the carriages would come under fire. One of the Jews, Dawid Kuszel, born in Łódź in 1901, willingly disembarked, and was shot dead.36

On July 17, 1946, the voivodeship Jewish committee in Kraków informed the Warsaw headquarters that, two days before, a train going from Maków Podhalański to Kraków Płaszów was stopped near Stryszów at night and some uniformed men took several Jews and non-Jews off it and into the woods.37

At the CKŻP headquarters in Warsaw, Maks Holc testified to similar incidents. On July 23, 1946, he had been traveling with a number of other Jews on a train going from Lublin to Warsaw. During the night, three men in police uniforms boarded the train, demanded the passengers’ identity papers, and took 1,200 złoty from them. While the men were checking the other passengers’ identity papers, some Poles signaled to Holc to come and hide behind them. Two other Jews on their way back to Szczecin, possibly carrying cash from the sale of property, “disappeared” (probably killed) from the train.38

35 More dramatic still is the account given to the Jewish committee in Kraków by Ida Gerstman, a repatriate from Lwów (AŻIH, file no. 301/4567). She managed to escape from Kielce on July 4, 1946, to a place called Słowiki, where she boarded a train. Identified as Jewish on the train, she was assaulted and thrown off the moving train. She managed to lie low in an MO station in Jędrzejów for two days, thanks to a bribe.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Eliasz Magid went through a similar experience when traveling by train from Międzyrzecz Podlaski to Lublin (AŻIH, file no. 301/2019) in the fall of 1946 to collect a sewing machine for a local cooperative. Two men assaulted him and threw him off the train.
An exchange of correspondence between the voivodeship Jewish committee in Białystok and the CKŻP’s Special Commission (Komisja Specjalna — KS) in Warsaw suggests that four Jews not identified by name were murdered in July 1946 on trains traveling from Warsaw to Białystok; and Chaja Szczupak, a resident of Ostrów, was dragged off a bus traveling from Zambrów to Ostrów Mazowiecka and beaten on November 26. On September 18, 1946, an unidentified partisan unit stopped a train between Międzyrzec Podlaski and Biała Podlaska. Shouting “Hand over Jews and Soviets,” they proceeded to check the passengers’ identity papers. Srul Zylberstein and Genia Adlerstein (a former prisoner in Auschwitz) were killed as they attempted to escape, and two other passengers managed to hide and save themselves through bribes.

The question of the motives for these crimes is inevitable. Members of the anti-Communist underground were apparently usually driven by nationalistic and antisemitic fanaticism. There were, however, politically motivated murders in response to the “Judeo-Communist” image. According to a report from the Białystok headquarters of WiN, dated October 1945:

“All the Jews are collaborators with the UB and the NKWD as agents, confidants, and informers. Almost all managerial positions in the UB are held by Jews...”

39 AŻIH, CKŻP, KS, file no. 48. There is another tragic, unexplained case connected with the name Szczupak. AŻIH (CKŻP, Wydział Prawny [legal department], file no. 304) has a letter from the Jewish committee in Białystok, dated November 10, 1948, reporting that a woman of that name had come to them with information about the trial of the murderers of her husband, Lejzor Szczupak, due to begin in January 1949. He had been murdered during an armed robbery in Sokółka a few weeks before. Warsaw was requested to send a suitable lawyer so as to ensure that “the murderers be punished appropriately.”

40 AŻIH, file no. 301/1869. According to Rafał Wnuk (Lubelski Okręg AK DSZ i WiN 1944–1947 [Warsaw: Volumen, 2000], p. 413), this was the work of the WiN unit under Stanisław “Klos” Miszczuk.

41 Quoted from Kazimierz Krajewski and Tadeusz Łabuszewski, Białostocki Okręg AK–AKO, VII 1944–VIII 1945 r. (Warsaw: Volumen, 1997), pp. 795–797. Henryk “Gryf” Jastrzębski, acting regional delegate for the government (in exile in London), expressed a more moderate view on the situation in Białystok in his report dated August 11, 1944: “Thanks to the benevolent care of the Christian-Polish community, some 3,000 Jews remain in the region. They are all resigned to breaking their ties with their current home, i.e., Poland, and immigrating to America. They will not be drawn into the work of the Polish underground. Some of them work in PKWN offices.” However, according to situational report no. 11 by the Białystok Regional AK Command, written slightly
August Grabski, quoting this report, adds that these were the motives behind the murder of several hundred Jews by forest-based units between 1944 and 1947. Alina Cała, who estimates the number of those murdered at 1,000, emphasizes that “only a few murders can be said with any certainty to have been political attacks on officers of the Office of Public Security or members of local authorities.” The victims were ordinary people “attempting to return to their hometowns, to reclaim their property, or [were murdered] for no apparent reason, simply because they [the murderers] were still considered to be outside the law, as they had been during the occupation, which was considered a valid state.” But what was the scale of these merciless individual murders?

David Engel, in the article cited above, “Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944–1946,” makes reference to a large number of sources connected with this question, analyzing them in detail. This is a work of mixed merit. The documentary part is based on thorough research in the Archive of Modern Records in Warsaw (Archiwum Akt Nowych — AAN), mainly in the MAP and PKWN sections. The other references to archival materials are of lesser significance. Engel cites a range of studies on the situation of the Jews in Poland, most of them written in British Mandate Palestine (Archive of the Diaspora Research Institute — DRI), as well as reports by Western diplomats, and information from the periodical Dos later, on January 5, 1945: “Dispatch by commandant of the Bielsk district: The Jews are colluding with the NKVD and almost all of them possess short arms. They spy on local residents and newcomers. In Drohiczyn, the Soviets killed a Jew by accident. The Jews, believing the Poles to have been responsible, murdered nine Poles... From a dispatch by commandant of the Wysokie Mazowieckie district: The Jews allegedly keep their distance from everything, but in fact are NKVD confidants. They denounce anyone who has anything previously owned by Jews, on occasion employing blackmail, demanding between 10 and 15 meters of rye for allegedly worn-out things. They do not spare even those who sheltered them, but took large payments from them,” Bialostoczyzna 1944–1945 w dokumentach podziemia i oficjalnych władz, in Jerzy Kulak, ed., Dokumenty do dziejów PRL, vol. 10 (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1998), p. 45, 98.

42 The image of armed Jews collaborating with “the authorities” may have been exacerbated somewhat by the CKZP establishing a militarized civilian guard, called the Special Commission (KS), following the Kielce Pogrom. This guard consisted of Jewish veterans and guarded Jewish institutions. By December [1946], the KS had mobilized 2,000–3,000 men in 200 groups. See August Grabski, Żydowski ruch kombatancki w Polsce 1944–1949 (Warsaw: Trio, 2002), p. 73.


44 Ibid.
THE POST-WAR WAVE OF POGROMS AND KILLINGS

Naye Lebn, published in Poland. It is hard to judge the depth of the author’s examination of the archival materials in the AŽIH’s CKŻP collection, which runs to thousands of files. He certainly did not analyze the Joint’s equally extensive collection of post-war files, also held in the AŽIH. Neither of these collections has ever been exhaustively analyzed; most scholars have only used the minutes of the CKŻP Presidium’s meetings and the documentary legacy of the KS CKŻP. Engel was not aware of the importance of the Ministry of Interior Affairs’ Archive (now held in the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej), above all, the weekly, monthly, and annual reports from the district (Powiat) and voivodeship offices’ Public Security section, which devote much space to the state of security in the field, though very rarely mentioning the nationality of the victims of murder and armed robberies.

In memoir literature, Engel draws chiefly on two books: Marc Hillel’s Le massacre des survivants en Pologne après l’holocauste 1945–1947; and the collection Testimonies of Survival: 96 Personal Interviews from Members of Kibbutz Lochamei Hagetaot.

Engel puts forward several significant hypotheses. The first is connected with the relatively small number of murders of Jews in the period under research, confirmed by various sources. On the basis of MAP reports, he states that between September 1944 and September 1946, at least 327 Jews lost their lives in 130 “incidents” in 102 localities. Out of them, 155 murders took place between September 1944 and the end of December 1945 (148 victims in 1945), and 162 between the beginning of January and the end of 1945.


46 Paris: Plon, 1985. The source base for this work is very limited; only a few interviews with Jewish survivors conducted by Hillel after the war, as well as a few Jewish memoirs published in French and English, are cited.

47 Tel Aviv: Kibbutz Lochamei Hageta’ot, 1984 (Hebrew).
September 1946. Two other reports contain information on 189 murders of Jews between March and August 1945 (108 in March alone), and 351 deaths between November 1944 and December 1945. The author’s study, based on research in AŻIH, AAN, PKWN, and MAP documents (including the CKŻP subsection), confirms the data presented by Engel.

Also of relevance is the information announced at CKŻP’s press conference on January 26, 1946. According to the source, in 1945 alone, 353 Jews were murdered in nine voivodeships — 85 in Kielce, 75 in Warsaw, 65 in Lublin, 41 in Białystok, 37 in Rzeszów, 29 in Łódź, 14 in Kraków, four in Śląskie (Upper Silesia), and three in Pomorze. There were murders in 91 localities. The most tragic month was March, when 92 people were killed. Based on Engel, we can assume that the first nine months of 1946 were more tragic for the Jews than the previous year (with ten percent more victims), giving a combined estimate of approximately 740–750 Jews murdered after the war in Poland.

Engel supplements his data by analyzing the distribution of the known murder cases in each month within the period and across the various regions of post-war Poland. The purpose here is to recreate “the perpetrators’ historical fingerprints and to establish their motives.” At this time, not only Jews were being killed; but also non-Jewish supporters of the new Communist authorities were being targeted. Engel is interested in whether there is any correlation between these two categories. As he notes, among the sources with which he is familiar, some regions of Poland, in particular Białystok and the surrounding area, are surprisingly underrepresented.
in terms of Jews killed there after the war. Moreover, there is a lack of either chronological or geographical correlation between the murder of Jews, on the one hand, and the killings of non-Jewish officers and soldiers from Communist Party frameworks, police personnel, and other military authorities, on the other. Between September 1944 and December 1946, at least 6,475 people in the latter category were killed. Jews were murdered in the Kielce, Lublin, and Warsaw voivodeships, above all. We cannot be sure of the total number of murders in the Białystok voivodeship since there are no data for the extremely “fatal” month of March 1945. According to Engel, Jews were at the greatest risk of losing their lives between March and August 1945 and, again, between February and July 1946. The more dangerous years were 1945 in the Warsaw and Rzeszów voivodeships; 1946 in the Kraków region; and both those years were equally dangerous in the Kielce and Lublin voivodeships.

Murders committed by anti-Communist underground formations of Communist military and police personnel fall into a different pattern. For this group, the most dangerous months were May and June 1945; and to a slightly lesser extent, September and October 1946. June 1945 was a comparatively frightening month for both Jews and Poles: At least 21 Jews and 23 Poles lost their lives. This was not the case in March 1945 (when 40 Jews and 12 Poles were killed) or in August 1945 (19 and 7 respectively). Given the negligible proportion of Jews within Poland’s total population, the number of Jews killed is very high. Under the new authorities’ framework, the voivodeships most dangerous for Jews — Kielce, Kraków, Lublin, and even Białystok — were relatively safe for Poles. Among the Jewish victims, 17 percent were women, and over four percent were children under 18. Among Poles, the equivalent figures are much lower, at seven percent and two percent.

From these analyses, Engel draws the following conclusion: Jews were killed for different reasons, at different times, and in different areas, than ethnic Poles. As he sees it, Jews were murdered above all in the spring and summer of 1945, when, having survived the camps and concealment on the Aryan side, they were returning to their homes and seeking signs that some of their loved ones might be alive; and, again, exactly a year later, when

51 In the Białystok region, however, it may be assumed that, from mid-1945, there were no longer any Jews except in Białystok itself, as they had moved to safer places elsewhere in the country.

52 Engel, “Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence.”
Jewish repatriates from the USSR were returning for similar reasons. This line is acceptable, although perhaps one more correlation procedure should be pursued: comparison of the concentration of murders with a map of the places where most Jews survived until liberation from the Germans. The Kielce voivodeship is of particular significance in this respect, as a place where relatively large numbers of Jewish laborers from the Hasag armaments factories survived until the end of the war. According to the CKŻP study cited by the author, in the Kielce voivodeship, the largest numbers of Jews were killed in the following months of 1945: 15 in April; 11 in June; 12 in September; and 13 in December. In all, during liberation from the German occupation between January and June 1945, as many as 37 people were murdered there. March 1945 was the most dangerous month for surviving Jews in the Białystok voivodeship with 34 victims; and the Warsaw voivodeship with 19 dead. In that month, 15 people were killed in both the Rzeszów and Kielce regions.

To supplement Engel’s conclusions, a report from the MAP’s political department to the MBP (cited above) for the period March-August 1945 should be examined, taking particular note of the way the attacks are categorized:

Total attacks: 30; 11 of which were in the course of robbery, one in connection with things looted from Jews during the occupation, two related to the reclamation of agricultural property, and two related to the reclamation of real-estate houses. The other 14 attacks were the result of Nazi propaganda, which, throughout the occupation, poisoned our society with the venom of racial hatred. In total, 81 killed [plus 108 in March], 13 injured, two kidnapped.

The question arises as to whether, among the various crimes, almost half of which, according to these figures, were antisemitic in nature, the proportion remained the same in the following year.

Most records of the collective and individual murders of Jews, including those attached to the report for March-August 1945, as cited above, do not discuss the perpetrators’ motives. It is likely, however, that in multiple murder cases, the antisemitic motive played an important, and even decisive,

53 AŻIH, CKŻP, Department of Culture and Propaganda, file no. 303/XIII/187.
54 AAN, MAP, file no. 786, sheets 17–21.
55 AAN, MAP, file no. 386, 387.
role. Aside from the murders in Krościenko mentioned above, the highest numbers of victims was in Przedbórz (Łódź voivodeship), where eight Jews, including two women, were murdered on May 27, 1945; on a road near Jurgów in the Spisz region, where seven people, five of them women, were killed on April 30, 1946; in Mordy in the Siedlce district, where six people, including three women, were killed (one hacked to death with an ax, and the others shot) on March 27, 1945; in Klimontów, where five Jews were killed on April 18, 1945; in Polaniec near Staszów, where five people were murdered (and four others injured) on April 9, 1945; in Raciąż, where five were killed and three injured on August 13, 1945; and in Działoszyce, where five people were killed on the night of June 16/17, 1945. The latter incident was definitely of an antisemitic nature and probably the work of the underground, as the victims, who included the chairman of the local

56 According to a rediscovered MO report dating from April 1945 (Witold Piecuch, “Wielka noc w Kańczudze,” Gazeta Wyborcza, March 2/3 [2002]), seven people were also murdered in an armed robbery in Kańczuga on March 31, 1945. The author is grateful to Alina Skibińska for this information.

57 There were certainly more Jewish victims in the Siedlce region immediately after the war. In a request to the CKŻP authorities for assistance with security, the local Jewish committee mentions over a dozen dead, including eight murdered in the village of Mokobrody (March 8, 1945) and six in the village of Wohyń (February 28, 1945). AZIH, CKŻP, Secretariat, file no. 132, see Alina Cała and Helena Datner, Dzieje Żydów w Polsce 1944–1969. Teksty źródłowe (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny [ŻIH], 1997), p. 23. According to other sources (a PKWN department report requesting aid to the Jewish community), five people were killed in Mokobrody.

58 AZIH, CKŻP, Secretariat, file no. 138, also AAN, MAP, file no. 386. According to the account given by Mordechaj Penczyna in 1947, it took place on May 10; according to Lejb Zylberberg it was on April 16. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir’s article in this volume, “Ethnographic Findings on the Aftermath of the Holocaust through Jewish and Polish Eyes,” describes in detail the circumstances of the vicious murder of the Klimontów Jews. This murder directly precipitated the mass flight of the surviving Jews from Sandomierz and the surrounding region (in June 1945 there was a record of 103 Jews in Sandomierz; by December 1948 this number had fallen to only 19). The murder victims in Klimontów were the families of local Jewish millers, who had been trying to reclaim their mills. For information on a similar incident — the killing of two millers in Janów, along with the Polish wife of one of them, on March 10, 1946 — see AZIH, file no. 301/1871. According to the authors of Atlas (p. 144), this murder took place on March 10, and five Jews and one Polish woman were killed. Adam Kopciowski (“Zajścia antyżydowskie na Lubelszczyźnie w pierwszych latach po drugiej wojnie światowej,” Zagłada Żydów, no. 3, [2007], p. 187) attributes this murder to a unit of unknown provenance, under the command of Kazimierz “Lech” Harmidra.

59 According to the Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej of August 26, 1945, this attack was carried out by thugs “dressed in Polish Army uniforms.”
Jewish committee, Szmul Piekarz, were killed by grenades. In some places, the murders took place over several days; in Starachowice, for instance, in June 1945, six people were murdered.

For unknown reasons, the Jewish committees’ reports to MAP, cited here, hardly take account of the information about the murders known from other sources, usually from Jewish accounts given to the Central Jewish Historical Commission (Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna), or passed on to the editors of Jewish memorial books somewhat later. In the Kaluszyn memorial book (Seyfer Kalushin [Yiddish], Tel Aviv, 1961), for instance, one record mentions the murder of three people. This fact is partly confirmed by a BŻAP (Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej — Jewish Press Agency Bulletin) record of July 13, 1945, which refers to two victims.\(^60\)

Without a doubt, in terms of Jewish memory, the testimonies by surviving Jews collected in the early years after the war by autonomous Jewish social institutions are the most important source. On August 29, 1944, at a meeting of the CKŻP in Lublin, the decision was taken to establish a Jewish Historical Commission. The first testimonies were taken down in August and September 1944 in Lublin. On December 28, 1944, the Commission took the name CŻKH (Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna — CŻKH), which was under director Filip Friedman, a well-known Jewish historian before the war, until July–August 1946. In 1947, the CŻKH evolved into the Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny — ŻIH). Out of over 7,000 testimonies collected by the Commission and later by the ŻIH, only 54 contain information about the post-war murder of Jews.\(^61\) The lack

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\(^60\) The author is grateful to Alina Skibińska for this information.

\(^61\) Some of the accounts cited by Bańkowska, Jarzębowska, and Siek in “Morderstwa Żydów” are rather dubious. These include, in particular, the accounts in file no. 301/2010: the murder of 12 Jews by an anti-Communist underground group in the Opoczno district; and file no. 301/4161: the murder of a group of 30 Jews by “AK soldiers” near Kosów Lacki. The author of the first account, Dawid Taśma, an activist for the Polish Workers’ Party and a UB employee in Rawa Mazowiecka, recalls that he heard about the murder of 12 Jews in the Opoczno district from a partisan apprehended as part of a difficult investigation. He said, “I beat him, forcing him to repeat that a Jew was beating him. We beat him unconscious. The next man testified the same.” Thus, this number most likely referred to all the murders in this area in the latter period of the occupation at least. In the translation of the second of the above accounts by Szapse Grinberg, filed in the AŻIH, which was recorded in Yiddish, the only killing mentioned after the war is of two Jews and a Pole, who had previously helped people to escape from the ghettos.
THE POST-WAR WAVE OF POGROMS AND KILLINGS

of a substantial number of reports of aggression toward surviving Jews after liberation in these testimonies should not be surprising, since the aim of this project was to obtain information on the course of the Holocaust in the Polish lands during the war.

The majority of unidentified murders, which took place in villages and small towns, were committed by Polish residents wishing to take possession of Jewish property. But these small-scale peasants were rewarded with land under the agrarian reforms directly after the Germans were expelled, and, together with the workers, became the bastion of the new Communists. Thus, the authorities, who did not enjoy the support of the majority of society, could ill afford to antagonize these social groups with the aim of combating antisemitism. This does not mean, however, that Jewish institutions avoided the subject of anti-Jewish incidents in the Polish provinces. For instance, there is an anonymous report of events that occurred under the German occupation near Szczytniki and Klimontów, recorded in early 1945 at the Jewish committee office in Kraków. It contains fairly precise details of eight murder cases of Jews in hiding in Szczytniki. The murderers were two Polish farmers who had previously hidden the Jews in their farmyards in exchange for large payments. The same source also mentions 30 other murder cases in the area. The last one, the murder of Jakub Grinbaum and his son, was committed on the eve of the January offensive, which took place between January 7 and 10, 1945, in the village of Tomaszewo.

Eleven-year-old Marysia Liss, who was in hiding in the countryside with various farming families and lost her father in the last few months of the occupation, relates her vicissitudes after reaching liberated Lublin via Kock, as follows: "Mommy went back to the countryside, to the peasants, for her things, which she had left with them, and she never came back, because they killed her. My uncle put me in a children's home in Lublin." 

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62 AŻIH, Relacje (Accounts), file no. 301/379. Szymon Goldberg, an escapee from Treblinka, held an equally dim view of the Polish peasants living in the vicinity of the death camp, see ibid, file no. 301/656; also Pesach Hoenig’s account of Polaniec, file no. 301/813, and many others. One of the more chilling accounts is that of Dora Zoberman (AŻIH, file no. 301/3743), which describes an ambush staged by Polish peasants on large Jewish families hiding in the copses outside Polaniec, shortly before the Russian invasion.

63 AŻIH, Relacje (Accounts), file no. 301/3363. The uncle of 15-year-old Markus Halpern, who helped him to survive in the forest outside Chrostowa, near Bochnia, was also murdered after the war, see AŻIH, Relacje (Accounts), file no. 301/3865.
BŻAP and Dos Naye Leben also carried fairly frequent reports of murders and attacks on Jews. Most of them, however, are not corroborated by other independent sources. Notable among them is the killing of seven people near Czorsztyn on April 30, 1946. This information is confirmed by a KS CKŻP report, including a list of the victims, and was also carried out by “Ogień’s” unit.64

Examination of material on a regional basis offers some potential for improving knowledge of the scale of these murders and the number of victims. One example of this method is Adam Kopciowski’s article “Zajścia antyżydowskie na Lubelszczyźnie w pierwszych latach po drugiej wojnie światowej” (see note 58). According to his findings, some 118 Jews were murdered or killed in combat in around 30 incidents in the Lublin region between the summer of 1944 and September 1946.65 Can the statistics for this region be used as the basis for extrapolating the number of victims across the country? Assuming they can, it follows from the CKŻP 1945 breakdown, quoted above (353 victims), that the murders of Jews in the Lublin region accounts for 18 percent of all the murders in the country. This would suggest that around 655 Jews were killed after the war. According to these findings, 80 percent of the victims were murdered because of “antisemitic or (and) spoliation-related motives.”

Alina Skibińska also presents a regional perspective in her article “Powroty ocalałych,”66 which focuses on the Mazovia region in the broadest sense, but does not include Warsaw. Some 9,000 pre-war Jewish residents of this region survived the war and returned to Poland at least briefly. There are records of their presence in at least 125 localities. Skibińska demonstrates that there was fairly widespread fear among survivors as to how their Christian neighbors would react to the fact that groups of Jews were still alive. This was the reason why many delayed in revealing their identity. In her summary of the state of security in the Mazovian provinces, she restates the figure of 75 Jewish fatalities in the Warsaw voivodeship in 1945, which is known from the CKŻP report.

64 BŻAP, May 8, 1946; AŽIH, CKŻP, KS, file no. 1, sheet 122; Maciej Korkuć (Atlas, p. 318) claims that this murder took place near Nowy Targ and describes the incident as “the shooting by ‘Ogień’s’ unit of five people of Jewish nationality traveling in a motor truck, from which shots issued, in response to an attempt by the partisans to stop it.”
The Jewish response to the more than year-long series of pogroms, murders, and isolated killings was to mount protest and information campaigns, as well as self-defense attempts. After the Kielce Pogrom (from March 1947), these efforts were coordinated by the KS CKŻP. The premises of Jewish committees and other institutions were patrolled by armed guards.

According to the Centralna Komisja Specjalna (CKS) report, dated May 30, 1947, its controlling body comprised representatives of all the parties “with seats in the CKŻP.” Its activities were directed initially by Yitzhak Zuckerman on behalf of the CKŻP Presidium and, after his emigration, by Michał Bruchański. In consultation with the Polish security authorities, work began “to organize, across the country, wherever there were larger concentrations of Jews, Jewish combat sections that would be prepared to take up arms to defend the Jewish population in case of need.”

According to the same report, “thanks to the organizational work of the KS, 200 groups were formed across the country, numbering some 2,500 armed men, if necessary, in the defense of the Jewish population.... In all, the KS groups guarded 390 Jewish institutions across the country. The KS had 1,000 rifles, 100 sub-machine guns, over 1,000 short arms, and 120 grenades.” A total of 700 pistols and 60 sub-machine guns were bought with the organization’s own funds (chiefly through donations from the Joint), while the rest of the weapons were provided by the UB. The guards were trained by ORMO instructors. “In the course of its activity, the KS intervened with authorities all over the country over 2,000 times.” The situation was especially tense in Kraków, Bytom, Białystok, Szczecin, Bielawa, Otwock, and Legion. In Legion, a pogrom was brewing. As in Kielce, a rumor of a missing Polish child served as the pretext. Fliers inciting people to stage a pogrom were dropped all over the town, including some in Russian, apparently intended for the local Red Army garrison. Shots were only fired in Rabka and Białystok.

The CKS also carried out other forms of reconnaissance. The CK report states:

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67 For example, the memorandum from the Central Committee of Jews in Poland to the prime minister, dated March 15, 1946 (Cała and Datner-Śpiewak, eds., Dzieje Żydów, pp. 40–42).
68 AŻIH, CKŻP, KS, file no. 40.
69 Ibid.
The names and addresses of hundreds of individuals who denounced Jews in hiding to the Gestapo were passed on to the security authorities, who made use of this valuable information. This campaign yielded especially good results in the Kraków voivodeship.... Our people attended church sermons, as a result of which we intervened on two occasions when priests preached antisemitism from the pulpit.

The present state of research indicates that at least 650–750 Jews perished in pogroms, underground operations, armed attacks, and assassinations in Poland after the expulsion of the Germans. This is the bare minimum, since there were probably many more tragic incidents about which written evidence has not survived. Many of the victims were defenseless women and children. At least a similar number were wounded during this period. Many cases were multiple killings — probably between 200 and 300 “incidents.” Given the total number of Jews who survived the war and spent at least a short time in Poland, these statistics are chilling. All these crimes were magnified by rumors, but what shook the survivor community even more was the perpetrators’ immunity to punishment. Aside from nine of those involved in the Kielce Pogrom, none of the post-war murderers were ever tried publicly. In a few other cases, post-war deeds were added to charges of crimes committed during the occupation, in accordance with the “August decree.” The “cleansing” of Poland of Jews by forced emigration, planned since the late 1930s by nationalist circles and redefined toward the end of the occupation as an ethnic cleansing campaign, was almost totally successful. Polish Jews were not only forced to flee their country of birth, but were stripped of their remaining assets, accumulated over generations, which had not fallen prey to the Germans. Neither the Polish democrats, nor the liberals, nor even the new Communist authorities claiming pragmatic intolerance of antisemitism proved capable of halting the purge.

Polish-Jewish Displaced Persons in Occupied Germany

TAMAR LEWINSKY

Introduction

Until now, no separate study focusing on the experience of Polish-Jewish displaced persons (DPs) in Germany has been published.1 However, since Polish Jews formed the largest group among Jewish DPs in Germany, there is a tendency to blur the differences between DPs from diverse national contexts and even to talk about the experience of Jewish DPs from Poland as the quintessential Jewish DP experience. One may indeed argue that because of their high numbers, on the one hand, and their strong presence in most areas of public life, on the other, the underlying cultural reference system of the DP society as a whole was that of Polish Jewry. There is certainly some truth in one of the DP journalists’ definitions of Polish Jewry as the “backbone of the She’erit Hapletah.”2 Yet, there are several aspects specific

1 The only exception is Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, “Polnische Juden in der amerikanischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands 1946/1947,” Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte, vol. 25, no. 1 (1977), pp. 120–136. However, this early piece of scholarship on Jewish DPs gives only a general introduction to the field and dedicates half of its space to the reprinting of original documentation.

2 Mordkhe Libhaber, “Dawke Federacjes!,” Ibergang, February 9, 1947. The newspaper Ibergang was, with the exception of the last issues, printed in Latin characters. Therefore, the spelling appears here as in the original. For texts originally printed in Hebrew letters, this article follows the YIVO transcription system. The term She’erit Hapletah is of Biblical origin (i.e., Genesis 32:9; 2 Kings, 19: 30–31; Jeremiah 31:7) and was used by Holocaust survivors to express their separate group identity as survivors of the cataclysm. See Zeev W. Mankowitz, Life between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 1f. According to Dan Michman, the term She’erit Hapletah may refer to: “1) The entire Jewish world, because it survived the Nazi assault to its national existence; 2) Direct survivors of Nazi atrocities, plus refugees who fled when the German armies approached their original domiciles and returned to European soil immediately after their Liberation; 3) Holocaust survivors in DP camps only; and 4) Holocaust survivors who were still in Europe but decided to settle outside the Continent, mainly in
to the experience of Polish Jews in occupied Germany that do not apply to the She’erit Haple-tah in its entirety and do, therefore, ask for a more thorough discussion. Although, as a starting point, we might rely on general studies on Jewish displaced persons, a more careful analysis needs to put emphasis on the characteristics that are unique to this group of survivors.

As a point of departure, the short story “Zi hot nisht gekent oysklaybn” (She Was Unable to Choose) by Yisroel Ber Alterman is closely read in order to discuss various pivotal topics in the history of the She’erit Haple-tah — both East European Jewish, in general, and Polish Jewish, in particular. Like the majority of the remnants of Polish Jewry, Alterman survived the war in the relative safety of the Soviet Union. After his repatriation to Poland, he decided to move westwards. Alterman was among the quarter of a million Jewish DPs stranded in DP camps or DP communities in occupied Germany. Settling near Ulm, where several larger DP camps were located, he made his first attempts at working as a journalist and writer for the Yiddish DP press. Until his eventual aliyah in 1949, he was a regular contributor to various Yiddish DP newspapers, including Ibergang, the official newspaper of the Association of Polish Jews in Germany. In Israel, he published several collections of short stories in Yiddish, mainly dealing with the Holocaust, and edited a yizker (memorial) book, documenting Jewish life in his hometown of Grójec. The above-mentioned short story appeared in Alterman’s semi-autobiographical book, Heymloze (Homeless People), published in 1959 in Tel Aviv and reprinted in 1980, in which he presents short sketches, insightfully describing daily life in the DP camps.

“Zi hot nisht gekent oysklaybn” revolves around 42-year-old concentration camp survivor Sonye Grinberg. Although wrinkles frame her eyes and lips, Sonye is still a beautiful woman, who carefully covers gray strands under her dark, permed hair. Sonye would like to get married, but cannot make up her mind whom to choose. In her strongly polonized Yiddish,
she repeatedly tells her acquaintances that “when you get married you have to be ostrożny [careful]. To link your fate with a mężczyzna [man] is not a zwykle [simple] thing.” (“Khasene tsu hobn miz me zan ostrozhne. Dem los tsu farbindn mit a menshtshizne, iz nisht ka zvinkle zakh.”)⁶

As the narrator remarks, her remaining alone is more than unusual, since Jewish women were rare among the survivors. As a matter of fact, the large number of men does have an effect on Sonye. Her problem is not a lack of prospective husbands, but an abundance of choices. First, there is tiny Mordkhele, leader of the local Hashomer Hatsair movement, who wants her to follow him to a kibbutz. She is attracted to him, but fears she would have to live under extremely difficult economic conditions with him. Then there is 40-year-old Yitskhok, a compatriot from her hometown of Ryki. Yitskhok works for the UNRRA⁷ and promises to take Sonye to Los Angeles. However, she is wary of his domineering character, which apparently contributed to the premature passing away of his three wives. Sonye’s third admirer is Arthur, a blond German Jew, who lives with a German family in a private home nearby. She is in love with Arthur, but they cannot decide whether he should move into the DP camp with her, or whether she should move out of the camp and lose her DP Kennkarte.⁸

One morning, the German garbage man, with whom Arthur lives, brings her a letter from her admirer. He does not leave without scrounging some food and cigarettes from Sonye. Later that morning, she is sitting in her small corner of the DP barracks, where a camp bed, a small mirror, and some photographs of film stars pinned on the brown wall are her sole furnishings, when Mordkhele rushes in to tell her that his kibbutz has received entry certificates to Palestine for four members and she is registered among them. Departure would be on that very day. Some time later, Yitskhok also comes to see her. He spent the morning at the offices of the Jewish Agency, where he applied for a certificate for both of them in case his plans to emigrate to the United States would not materialize. At the offices, he met another compatriot with whom he plans to organize a hometown association (landsmanshaft) of Jews from Ryki. Landsmanshaft members, he claims, have a very good standing: “Jews in Germany have become millionaires in this way.”⁹

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⁶ Alterman, Heymloze, p. 94.
⁷ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.
⁸ Alterman, Heymloze, pp. 94–96.
⁹ Ibid., p. 97.
Sonye takes off for a rendezvous with Arthur, but she is running late and he does not wait for her. Finally, she decides to follow Mordkhele, who is able to offer her immediate emigration. But Sonye never makes it to Palestine. She collapses and dies shortly thereafter of gallstones, a chronic illness exacerbated during her years as a slave laborer. The narrator laconically concludes: “Sonye Grinberg from Ryki did not come back from the hospital and never met her three grooms again.”10

Alterman’s story is instructive on many different levels. It depicts daily life in an overcrowded DP camp, where privacy was almost nonexistent. It shows the close proximity between the German and Jewish homes, and daily life full of German-Jewish encounters and interactions. It demonstrates patterns of linguistic assimilation and cultural hybridization. It addresses the problem of the one-sided sex ratio among Jewish DPs in the wake of the Holocaust, which was approximately 1:3.11 The organizations depicted in “Zi hot nisht gekent oysklaybn” serve both the national and local interests of the Jewish interim community. Moreover, considering the different emigration patterns, Alterman offers options other than aliyah, such as immigration to the U.S., and even addresses the possibility of building a new life in Germany. Sonye’s insecurity in choosing a suitable husband serves as a metaphor for the different conceptions of a Jewish future circulating among the DPs. Moving beyond the textual dimension to consider the writer’s biography, the range of wartime experiences specific to the remnants of Polish Jewry also includes exile in the Soviet Union.

The topics touched on by Alterman’s short story serve as a blueprint for this article, which has four main aims. The first part is a general introduction to the history of the DP community in Germany, with emphasis on the demographic data. The second part focuses on the involvement of Polish Jews in Jewish self-administration bodies in the Western Occupation Zones and also provides biographical information on some of the leading personalities there. The third part presents some of the major topics discussed in Ibergang, the newspaper of the Polish-Jewish community in Germany, with special focus on articles discussing Polish-Jewish history, as well as the Polish-Jewish DPs’ self-image. The fourth part examines the organization and goals of Polish-Jewish hometown associations, enhancing the understanding of transnational networks and their role in communal

10 Ibid., p. 98.
remembrance, rehabilitation, and reintegration, as well as, finally, the emigration patterns evolving from the multiple ideological affiliations of this specific group.12

**The Arrival of Survivors at Different Times**

When the war ended, approximately 90,000 Jews were still alive in Germany. For tens of thousands of them, however, liberation had come too late, and they died of dysentery and exhaustion within the first days and weeks. It is estimated that only 50,000–55,000 Jewish camp survivors remained alive.13 This initial Jewish DP population in the Western Zones of Germany consisted mainly of Polish and Baltic Jews who had survived the atrocities of the concentration camps within the borders of Germany. Most survivors were adult males; there were very few women; children and the elderly were almost entirely absent from the initial survivor communities.

After liberation, the Allies relocated these survivors, together with their non-Jewish compatriots, to provisional assembly centers, from where they were to be repatriated to their countries of origin. In light of persistent racism and antisemitism, it is noteworthy that survivors in Germany were housed according to nationality: Lithuanian Jews with non-Jewish Lithuanians, Polish Jews with non-Jewish Poles, and Latvian Jews with non-Jewish Latvians. Therefore, in many instances, liberated Jews were forced to live in close proximity to their former neighbors from whom they had distanced themselves because of their wartime experiences.

In the American Occupation Zone, the survivors’ request to set up separate Jewish DP camps was granted following the Harrison Report to the American government on the conditions of refugees in Germany and Austria in August 1945. In this report, Earl G. Harrison recommended that Jewish DPs be treated as a national group.14 The British opposed the

12 Although this article focuses only on the She’erit Hapletah in Germany, it must be stressed that there were also Polish-Jewish DPs in occupied Austria and in Italy.
separation of Jews from non-Jews because they did not accept any racially or religiously motivated segregation. Some reforms were eventually implemented only at the end of 1945, but Jews in the British and French Zones received no special privileges.\(^{15}\)

In the second half of 1945, several larger Jewish DP camps, such as Föhrenwald, Landsberg, and Frankfurt-Zeilsheim, were established in the American Zone, mainly in Bavaria. In the British Zone, Jewish life was centralized: Bergen-Belsen, as Hohne-Belsen inmates called their DP camp, was the only large DP camp. Nine thousand Jews, comprising the majority of the Jewish population in the entire zone, lived in this DP camp, in close vicinity to the former concentration camp.\(^{16}\) In the French Zone, there was a very small and dwindling number of about 1,000 Jewish DPs. The number of Jewish survivors in the Soviet Zone is not known since Soviet regulations did not officially stipulate DP status.

In the course of the first months after the end of the war, the occupying powers succeeded in repatriating most of the DPs to their countries of origin. Nevertheless, by the end of September 1945, more than one million DPs still remained in the Western Occupation Zones in Germany.\(^{17}\) The Jewish survivors were among those unwilling or unable to return. Whereas non-Jewish former camp inmates and forced laborers, by and large, were grateful for the possibility of returning home soon, most liberated Jews opposed repatriation. With Polish Jewry almost entirely annihilated and Jewish life in ruins, Polish Jews, especially, refused to set foot on Polish territory again. The majority of those Polish Jews liberated in Germany and Austria who returned home in search of relatives and to secure property went back to occupied Germany, bringing with them the most devastating news about the extent of destruction and the prevailing antisemitic attitudes of the local Polish population.\(^{18}\)


\(^{16}\) Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, p. 61.

\(^{17}\) Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, *Vom Zwangsarbeiter zum heimatlosen Ausländer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), p. 59. According to Jacobmeyer’s estimate, more than ten million DPs found themselves in the territory of the former German Reich and Nazi-occupied territories after the war had ended. See ibid., p. 42.

\(^{18}\) David Engel, “Poland Since 1939,” in Gershon Hundert, ed., *The YIVO Encyclopedia of
After the repatriation efforts of the Allied forces slowed down, the number of Jewish DPs, unlike that of other refugee groups in Germany, did not stabilize, but increased. Organized by the clandestine Zionist Brichah movement, as well as through individual efforts, Jews who had been freed from concentration camps in the East, or had survived in hiding on the Aryan side or as members of partisan groups, illegally crossed the borders to join the She'ërit Hapletah in the Western Occupation Zones. Flight from Poland peaked twice. In the first wave of emigration, some 40,000–50,000 Jews left Poland between July and October 1945. The second wave of refugees that arrived in Germany between May and September 1946 included a large percentage of the 230,700 Polish Jews who had survived in Siberia and Soviet Central Asia as forced laborers, exiles or members of the Red Army and the Anders’s Army, and originally opted to return to Poland.19

Only a small number of these so-called infiltrators managed to enter the British Zone, where border regulations were handled more strictly than in the American Zone. Those infiltrating the British Zone received insufficient assistance. The majority of the Brichah routes therefore led to the American Zone. Whereas the Jewish population in the British Zone remained relatively stable at approximately 16,000 Jews,20 the Jewish DP population in the American Zone, according to a population survey of the Joint Distribution Committee’s (JDC) statistical office taken in November 1946, showed an increase of 365% from December 1945 to 145,735.21 Population surveys based on the registration with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the International Refugee Organization (IRO) show that Polish Jews formed the majority among Jewish DPs in the American Zone. By September 1946, they accounted for 70%, increasing to over 80% of the Jewish DP population in the American Zone by August


19 Yosef Litvak, “Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union at the End of the Second World War and Afterwards,” in Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky, eds., *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 227–239, esp. p. 235. These numbers include all repatriations until the end of the 1940s. However, the majority of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union returned during the official repatriation efforts in the first half of 1946.


1947, two-thirds of whom had survived the war in the interior regions of the Soviet Union.22

Thus, the influx of Jewish refugees not only swelled the overall number of Jewish DPs in Germany, but also fundamentally altered its demographic composition and geographic distribution, especially in the American Zone. Although the number of men remained disproportionately high, the arrival of Polish Jews repatriated from the Soviet Union brought about a diversification in age and family structure. Often refugee families included members from three generations. By the end of 1946, the vast majority of the Jewish DP population in the American Zone no longer consisted of concentration camp survivors, but of refugees.

The strong influx of direct and non-direct survivors led to overcrowding in the existing DP camps, making the establishment of further camps necessary. Infrastructures and localities of what came under the definition of a DP camp were diverse: DPs lived in barracks, sanatoria, hotels, and apartment buildings. In addition, many Jewish DPs chose to live outside the DP camps’ confined social and physical boundaries, settling in German cities and towns. Though there is still a lack of in-depth studies on the so-called “free-living” among the DPs, it can be assumed that they were the younger, more independent, and assimilated part of the She’erit Haplethal and preferred to live more independently. By contrast, Jewish life in the British Zone remained centralized, with Bergen-Belsen as the “capital.”

Some Jewish DPs organized themselves into kibbutzim and haksharot (agricultural training farms). The first kibbutz group in Germany was established by survivors of the Buchenwald concentration camp.23 Whereas this collective was open to members of all political orientations, the kibbutzim founded in the subsequent months were connected to specific Zionist parties. Many members of the kibbutzim that came into existence after the fall of 1945 arrived in organized groups from Poland, Hungary, and Romania,

22 International Tracing Service Bad Arolsen (ITS)/Arch./Hist. DP Folder 2, Supplement to Summary Record of DP Population, September 21, 1946, “Others and Unclassified” by Nationality; ibid., Folder 3, Supplement to Summary of DP Population in Centers, “Others and Unclassified” by Nationality, Office of Reports and Statistics, PC IRO US Zone Headquarters Heidelberg, August 23, 1947. These figures include not only Eastern European Jews, but also German Jews registered with the above-mentioned relief organizations.

and tried to emigrate collectively. In early 1947, there were 276 *kibbutzim* in the American Zone, with over 16,000 members.\(^{24}\)

In spite of all these different social, geographical, political, personal contexts, overarching institutions, such as the Central Committees, schools, vocational training, press, and theater functioned as cohesive forces reaching out to almost all the remote DP camps and Jewish communities.

**The Presence of Polish Jews in Public Life**

Since the Jewish DP population in the British Occupation Zone remained relatively stable, it is not surprising that there were no major shifts in the composition of the leading self-governance bodies. Many of those who participated in the establishment of a provisional Jewish committee as a self-help body for the survivors in Bergen-Belsen shortly after liberation continued to occupy leading posts in the official Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the British Zone of Occupation. Many founding members of the Central Committee that was established in September 1945 were Polish Jews; for example, Yossele Rosensaft from Będzin previously headed the provisional committee responsible for accommodating Jewish survivors in private blocks. A skilled speaker with a charismatic personality, Rosensaft headed the Central Committee until its eventual dissolution in 1950. Unlike other leading members of the Central Committee, he was the son of a Hassidic family, later affiliated with the Po’ale Zion movement, and was not an intellectual. As Hagit Lavsky pointed out, he was “a genuine representative of the Polish-Jewish masses. He spoke their language and understood their needs and wishes.”\(^{25}\)

In the American Zone, where Jewish life was less centralized, with high migration flowing into and out of it, there was a greater variety of personalities in the cultural and political spheres. Contrary to the British Zone, it were Lithuanian Jewish survivors liberated from Dachau and Buchenwald, and not Polish Jews, who established the initial organization.\(^{26}\) The influence of Lithuanian Jewry on the *She’erit Hapletah* in the American Zone


remained strong even after the arrival of tens of thousands of Polish Jews through Brichah channels. After the first elections to the Central Committee of Liberated Jews, Lithuanian Jews continued to occupy leading positions.

Only after the Second Congress of Liberated Jews in the American Zone of Occupation, which took place in the Bavarian resort of Bad Reichenhall in February 1947, did this discrepancy between numbers and societal influence change in favor of the Polish Jews. It may be assumed that this was not only due to the demographic dominance of Polish Jewry in the American Zone of occupation. Much more important was the fractionalization process that changed the political outlook of DP society. Under the influence of the Brichah and emissaries from Poland and Palestine, the United Zionist Party, established in the early days of the She’erit Hapleletah in the American Zone, broke up. It was succeeded by diverse Zionist parties reflecting almost the entire spectrum of political organizations in Poland after the war. In contrast to Poland, however, parties active before World War II, such as the liberal General Zionists and the right-wing Revisionist Party, became influential in Germany, whereas Communists and Bundists were absent from the electoral lists. Thus, the arrival of strongly politicized refugees led to the restructuring of the Jewish self-governance bodies, allowing new forces to enter the political arena.27

What holds true for both zones was the undeniable fact that only a minute elite remained among the survivors and refugees. This small intellectual stratum of a society, deprived of years of learning and schooling, felt a strong moral duty towards the surviving remnants of Eastern European Jewry and an obligation to fill the gaps in various fields of public life. To some degree they resumed their commitment to Gegenwartsarbeit (work in the present), fostering national and Zionist values through cultural work in the Diaspora. Yet, more often than not, they became active in various fields of public life, independent of any ideological affiliation. By default, the learned became what is defined in Yiddish as kulturtuers or klal-tuers (cultural activists): intellectuals who were active simultaneously in various societal contexts — as teachers, journalists, writers, politicians, historians, and folklorists.

In the British Zone, the triumvirate of three Polish Jews — Paul Trepman, David Rosental, and Rafael Olewski — is a case in point. They not only headed the Central Committee’s culture department in the British

Zone, but organized and edited the Jewish DP newspaper *Undzer shtime* (Our Voice) in Bergen-Belsen. It is worth mentioning that all of them were already involved in politics in the inter-war period, yet they adhered to different parties: teacher and journalist Rafael Olewski from Osięciny was an active member of the General Zionist Party; teacher Paul Trepman from Warsaw was a Revisionist Zionist; and Yiddish writer David Rosental from Warsaw was a member of the Labor Zionist Party. \(^{28}\)

Sami Feder, founder and director of the Kazet Theater (Concentration Camp Theater), as the official ensemble of the Jews in the British Zone was called, is another good example of a *kulturtuer*. Feder was born in the border town of Zawiercie in 1909 and moved to his grandfather’s house in Frankfurt-am-Main after World War I. There, still in his teens, he was culturally active among Yiddish-speaking emigrant circles. Before returning to Poland in 1933, he studied acting in Berlin. In Warsaw, he staged Yiddish plays, many of which addressed the political situation. He remained true to his artistic mission even under the most dehumanizing conditions. The troupe, performing under his direction in the Bunzlau concentration camp, later served as the basis for the Kazet Theater. Out of necessity, he also became a folklorist. When official rehearsals of the Kazet Theater began in July 1945, the ensemble faced various problems, the most urgent being the almost total lack of printed texts and notes. The actors wrote down what they had memorized before the war and started collecting songs and folk-plays from the survivors. Part of the song collection from the ghettos and camps was later published. \(^{29}\) In addition, Feder was a member of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the British Occupation Zone. \(^{30}\) Trepman, Rosental, Olewski, and Feder were all among the initiators of the Historical Commission in the Bergen-Belsen DP camp. \(^{31}\)

In the American Zone, *kulturtuers* often had not only been active before the war, but had been also involved in post-war reconstruction activities in

\(^{28}\) Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, pp. 67–70.


\(^{30}\) Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, p. 110.

Poland before they left for occupied Germany. Thus, although many of the cultural institutions in the She’erit Hapletah were grassroots organizations, ideas and structures developed in Poland had an impact on the organizations’ further development. The historian Philip Friedman, for example, used the ideas and experience resulting from his work on behalf of the Central Jewish Historical Commission (Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna — CŽKH), of which he was founder and first director, in November 1944, at the Central Historical Commission (Tsentrale Historishe Komisye) in Munich.32

The official theater of the She’erit Hapletah in the American Zone of Occupation, the Minkhener Yidisher Teater (Munich Yiddish Theater), also went to Germany as an existing troupe. Under the name of Muzikalisher Yidisher Kleynkunst-teater (Musical Yiddish Variety Theater), the actors first worked together in Jelenia Góra in early 1946. Helped by the Brichah, they managed to leave Lower Silesia and reach Munich via Szczecin and Berlin, bringing with them their costumes, musical instruments, and props. Their first stage director was Israel Becker. When he resigned in order to work on the Yiddish motion picture Lang ist der Weg/Lang iz der veg (Long Is the Road), the first German-Jewish co-production after the war, Alexander Bardini took over from him. In Germany, several new members, including Berta Litwina, who had appeared in Yiddish films before the war, joined the troupe.33

Writers and journalists who had been members of the revived Association of Yiddish Writers in Poland joined the Jewish Writers’ Union in Munich and became active in the Zionist press. Among them was Mendel Mann, who had spent the war years in the Soviet Union and fought in the Red Army. Before his flight to the American Zone in Germany, Mann had been in charge of the Jewish Committee’s Department of Culture and Education in Łódź, had been an active member of the Yiddish Writers’ Union, and had authored the first volume of Yiddish poetry published in post-war Poland.34 He was later active in the She’erit Hapletah in Bavarian

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32 Ibid., p. 444. Friedman received his doctorate in history in Vienna, lectured at the University of Warsaw before the war, and left Poland in 1946 when he was appointed Head of the Education and Culture Department of the JDC in the American Zone. For his full biography, see Alveltlekher yidisher kulturodis, ed., Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur, vol. 7 (New York: Congress for Jewish Culture, 1968), pp. 485–489.
34 Mendel Mann, Di shtilkeyt mont. Lider un baladn (Lodz: Borochow, 1945).
Regensburg, where he joined the local committee and the editorial board of *Der Nayer Moment*. The history of this regional newspaper, initiated some weeks prior to Mann’s arrival, goes back even further: Its editor Natan Zilberberg named it after the famous Warsaw daily *Moment*, which he had helped to found.

“Good or Bad for the Jews?” The *Ibergang* Newspaper for Jews from Poland

Mordkhe Libhaber was another ambitious young journalist. Like many of his colleagues, he had been repatriated from Soviet Central Asia to Poland in 1946, but unlike Mendel Mann, he had never intended to stay. Shortly after his arrival in Poland, he had moved further west and settled in Munich, then the *She’erit Hapletah’s* thriving and bustling capital. Libhaber, born in Markuszów near Lublin in 1917, became a regular contributor to *Undzer veg* (Our Way), the Central Committee’s official newspaper, and to the Zionist DP press. Yet, very soon, he began to pursue the idea of editing a newspaper for the largest group among the Jewish survivors.

When Libhaber approached the Central Committee to secure a license for the planned newspaper on behalf of the Association of Jews from Poland, his request was initially turned down — out of fear that a newspaper so strongly affiliated with one segment of the DP population would act as a catalyst for the fractionalization process already in full sway. However, since various Zionist parties also started to publish their own newspapers, for which hometown associations abroad assured financial support, the Central Committee could eventually no longer defend its stance against Libhaber. Thus, between November 1946 and September 1948, *Ibergang* served as the official organ of the remnant of Polish Jewry in Germany.

By and large, *Ibergang*’s coverage did not differ much from the existing DP press. Much emphasis was placed on news about developments in Palestine, in particular, and international politics, in general. *Ibergang*’s focus...
and orientation were supportive of the general Zionist ideology held by the *She’erit Hapletah*’s leading authorities.

It may be assumed that the newspaper did not only serve the interests of Polish Jewry. Except for the last two issues, *Ibergang* was printed in Latin characters with Polish spelling. Many of the local newspapers founded in the early days of the *She’erit Hapletah* in Germany adopted this solution due to the lack of Hebrew printing facilities. *Ibergang*, however, was the only newspaper not to switch over to Hebrew type when it became available. Thus, readers who understood Yiddish, but were unable to read the Hebrew alphabet, chose *Ibergang* by default. Much of the newspaper’s success — which spread well beyond Germany — can be put down to this.\(^{39}\) A weekly press review, also in Latin characters, outlined the main issues covered by the Yiddish DP press.\(^{40}\)

There are no statistics about the linguistic skills of Jewish DPs from Poland or other Eastern and Central European countries, but ideology and reality certainly diverged. The younger refugees were fluent in Polish and other languages, which they used frequently among themselves.\(^{41}\) *Ibergang* tried to appeal especially to those readers who had been torn loose from Jewish languages and culture. Libhaber repeatedly published concerned comments in which he called the readers’ attention to the lack of both general and Jewish education. In his article *Der kern fun asimilacje un kulturlozigkajt* (The Core of Assimilation and Lack of Culture), he condemned pre-war assimilation tendencies ex-post facto as a negative development, but differentiated them from the total lack of culture resulting from years under abnormal conditions. According to him, the DPs could not afford the luxury of a purely Zionist and national education detached from the European Jewish heritage. They had to provide their members with the most basic knowledge of both general and Zionist topics: “The road to assimilation before the war was wrong and fatal […], but it was a road to culture. Today, our youth’s road leads to a lack of culture.”\(^{42}\) Therefore, *Ibergang* was determined to contribute to both the Zionist and general education of its readers, providing articles on Jewish history and biographical sketches of outstanding personalities in the inter-war period.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., p. 95; Lewinsky, *Displaced Poets*, p. 175f.

\(^{40}\) This weekly section was titled “Ojf di szpaltn fun der jidiszer preses” (On the Pages of the Yiddish Press).

\(^{41}\) Lewinsky, *Displaced Poets*, pp. 177–181.

Beyond the topics of interest to the general reader, Ibergang devoted space to vital issues for Jews from Poland. It provided information about commemorative events, the founding of new landsmanshaftn, published lists of missing people, and printed incoming correspondence from landsmanshaftn associations in the United States and Palestine. In this regard, it functioned as a bulletin board at a time when phone connections and postal services were restricted. Through Ibergang, Jews from Pabianice, for example, learned that their landslayt (fellow countrymen) in the United States showed interest in them, and Jews from Dąbrowica in Polesia and the surroundings were asked to register with hometown associations in Germany because landsmanshaftn in Australia wanted to get in touch with them. Ibergang also gave information about the efforts of the Association of Polish Jews in Palestine to build colonies intended for Jewish survivors from Poland.

Moreover, Ibergang supported the landsmanshaftn, the Historical Commissions, and the Central Committee’s judicial department in the prosecution of war criminals and their collaborators by calling on readers to testify against them. Under headlines such as Help to Punish Your Murderers!, the newspaper listed names of suspected war criminals and looked for eyewitnesses who would testify on the suspects’ involvement in specific actions, such as the liquidation of ghettos, or identify concentration and labor camp officials. During the preparation of the Dachau War Crimes Tribunals, a special appeal was directed at Polish Jews who had witnessed the evacuation of the Flossenbürg concentration camp. The article included a full listing of all evacuation routes and death marches, satellite camps, and commandos. Ibergang emphasized that giving evidence was of the utmost importance, “because of the lack of eyewitnesses, many Nazis and war criminals might be set free. Therefore, it is the holy duty of every single Jew who can bear witness to give his address.”

Ibergang also dedicated considerable space to news reports from Poland and kept track of the legislation concerning re-privatization and restitution.

of Jewish property there. The editors called on world Jewry and Jewish organizations to exert pressure to advance the restitution process and encourage individuals to file claims wherever legal opportunities existed.47 The newspaper’s coverage was certainly not neutral. This was reflected especially in reporting about political developments in Poland, which considered everything from the perspective of whether it was “good or bad for the Jews.”48

Many articles explored the causes behind the exodus of Jews from Poland, including in-depth analyses of Zionist commitment, Polish post-war antisemitism, reconstructing communal life, and omnipresent memories of destruction.49 When the Sovietization of the Polish government became apparent, Ibergang increasingly voiced disapproval of the new regime.

Many articles on Poland appeared in 1948. These reports were no longer by journalists still living in Poland and associated with the Central Committee, but rather by Polish Jews who were either DPs or living in the United States. Among them was Mordkhe Tsanin. Disguised as a non-Jewish, English-speaking journalist, he had traveled to the destroyed Jewish communities in Poland in 1945–1946 to write a series of articles for the New York-based Yiddish daily Forverts.50 With these articles, he initiated a public discussion about the lack of interest in Jewish memorial sites. After having published a critical article in the Yiddish newspaper Dos naye lebn (The New Life) in Łódz and reports in the international Yiddish press, he became a persona non grata to the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce — CKŻP). He reiterated his critique in Ibergang and bitterly accused the Central Committee in Poland of being insensitive to the victims’ memory. He labelled the Jewish organizations in Poland as “bureaucratic nests of self-contented snobs who have forgotten why they have been elected.” Their duty, as Tsanin saw it, lay in the reestablishment and continuation of hundreds of years of Polish-Jewish

cultural tradition, which was the very basis of national existence (*natsional-aler kiyem*). In an open letter, he even accused Poland’s Jewish leadership of not taking care of Jewish “national monuments, Jewish graveyards, mass graves, tombstones.” *Ibergang* published both the article and the open letter without any comment.51

The scholar Abraham Melezin also complained about the imposition of Communist rule that was endangering the cultural autonomy of Jewish institutions and impacting on the Jewish school system. Cultural continuity in Jewish schools in Poland, he claimed, only constituted a façade through which it was impossible to keep alive a national and ideological atmosphere among the younger generation. Melezin, former assistant professor at the University of Lublin and member of the Jewish Historical Commission in Łódź, resettled in the United States shortly before the publication of his article.52

Other contributors commented not so much on political topics, but rather expressed their personal grief and tried to come to terms with their losses through metaphors of destruction and rebuilding. Many wrote down their impressions after visiting their former hometowns in Poland. A survivor from Zloczew, for example, described his return to the hometown he had left in 1941. When he went back in 1945, no Jews remained there. The town was in ruins. Even the graveyard was almost entirely destroyed, with only one tombstone remaining, marking a famous rabbi’s grave. Like in a Hassidic tale, he told how the local people had tried to remove the rabbi’s tombstone several times, but it was stuck too deep in Zloczew’s soil. Yet, the value of this account goes beyond its mythical implications, for the returnee perceived this as a “symbolic gravestone,” a witness to the memory of the town’s Jewish past: “Zloczew has once been [the Jews’] home. However bad a home is, you cannot forget it. You can lose or leave it — but not forget it.”53

Mordkhe Libhaber returned to Poland for the unveiling of the Rapaport’s Ghetto Heroes’ Memorial in Warsaw on the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. As editor-in-chief of *Ibergang*, he attended the official ceremonies as part of the international delegation. It was his first trip in three years to the city of his youth. In his travelogue, he compared

the destroyed city in 1945 to the renewed capital of Poland under reconstruc- 
tion. In 1945, there had been only one Warsaw, in which the Polish 
and Jewish parts were connected by grief, he recalled. In 1948, there were 
two Warsaws: the Jewish Warsaw still buried under rubble; and the Polish 
Warsaw, alive and bustling with reconstruction.54

Leo Wulman was equally devastated by how little remained of Jewish 
Warsaw and other Jewish communities. This Polish-Jewish journalist, who 
visited Poland from the USA, also highlighted the discrepancy between the 
rebuilt Polish part of the city and the ruins of the ghetto. He remained ob-
sessed with this image:

This image afflicted me during the whole of my journey through Po-
land. Entire cities and towns, once inhabited by Jews, remained un-
populated. Sochaczew, Zduńska Wola, Kutno and Łaszczów, once in-
habited by Jews, are literally uprooted like trees after a tempest. In some 
smaller towns, I saw prayer houses, miraculously spared, but they re-
main forlorn, boarded up or turned into storerooms for coal, potatoes, 
and corn. People familiar with how Poland used to be get the impres-
sion they are in a totally new and foreign world.55

Confronted with the ruins of their former hometowns, the returnees felt 
alienated and horrified. As Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska put it, many 
were “appalled to find that the places of their past have remained and that 
life goes on there despite destruction of the Jews.”56

Besides reports from those who returned to search for surviving rela-
tives and friends, the newspaper also dedicated space to descriptions and 
memories of specific places in Poland. These articles provided information 
on the pre-war history of local communities, their destruction and mur-
der of the Jewish inhabitants, which, more often than not, were based on 
eyewitness accounts.57 Memorial articles devoted to specific communities

54 Mordkhe Libhaber, “A nesje fun pajn...wider in Warsze,” Ibergang, June 12, 1948.
55 Leo Wulman, “Fun a rajze iber Pojln,” Ibergang, February 8, 1948. This article was 
originally published in the newspaper for Polish Jewry in the United States Nasza 
Trybuna.
56 Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, Patterns of Return. Survivors’ Post-war Journeys to Po-
land (Ina Levine Annual Lecture, February 15, 2007) (Washington, DC: United States 
57 For example, Mojsze Grinsztejn, “Churbn Piotrkow,” Ibergang, October 19, 1947.
were published on the anniversaries (yortsayt) of Aktionen or liquidations.\textsuperscript{58} Whereas the local and regional press, as well as the Zionist newspapers, reported mainly on famous and large Jewish communities, such as Warsaw, Vilnius, and Łódź, \textit{Ibergang} dedicated space to small towns, such as Jablonna, Pultusk, Różan, and Ostrołęka.\textsuperscript{59} These reports often combined historical documentation, eyewitness accounts, and personal memories spanning several decades. They therefore resembled the accounts collected in early \textit{yizker} books.\textsuperscript{60}

In-depth reports appeared rather infrequently during the last few months of the newspaper’s publication. Cold War tensions reduced the accessibility of information on Jewish life in Poland. At the same time, Jews in Germany were increasingly concerned with the future, as emigration from Germany became a more realistic option. The newspaper opted to cut the umbilical cord during this transitional state of reorientation, which meant saying farewell to its former home, while not ceasing to support the remnants of Polish Jewry in their onward journey to new destinations. \textit{Ibergang} presented Poland, as one journalist put it, with a “\textit{get}” (a divorce contract) after hundreds of years of coexistence.\textsuperscript{61}

Libhaber even concluded that there were no Polish Jews anymore, but only Jews from Poland, because “we have not betrayed Poland, but Poland has betrayed us! [...] The glorious chapter of Jewish history in the Polish Diaspora has ended.”\textsuperscript{62}

\textbf{Landsmanshaftn: Local versus National Identity}

While in Libhaber’s view, the Polish Diaspora had reached its final stages, the Diaspora of Jews from Poland still lived on all over the world, with the Polish Jews in Germany forming its largest coherent group. For the \textit{She’erit Hapletah}, where the DPs in many cases were the last members of a family,

\textsuperscript{60} See Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska and Adam Kopciowski’s article, “Memorial Books As a Remembrance of Collective Trauma,” in this volume.
finding survivors from the same country or even city or town was more important than anything else. Contact with *landsloyt* provided them with a sense of belonging, sometimes serving as a substitute family. In the camps, former inhabitants of the same city or town tried to be in physical proximity. In the Pocking DP camp, which was the largest in the American Zone, Block F-23 was inhabited exclusively by Jews from Białystok. In September 1945, 439 out of the 452 Jews in Stuttgart originated in Radom, among them a former member of the Radom city council, who became head of the local Jewish committee.

Beginning in 1946, *landsmanshaftn* began to organize associations in Germany. Survivors, not only from large cities, such as Warsaw or Łódź, but also those from small communities, established hometown associations. In May 1946, 30 such associations of Polish Jews were registered in the American Zone. By the end of the following year, their number had risen to 112. Because of their large number, Polish Jews decided to create overarching structures for their hometown associations. A federation of the *landsmanshaftn* from Jews of Poland was eventually founded in May 1946, and the first zonal meeting took place on November 3 and 4 of the same year. A total of 167 delegates, representing almost all the larger and also many of the smaller communities of inter-war Poland, assembled in the medieval synagogue of Augsburg in order to “find relatives, neighbors, fellow townsmen, or familiar people.”

In the course of the two-day conference, the Federation’s agenda was

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67 To a lesser extent, survivors from Hungary, Romania, and Lithuania also formed hometown associations.


69 Ben-Zion Hibel, “Mir, di reshtlekh... (nokhn ershtn tsuzamenfor fun poylishe yidon),” *Undzer veg*, November 15, 1946. There was also a *landsmanshaftin* association for Lithuanian Jews. Jews from Vilnius chose not to join either association, since they considered themselves a different and special case. See Gar, “Bafrayte yidn,” p. 148f.
formulated. In his inaugural address, the lawyer Friedheim, Chairman of the Federation, talked about the long and intertwined history of Jews and Poles. He highlighted Jewish contributions to Polish culture, economic life, and politics and the failure of Polish-Jewish relations, which, he claimed, had become apparent in the Polish collaboration with the Germans during the war and the antisemitism in the aftermath of the Holocaust.70

Today, we will not recall the details of our murderers’ deeds. We will not emphasize the details of our painful martyrdom, recalling our day-to-day hell-like life in the ghettos and forests, where at every turn death was imminent — this is already far away from us — although we will not be able to forget it in our lifetime. Let us think a little about the present times. Our lives are still in danger. The lives of our brethren still in Poland are not safe; every day murders are taking place, and innocent people are being killed because they are Jews. And all this is happening after the war.71

Since tens of thousands of Polish Jews had left Poland and had to abandon their property, especially after the Kielce Pogrom in July 1946, there was a strong need for an umbrella federation with social, political, and economic goals. The new federation provided emergency aid for newly arrived refugees, fought for compensation payments from Poland, and aimed at retrieving Jewish children from Christian homes. Moreover, it supported the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Germany and the historical commissions in bringing infamous Nazis as well as kapos to trial by finding witnesses willing to testify against them. They raised funds to erect memorials in Poland, collected data on the annihilation of Jewish communities, and edited yizker books. The landsmanshaftn also planned to concentrate on cultural and educational work among the young refugee population, often torn away from Jewish tradition. Thus, the federation insisted that Polish DPs speak Yiddish and learn Hebrew. The use of Polish, which was regarded as the enemy’s language, would be abolished. Proper use of Jewish languages, they claimed, would help to add a new link to the golden chain of Eastern European Jewish tradition in the future homeland.72

71 Ibid.
72 “Groyse oyfgabn,” Ibergang, November 17, 1946; Mordkhe Libhaber, “Dos pojlisze
The landsmanshaftn federation in Germany established contact with their compatriots in other countries. It seems that contact with Jewish hometown associations in Poland, initially serving as the first refuge for displaced landslayt of destroyed Jewish communities, was limited to personal inquiries about missing individuals. Like the Central Committee and Jewish relief organizations, landsmanshaftn kept records of repatriates from the Soviet Union and their transmigration to the West.73 The federation’s primary aim, however, was to get in touch with landsmanshaftn in the United States and Palestine, in the hope that they would offer financial support and assistance for the emigration process and integration after arrival.74 On a practical level, DPs in Germany used these transnational connections with hometown societies all over the world to secure financial aid. For example, the landsmanshaft of Jews from Krasnystaw did not have any financial resources when it was established. Yet, in the first four months of its existence, it made contact with landsmanshaftn in New York, Los Angeles, and Buenos Aires, and the first relief efforts were initiated. The landsmanshaft in Los Angeles was especially active: 30 care packages were sent to Germany and distributed among 40 families. In cooperation with the Los Angeles committee, they planned to expand their relief efforts beyond Germany. They discussed establishing a cooperative in Palestine, where landslayt would find work and shelter after immigration.75 The landsmanshaft of Jews from Żelechów was connected with landslayt in Argentina and Australia via a hometown association in Chicago. These organizations not only sent packages to 150 Jews from Żelechów in Germany, but also succeeded in obtaining 35 emigration permits.76

Countless letters to hometown associations overseas — replete with touching personal accounts — testify to the DPs’ hope that their landslayt could provide much-needed help. With most members of their nuclear families murdered, DPs reached out for backing from their symbolic extended families. For example, a woman residing at a DP camp in the Frankfurt

74 Gar, “Bafrayte yidn,” p. 147.
75 YIVO DP-Germany, 1294/92, Tsirkular nr. 1: Tsu ale undzere mitglider, tsu ale krasni-staver landslayt!
76 “Wi azoj brider helfn zich,” Ibergang, January 12, 1947.

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region asked the Brezner Beneficial Society in Boston for assistance. She had survived the war by hiding in the woods and, due to her poor diet during those years, had lost her teeth. Since she had had to undergo a medical examination for her planned emigration to the United States, she needed money for dentures. The woman felt ashamed to ask for financial support, “but unfortunately,” she explained, “there is no one else I could ask for such a thing.”

Beyond the purely financial aspects of assistance, the efforts of the hometown associations were first of all ideologically motivated. Not only in Germany, but also around the world, the landsmanshaftn aimed to alleviate the burden of individuals trying to come to terms with their new realities and to provide them with a sense of belonging. As Rebecca Kobrin suggests, Eastern European Jews “summoned metaphors of regional distinctiveness to form associations to help them gain a foothold in their new homes, while remaining connected to their former homes and other Jewish immigrants scattered throughout the world.”

In general, the Central Committee, as well as the JDC, opposed direct funding of rehabilitation programs in the DP camps through the landsmanshaftn abroad. According to them, most camps had mixed populations and it was virtually impossible to run workshops or vocational training that only served the interests of a particular landsmanshaftn group. The JDC was especially troubled by this, because direct contact between landsmanshaftn in Europe and the United States undermined its organizational structures. The JDC suggested that the landsmanshaftn support their landslayt indirectly by donating funds to the JDC for general distribution. Both the Central Committee and the JDC proposed that if landsmanshaftn wanted to help, they should invest in resettlement programs in Palestine.

There was another reason that the Central Committee initially opposed the landsmanshaftn activities. As already shown in the case of Ibergang, the committee feared regional distinctiveness would clash with the authorities’ national and Zionist aspirations. In his inaugural address at the first conference of Jews from Poland, the Central Committee’s speaker, Dovid

77 AJA, MS-286, Brezner Beneficial Society of Boston, Rita Yelgin to Yehude Yas, Hessisch Lichtenau, February 1, 1948.
Treger, stressed his conviction that there were no longer any Polish Jews, but only Jews from Poland and homeless Jews. He emphasized the importance of a united national and Zionist ideology among the She’erit Hapletah. He did not conceal his critical attitude, stating that the Central Committee did not oppose the landsmanshaftn per se, but would not exhibit a “Polish character.” He urged the federation to work in accordance with the Central Committee’s policies and avoid political involvement. 80 Initially, the Central Committee opposed the founding of Jewish landsmanshaftn in Germany, claiming they would lead to the disintegration of the She’erit Hapletah as a unified Zionist body of survivors. As many Central Committee members became active in hometown associations, the committee’s opposition to the landsmanshaftn grew weaker and finally almost disappeared. 81 The similar interests of landsmanshaftn associations and the Central Committee probably contributed to this. Both bodies distanced themselves from the surrounding German culture and society and called for illegal immigration to Palestine.

Also, as Libhaber made clear, Polish Jews in the DP camps regarded themselves as part of the larger survivor community, as well as “preservers” of the specific Polish-Jewish heritage:

Life is stronger than will. We would have preferred that our new generation, for which we suffer and undergo hardships in our way, should live without memories of the past. It should not organize itself according to yesterday’s history. On the contrary, we will do our best to show our youth the ugliness of that [past] life in Buczacz, Ejszyszki, Zloczew, and Żelechów…. We want Ein Harod, Yagur, and Ruchama [names of kibbutzim] to replace our youth’s memories. But, in the She’erit Hapletah, there are also other individuals — Jews who still live with the past, who cannot easily conceive of a [new] future at the age of 50 and breaking free of memories of collective celebrations in the shtetl, difficult and good days, and shared friends. 82

Libhaber did not question Zionism as the displaced community’s ideological cornerstone. Yet, as he pointed out, the dominance of a Zionist ideology

82 Libhaber, “Dawke Federacjes!”
disconnected from the past and focusing solely on the future was not tenable. Whereas the younger generation, especially those who went through their childhood and youth in the dark years from 1939 to 1945, often felt little attachment to their places of origin, the older generation — who had left behind their entire lives — was much less likely to integrate smoothly into a new society without any ties to the past. Thus, he added, localized identity and affiliations to specific regions or countries did not clash with the collective idea of a Jewish nation: “We cannot talk about an antagonism between Polish, Lithuanian, Hungarian, and other Jews. Another column in a building does not lead to the structure’s collapse.”

Within the context of the DP camps, landsmanshaftn organized local commemorative events and helped to keep alive the legacy of collective remembrance. Polish Jews also attended the commemorative meetings organized by the Central Committees and local camp committees. Public commemoration in the She’erit Hapletah, however, revolved around larger events, such as the uprisings of the Warsaw and Vilna ghettos. Both private and regional commemoration and mourning did not fit into the larger context of these centralized and politicized commemorative practices. Landsmanshaftn therefore invited their members to participate in local memorial services (hazkoret) and memorial assemblies (troyer akademyes), often according to yortsayt dates marking the annihilation of communities, the liquidation of ghettos, and mass shootings. Through the personal and emotional connection to places and the loss of the close relatives they mourned, commemorative meetings organized by the landsmanshaftn were vital for individuals in coming to terms with the destruction and loss. During these services, survivors of a specific community collectively mourned their families and friends and exchanged memories and information. Thus, when the landsmanshaften of Jews from Częstochowa assembled in Landsberg on October 20, 1946, not only was the destruction, deportation, and murder of the Jewish population recorded, but also the bygone glory of what was once a thriving community and its famous sons. This was declared the nucleus for the revival of Polish-Jewish life in the future Jewish homeland:

From the ruins of the Jewish cities and small towns in Poland, symbols have emerged. On the wings of these, new Jewish cities will come into being. Yet it will not be on the banks of the Vistula or Pilica, but

83 Ibid.
84 Gar, “Bafrayte yidn,” p. 147.
by the rivers flowing into the Jordan and Dead Sea. There, new Jewish cities will emerge, Jewish towns, Jewish factories, groves, [and] fields [...] And together, through Jewish culture and Jewish self-defence, we mourners will use all our strength and energy for the holy legacy, in order to heighten and embellish our country in remembering Jewish Częstochowa. 85

Driven by the urge to commemorate, survivors began compiling *yizker* books. 86 In these memorial volumes, survivors from specific communities and towns recorded Jewish life before and during the war, the murder of the inhabitants, and the destruction of communal and institutional life. Biographical sketches and photographs individualized commemoration. The *landsmanshaftn* in Germany edited memorial books with the financial support from hometown societies in the United States. 87 For instance, the memorial book of Częstochowa published in 1948 under the title *Khurbn Tshenstokhov* (The Destruction of Częstochowa) was a heavy volume of more than 400 pages. While only the first few chapters focused on daily, political, and cultural life before the war, more than 200 pages were dedicated to wartime experiences in the local ghetto, as well as on the Aryan side. The editor of this memorial book, Benjamin Orenstein, put special emphasis on individuals and groups actively resisting the enemy in underground movements. This record of Częstochowa's destruction also includes deportations to the HASAG labor camp, Mittelbau-Dora, Buchenwald, and Bergen-Belsen.

The second part features speeches by leading members of the *landsmanshaft* in Germany and poetry about Jewish DP life, while the third part provides biographical information on important personalities from the


87 For a full listing of *yizker* books edited in Germany, see Finder, *Yizker!*, p. 256, n. 43.
inter-war period. The book closes with a prayer for the eternal memory of the deceased.

In his introduction, Cwi Kantor, Chairman of the central administration of the landsmanshaft for Jews from Częstochowa, sheds light on the work involved in preparing a yizker book for publication. Retracing this process in detail is worthwhile, since it shows the interaction among the association’s members. Orenstein first recorded his own observations and memories. He sent them out to about 60 people, who added to, and verified, the information. After integrating these supplementary comments, he resent the manuscript to the first group of readers. Approximately 25,000 sheets of paper were used in preparing the final version. The volume was primarily dedicated to the survivors, but also to members of Częstochowa’s hometown associations in other countries, and to future generations. Kantor wanted the yizker book not only to commemorate the deceased, but also to honor the survivors:

Maybe future generations, immersing themselves in this period, will erect an eternal gravestone (matseyve) not only for the six million who have perished, but also for those who have been spared the hangman’s cruelty, the saved remnant, proving that the glory of Israel will never fade away.\(^8^8\)

In this vein, Kantor reiterated the call to remember and record, evoking the recurrent topoi of the missing gravestone syndrome and substitute gravestones in recent scholarship.\(^8^9\) Moreover, this call to remember was also directed to landsmanshaft in other countries. They were not only asked to keep memories of their loved ones alive, but also not to forget those who survived the atrocities, remaining as the last eyewitnesses of Jewish life and its destruction in Eastern Europe. The landslayt in Germany thus demanded moral commitment from their brethren in other countries, claiming that the Polish-Jewish community’s remnants were their heirs and living yortsayt-likht (memorial candle):

88 Benjamin Orenstein, Churban Czenstochow (Munich: Central Farwaltung fun der Czenstochower landsmanszaft in der amerikaner Zone in Dajczland, 1948), p. 11.
We [...] believe we have survived for only two reasons: first, in order to carry on the existence of our Jewish people, and, second, to erect a monument (matseyve) in the memory of our fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, and close ones who perished to sanctify the name of God (af kidesh-hashem). It will only be possible to realize this testament of our cherished martyrs with moral support from the Yishuv in the Land of Israel and material aid from our American brethren.90

Conclusion: Beyond Germany

After the closure of the DP camps in the months and years following the creation of the State of Israel, and the American DP Act, issued in the same year, the She'erit Hapletah grew smaller and smaller, until its last remnants were absorbed into the newly established German-Jewish communities. Yet, not many DPs chose to remain on the “cursed soil.” Those who were still in Germany when the last DP camp in Föhrenwald was returned to the local population in early 1957 were either chronically ill or unfit for emigration for other reasons.

While precise figures about emigration from Germany are lacking, there are at least some approximate ones. The majority of the Jewish DPs in Germany made aliyah, while about 30–40 percent settled in the United States. The remainder chose destinations such as Canada, South America, South Africa, Western Europe, and Australia.91 We cannot, however, estimate the percentage of Polish Jews within these figures. In emigration lists, all members of the She'erit Hapletah figured indiscriminately as Jews, and not according to their pre-war citizenship. Therefore, the migration routes can only be traced for a few individuals.

Libhaber left Germany in 1951 for the United States.92 Yisroel Ber Alterman, writer of “Zi hot nisht gekent oysklaybn,” settled in Israel. So did the actor Israel Becker, who became a member of the acclaimed Habima National Theater in Tel Aviv. However, the first destination did not always become the permanent new homeland. Expectations voiced before emigrating were

90 YIVO DP-Germany 1294/92, Komitet fun krasnistaver pleytim in goles Daytshland, Tsu ale poylishe yidn in Amerike un in der ershter rey tsu di yidn fun Krasnistav.
92 Lewinsky, Displaced Poets, p. 243.
not always congruent with the realities encountered. In 1961, Mendel Mann left Israel, where he had lived since 1949, for Paris. Aleksander Bardini, unable to settle in Canada, returned to Poland, where he became active not only as an actor, but also as a director, and professor at the State Theater Academy (Akademia Teatralna) in Warsaw. Thus, different ideologies and motivations were behind emigration patterns, and not all personal plans proved feasible.

For many new immigrants in the United States and Israel, landsmanshaftn again provided a sense of belonging. In the United States, where the first Jewish hometown associations came into being as early as the 1880s, some of the new immigrants were absorbed into already existing hometown associations, whereas others created new organizations. The main reason for this rift was the survivors’ estrangement from their veteran landslayt. Memories of their former hometowns in Poland differed immensely between the two groups. In Israel, where the first landsmanshaftn were created by immigrants who came to Palestine in the fourth and so-called Grabski Aliyah in the 1920s, no such rift was discernible. Organized in the framework of the Federation of Immigrants from Poland in Israel, the aim of these landsmanshaftn was to “unite those stemming from Poland, with the aim of creating societal, cultural, and economic support for immigrants from Poland, as well as to take care of and eternalize the historical, cultural, and societal values of Polish Jewry.” Also in other parts of the world, from Argentina to Australia, landsmanshaftn supported Polish-Jewish DPs in their transition from immigrants to new citizens, while at the same time integrating them into the transnational Diaspora of Jews from Poland.

With the disappearance of the DP camps, the She’erit Hapletah in Germany was soon forgotten. Yet not only had the Germans, busy reconstructing their lives in the young Federal Republic, blotted out the former presence of Jewish DPs, but also the DPs themselves considered their stay in the Western Occupation Zones as representing a mere interlude between destruction and rebuilding. Interest in this chapter of history has only

93 Ibid., p. 244.
95 Liber Losh, ed., Landsmanshaftn in Yisroel (Tel Aviv: Hit’ahdut ole Polin beYisra’el, 1961), p. 5.
96 Ibid., p. 6.
increased in recent years. Nevertheless, many aspects, especially everyday history, still require in-depth analysis, and extensive collections of primary sources have not yet been explored. Only through studying them will it be possible to discover and adequately describe this transient society’s polyphony, so aptly illustrated by Alterman’s story about Sonye being unable to decide among her three suitors.
The Adaptation of Survivors to the Post-War Reality from 1944 to 1949

EWA KOŹMIŃSKA-FREJLAK

Introductory Notes

Wars involve time out from everyday life and breaks from the continuity of existence, not only for individuals but also for social groups, and even entire societies and nations. Whether it is possible to return to everyday life (whatever might be understood by that term) after a war ends is of particular importance in such an enormous cataclysm as the Holocaust. In one of his essays, Emmanuel Lévinas wrote:

I would like to recall — before the representatives of so many nations, some of which do not have Jews among them — what the years 1939–1945 meant for European Jews. Among millions of human beings who confronted misery and death at the time, Jews suffered the unique experience of utter abandonment. They experienced a condition inferior to material objects: they experienced complete passivity, they experienced agony. For them, Isaiah, Chapter 53 was completely fulfilled. The suffering they shared with all victims of the war acquired the unique character of racial persecution, which is absolute, since it paralyses the very intention of escape, precluding conversion, self-renunciation, any apostasy in the etymological sense..., thereby attaining the innocence of human beings brought to their ultimate identity...¹

The uniqueness of the Holocaust experience — by its very nature — encounters linguistic barriers. How is it possible to discuss experiences that

defy verbalization, extending beyond preexisting linguistic systems? In the commentary to his analysis of Holocaust testimonies, Jerzy Jedlicki writes about “the overpowering force of fixed literary conventions imposed on the writer even in describing otherwise unparalleled situations.” Can anything be said about the condition of people who survived the Holocaust? How can their existential state at the transition between these two periods — the end of war and the return to a “normal” life — be described? Finally, what kind of data might provide an answer to this question? Obviously, historical, sociological, psychological or philosophical reflection would each give a different response. This article aims to discuss the problem in the most comprehensive manner possible, and is not limited to the perspective of any of these disciplines.

Is it necessary to refer to Holocaust survivors’ wartime experiences in order to reconstruct their existential condition directly after the war? Is the tacit assumption that past experiences affect later perceptions really justified? Isn’t it possible to view the war period as an autonomous episode in the individual’s biography, delimited by specific dates and events, with negligible impact on the survivor’s psyche, or, at any rate, without significant influence on his or her later life?

War, like revolution, is, after all, a break in the continuity of existence. It constitutes a period outside of everyday life, from which it is qualitatively, radically different. According to Roger Callois:

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4 Pitrim Sorokin, The Sociology of Revolution (Philadelphia-London: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1925). Defining the concept of revolution, Sorokin indicates various fundamental changes accompanying it on the levels of both the individual and society as a whole.

5 “Literature points to analogies between destabilizing situations as a result of events, such as wars and revolutions, and natural disasters, such as fires and earthquakes, which disturb the existing order, unexpectedly disrupting the previous course of events and introducing entirely new rules of social life: rules of ‘the social state of emergency’”; Elżbieta Tarkowska, Czas w życiu Polaków. Wyniki badań, hipotezy, impresje (Warsaw: Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii [IFiS] PAN, 1992), pp. 46–47.
War [is] a threat and disaster, which sets free the element of death, just as a feast day sets free the element of life and joy...

War...destroys and completely transforms society, cutting it off from peacetime by a terrible contrast.... It nullifies both anxiety and self-satisfaction; individual endeavor cannot survive — artistic activity, happiness, and even fear. No one can remain on the sidelines and be occupied with something else, because war finds employment for everyone. War requires all power and energy...⁶

Barbara Engelking applies the categories used by Callois⁷ to analyze the Jews’ wartime situation:

For the Jews, the war was not, in general, a time when they experienced a positive sense of community. Their war was not a sacred, but rather a cursed time. The Jewish community during the war became unbelievably atomized, fragmented into individuals or individual families, who were concentrated on one single goal: survival.⁸

The essence of a cursed time is its permanence: It is never complete or definitely closed, but remains a constant burden.⁹ Irrespective of how survivors managed to live through the war — whether in a concentration camp, forced labor camp, forest shelter, among partisans, on the Aryan side, or in some other way — their sense of identity must have been shaken. The act of labeling them as Jews — irrespective of whether they had previously thought

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⁷ Tarkowska points out the distinction between “sacred time” and “profane time” in sociological thought: “In sociology, the classical distinction (after Durkheim) between sacred and profane time serves to distinguish periods of particularly privileged status, linked with important events, from periods devoid of such associations.” See Tarkowska, Czas w życiu Polaków, p. 24.

⁸ Engelking and Paulsson, Holocaust and Memory, p. 27.

⁹ On the permanent influence of the Holocaust in later life on Jews who survived with Aryan papers, see Małgorzata Melchior, Zagłada a tożsamość (Warsaw: IFiS PAN, 2004).
of themselves as members of a Jewish community in any sense — nullified or, at least, subordinated any previous identifications. The situation of Jews who lived through the war in the Soviet Union requires a separate discussion, which follows later in the article.

The subject of this article is the condition of people who survived the Holocaust and tried to return to a “normal” life. Both the individual and social aspects of their existential situation at the transition between two periods are discussed. The attitudes of Polish Jews after the Holocaust, as well as their choices concerning ideology, politics, identity, and life in general, cannot be sufficiently clarified without reference to the survivors’ condition immediately after the war in broad physical, mental, material, and social perspectives. In the Holocaust literature, there are, indeed, many references to this problem. To date, however, it has not been systematically studied. Psychological research on the survivors, carried out in the West since the mid-1970s, does not fill this gap. This research is dominated by perceiving the Holocaust as the main traumatic event in these people’s lives. A survivor is considered to have “…encountered death, having been exposed to its danger, or having witnessed other people’s deaths, while remaining alive.”

It is assumed, therefore, that surviving the Holocaust leaves a similar mark on the survivor’s psyche as surviving an atomic explosion, participating in the Vietnam War, or experiencing a catastrophic flood. Following such events, survivors develop characteristics of what the literature describes as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Criticism of such psychological research is mainly based on the claim that the individuals examined are unrepresentative of the entire survivors’ population since, as a rule, they are either “volunteers” or people seeking help. The researchers’ attitude is also considered one-sided, since they usually perceive survivors as “victims” of the events, and focus on the psychopathology. A no less important

11 Ibid.
12 According to Robert Lifton, PTSD’s principal elements include imprinting death and fear of death, a sense of survivor guilt, mental stupefaction, suspicion of false comfort, and the need to understand and make sense of it. See Robert Lifton, “The Concept of Survivor,” quoted in Engelking and Paulsson, Holocaust and Memory, pp. 245–251. On the other hand, William G. Niederland proposed a “survivor syndrome,” consisting of “persistent and numerous symptoms, like chronic depression and reactive fear, sleeplessness and nightmares, personality changes and advanced psychosomatic illnesses,” quoted in Engelking and Paulsson, Holocaust and Memory, p. 244.
objection, from the perspective of the present discussion, is that research on PTSD was based on testimonies collected many years after the war, and, therefore, subject to processing by memory. To avoid possible memory distortions with the passage of time, this study mainly relies on documents and testimonies collected during the period studied.

The present research covers the years from 1944 to 1949. Reflections on adaptation modes apply to the entire period, but focus primarily on the years from 1944 to 1946/47. As Jewish activists in Poland at that time stressed, 1947 brought stabilization to the survivors’ situation: It became safer; the wave of legal and illegal emigration from Poland ended; living conditions improved; and Jewish organizations, which initially focused on providing the survivors with short-term relief, were able to undertake activities with expected long-term results, in accordance with their ideological guidelines.

Until 1948, there was a continuous influx of Jews who had survived outside the borders of Poland, reaching peaks in 1945 and 1946. This was the result of the survivors’ return from camps and forced labor assignments in the West, and above all, by the implementation of two consecutive


14 “Profound changes have recently been taking place in the life of the remnants of Polish Jewry. During the past six months, the Jewish economic status has definitely improved. There are plenty of opportunities for successful employment. Repatriates from the East who remained in Poland have found jobs, homes, and decent living conditions. There has been an improvement especially in the situation of workers, organized in cooperatives, which have become an important feature in the life of Polish Jewry. Tailors, shoemakers, metalworkers, and other craftsmen, who are members of cooperatives, earn much more than regular workers. One can find an apartment, especially in Silesia, and people are gradually settling down. In Silesia, I saw many pregnant Jewish women: a sign that life is returning to its normal course. There has been a decisive change for the better in the security situation in the country. Jews go on business to remote towns.” See J. Majus, *Rzeczpospolita konstruktywnego realizmu* (translated from Hebrew), *Mishmar*, September 21, 1947; AAN, KC PPR, file no. 295/XX–61, sheet 4.
repatriation agreements — the first signed by Poland with the governments of the Lithuanian, Byelorussian, and Ukrainian Soviet Republics, and the other with the USSR government. The attempts made by survivors at the time to find their place in post-war realities, enable us to follow the adaptation paths of all those who decided to remain in Poland, at least during the early post-war years.

The years between 1944 and 1949 mark a comparatively independent period for the Jewish community in Poland: Their political parties and youth wings were able to conduct activities; several Jewish periodicals were published in Polish, Yiddish, and Hebrew; and Jewish religious associations, Jewish education, social organizations, sports clubs, and the like were active. In 1949, the Zionist parties were dissolved, and the Bund ceased to exist after merging with the Polish United Workers’ Party faction (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza — PZPR) in the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce — CKŻP). By the spring of 1950, most Jewish institutions were nationalized, and some were dissolved. In October 1950, the CKŻP merged with the Jewish Art and Culture Society (Żydowskie Towarzystwo Kultury i Sztuki) to form the Social and

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16 Three Jewish periodicals were published in 1945; 25 (including five youth magazines) in 1946; 27 in 1947; 20 in 1948; 17 in the following year; and only seven in 1950. See Marian Fuks, “Prasa PPR i PZPR w języku żydowskim (Folks-Shtime 1946–1956),” BŻIH, no. 3 (1979), p. 111; Józef Korzeniowski reports about 78 Jewish press titles published in the years 1944–1950 in Poland, including 37 that appeared regularly. See Józef Korzeniowski, “Bibliografia czasopism żydowskich w PRL,” BŻIH, no. 3–4 (1986). According to Zofia Borzymińska and Rafał Żebrowski, in the second half of the 1940s, about 30 Jewish periodicals appeared in Polish and Yiddish; and there were about 70 periodicals, including bulletins and one-off issues. See Zofia Borzymińska and Rafał Żebrowski, Po-lin. Kultura Żydów polskich w XX wieku (Zarys) (Warsaw: Amarant, 1993), p. 310.

17 Jewish religious associations were established after a circular was sent out by the Ministry of Public Administration (MAP) on February 6, 1945 (in June 1946, its name was changed to Jewish Religious Congregations). See Józef Adelson, “W Polsce zwanej Ludową,” in Jerzy Tomaszewski, ed., Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950) (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe [PWN], 1993), pp. 429–433.

Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów — TSKŻ), which played a much less significant role.19

The magnitude of the Holocaust was a source of permanent shock to all the survivors. However, the adaptation process to the post-war reality was different among Jews who had not lived under German occupation during the war and learned about the course and extent of the Holocaust only after their return to Poland. Therefore, in this study, survivors from the interior of the USSR are treated as a special group. (All Polish Jews/Poles of Jewish origin returning to Poland from other countries also certainly experienced similar shock. Lack of adequate sources make it impossible to analyze the state of their consciousness during the transition from war to peace, while, on the other hand, they were an incomparably smaller group than those who survived in the USSR.20 This is why only limited mention of this problem is made here.)

The realities the survivors had to face required adaptation. They found it necessary to undertake activities to give meaning in a world rendered meaningless by the Holocaust. To make existence in Poland possible and to ensure their security in a broad sense, Jewish survivors had to overcome their wartime experiences. To improve their existential condition, they had to confront fundamental questions, such as “what for” and “how” to live? The range of available answers was determined by the post-war reality in Polish society, on the one hand, and by the possibilities and restrictions imposed by the Communist authorities, on the other.

Some survivors never intended to stay in Poland. They could not and did not want to continue to live in the country where their loved ones, family members, acquaintances, and strangers alike — their entire pre-war world — had been murdered. Many repatriates from the USSR treated Poland only as a stopover to the places where they would eventually settle. The unfriendly attitude of Polish society towards the returning Jews, as well as

19 The TSKŻ’s role was significantly reduced, compared to the function and scope of the activities of its predecessor, the CKŻP. However, it should be borne in mind that from the perspective of a large part of the Jewish community, the TSKŻ played an immensely important role, since there was no alternative. See Grzegorz Berendt, Życie żydowskie w Polsce w latach 1950–1956 Z dziejów Towarzystwa Społeczno-Kulturalnego Żydów w Polsce (Gdansk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2006); idem, “A New Life: Jewish Institutions and Organizations in Poland from 1944 to 1950” in this volume.

20 See Albert Stankowski’s article, “How Many Polish Jews Survived the Holocaust?,” in this volume.
a wave of pogroms and murders perpetrated against them, was another argument for emigration. Frequently, their only remaining relatives lived abroad. The decision to emigrate was also obvious to those who did not accept the new political system in Poland. The motives behind their decisions seem fairly clear: initial rejection of the conditions for future life in Poland. Similar psychological, ideological, and political arguments were immaterial for survivors who decided to remain in the country. There were also those who did not have to “make decisions,” since they did not feel they had any other alternatives. Thus, emigration can be considered as a form of plebiscite or test: Some of those who remained were able to find their own place in the country, or at least initially hoped they would.

The Condition of Survivors Immediately after the War

It is impossible to understand the existential condition of survivors without referring to some Holocaust statistics. According to CKŻP data, out of approximately 3.5 million Jews in pre-war Poland, only 42,662 remained self-declared Jews by May 1, 1945, within the country’s new borders, increasing to 106,492 by January 1, 1946, and to 240,489 by July 1. Rapid changes in the number of survivors followed the implementation of two consecutive repatriation agreements. The majority of the survivors were men; and also

21 See Andrzej Żbikowski’s article, “The Post-War Wave of Pogroms and Killings,” in this volume.
22 See Albert Stankowski’s article, “How Many Polish Jews Survived the Holocaust?,” in this volume. Only the most important data are presented here without undertaking critical analysis of the sources on which they are based. In the context of the subject discussed, it is particularly important to determine the direction of changes in the survivors’ demographic structure in relation to the pre-war Jewish population in Poland.
24 According to CKŻP data, in 1945, 13,130 women were registered in Łódź, compared with 13,960 men. See Dobroszycki, Survivors of the Holocaust, p. 12; in 1947, among the Jews registered in Poland, men constituted 51.7 percent and women 48.3 percent. See Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska, Żydzi polscy (1947–1950). Analiza więzi społecznej ludności żydowskiej (Warsaw: IFiS PAN, 1996), p. 29; for every 100 repatriated men from the Soviet Union registered in provincial and district committees in the first half of 1946, there were 83.4 women. See Zarys działalności Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce za okres od 1 stycznia do 30 czerwca 1946 (Warsaw: Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce [CKŻP], 1947), p. 24. Men predominated, understandably, also among those who survived the war as partisans or in the army. See Dobroszycki, Survivors of the
characteristic was the low number of children and elderly people. The vast majority of the elderly were single.²⁵

The largest group of survivors were those who had been evacuated or deported from Poland’s Eastern Territories to the USSR, primarily to the Asiatic republics, where they lived throughout the war. Men predominated in this group since they had had a better chance of escaping to the Soviet Union at the beginning of the war.²⁶

“All Jewish survivors carry memories of the most terrifying experiences on their shoulders. Each has his or her own story, which seems to be broadly similar, although its nature differs in each individual case. Every survivor’s heart trembles with the pain of having lost everything that was dearest to him or her,” Emil Sommerstein, Chairman of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, stated in his radio address to Jews abroad, in January 1945.²⁷

With respect to the psychological situation of survivors who experienced German occupation, the present study primarily draws on material collected from as early as 1944 by the Central Jewish Historical Commission (Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna — CŻKH), which was attached to the CKŻP (in 1947 the commission became the Jewish Historical Institute).²⁸ These testimonies came from those closely identified with the Jewish community, as well as assimilated Poles of Jewish origin (also

Holocaust, p. 14. For the sake of comparison: According to the census of 1931, in the Jewish population, for every 100 men there were 108.7 women. See Szyja Bronsztajn, Ludność żydowska w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym: Studium statystyczne (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1963), p. 148, quoted in Dobroszyczyki, Survivors of the Holocaust, p. 12). By contrast, according to the 1946 census in Poland, for every 100 men there were 118.5 women. See Mały rocznik statystyczny (Warsaw: Główny Urząd Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 1947), pp. 9–10, quoted in Dobroszyczyki, Survivors of the Holocaust, p. 12.

²⁵ Dobroszyczyki, Survivors of the Holocaust, pp. 13–14; see also Hurwic-Nowakowska, Żydzi Polscy, pp. 29–31.


²⁸ The author’s observations are based on the first 200 testimonies, with catalog numbers from 301/1 to 301/199. The assumption that they were the earliest records proved to be correct. Additional material was provided by the following two anthologies of testimonies: Maria Hochberg-Mariańska and Noe Grüss, eds., Dzieci oskarżają (Krakow-Lodz-Warsaw: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna [CŻKH], 1947) and idem, Dzieci żydowskie oskarżają (Warsaw: Amerykańsko-Polsko-Izraelska
sometimes from Jews/people of Jewish origin from other countries). They all approached the Jewish committees for various kinds of assistance. Above all, they hoped to obtain information about their families and friends, motivating even those who were more assimilated to contact these committees.29 The Jewish survivors’ testimonies, recorded in the years 1944–1947 at the CŻKH, offer an additional advantage which makes them worthy of analysis: the interviewees’ memories were still fresh.30 The language of these accounts is usually very simple and matter-of-fact. Their authors concentrated on conveying events they had witnessed or participated in, only rarely describing their moods and emotions at the time.

Fryda Koch, who was seven years old at the outbreak of war, lived in the Eastern Borderlands, and hid in the forest before an Aktion, relates:

I had some hot tea. Although my mommy and brother wanted to commit suicide, I no longer agreed to this. I wanted to live. I wanted to live so much. It was so beautiful all around. Now I can tell [you] about what we've been through but I can't express what we felt.31

The range of emotions recalled in these few cases begins with feelings of relief and joy that the war was over. Abraham Zalchender, who was a resident of Warsaw, the son of a rabbi, and was in concentration camps for four years, describes the camp’s liberation:

Fundacja Shalom, 1993). Some of the testimonies included in this book are direct reprints of those edited by Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, which are undated.

29 Testimonies from assimilated Jews, who did not identify with the Jewish community before the war, are likely to be underrepresented. However, their reports are also included in the anthology. This problem was mentioned by Helena Merenholc in a conversation with Barbara Engelking (Merenholc worked at the CKŻP’s Department of Records and Statistics from 1945 to 1949): “The files were not perfect; people changed names, continued hiding on the Aryan side, they hadn’t overcome war psychosis — they just didn’t report to the committee. After what they had been through, they cut themselves off from the bond, which in many cases had been imposed on them. With the end of the war and the controversial liberation, there came anxiety — no one could heal the moral wounds.” See conversation with Helena Merenholc, Nie żałuję ani jednego dnia spędzonego w getcie, in Barbara Engelking, Na łące popiołów ocaleni z Holocaustu (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Cyklady, 1993), p. 211.

30 In a study on the commission’s activities, Grüss makes an interesting observation: “The committee acknowledged the need to popularize the commission’s objectives and went as far as employing certain sanctions to induce people to give testimonies.” Noe Grüss, Rok pracy Centralnej Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej (Lodz: CŻKH, 1946), p. 6.

31 Hochberg-Mariańska and Grüss, Dzieci żydowskie oskarżają, p. 47.
I feel I’m going mad with joy. Soon the first soldiers came, I tell them who I am [the author hid in the camp during the evacuation — E.K.-F.] and how I got here...

I can’t believe it’s all real because I still have a feeling I must be dreaming.32

Moszek Merin, who was born in 1914 in Będzin and hid in a shelter in the forest, recalls:

During those seven months we were deprived of warmth, of tasty food. We didn’t take off our clothes or underwear all that time; we lay like that, day and night. Our diet consisted of dry bread, potatoes with salt, and bitter black coffee.33 Water poured onto our heads from the ceiling.... They didn’t give us a piece of cloth to cover ourselves with. We lived in such conditions until January 27, the [date of the] blessed entry of the Russian Army. With a sigh of relief, we said goodbye to the place we had been suffering in for seven long months.34

Józef Reich was born in Kraków and was four years old at the outbreak of war. Mostly he hid alone in Warsaw, on the Aryan side and later, also with his parents in the country. He recalls:

The Russians marched in. I longed for them, as I knew they would bring me freedom, for which I yearned with all my soul.35

Ten-year-old Krystyna Chiger, who hid with her parents and younger brother in the sewers for 14 months, remembers the first moments after the liberation:

We walked through the [sewage] pipe for a few minutes, then we tore off the manhole cover, and the sewer workers pulled us up to the surface. We looked so miserable. We didn’t even look like children. People felt sorry for us.... I felt very happy when I saw the sun, flowers, and people. And I was so happy, only Pawel cried a great deal and wanted

32 AŻIH, file no. 301/33.
33 Merin obviously meant a coffee substitute: ersatz coffee.
34 AŻIH, file no. 301/119.
to go back to the sewer because he wasn’t used to the light and he was scared of people.36

The joy at the long-awaited liberation, with the consequent “magical expectations” (the triumph of finding lost families)37 paradoxically deepened the sense of isolation, loneliness, and emptiness. This is very clearly expressed in Anna Mous’s account. Born in 1922, she worked as a cash-clerk in her father’s business before the war, survived the Przemyśl Ghetto, and hid in a forest bunker from 1942:

In September [1944], when the Red Army marched in, he [the person who brought food — E.K.-F.] sent a Soviet to our tunnel, who told us to get out. I returned to acquaintances in Przemyśl. Unfortunately, I found no one from my family, and [therefore] asked myself, “Why was I so eager to live? Why?”38

From a testimony by Maria Klein, who escaped from Lwów to Białystok with a 15-year-old son, who was killed, as was her husband:

It is only now that I feel the full extent of my misery, all the delusions: All hopes are dashed. No one can return our dear departed, murdered so cruelly, to us.39

36 AŻIH, file no. 301/2352; the author of the account hid in the sewers, most likely in, and perhaps also under Lwów. The city was liberated from German occupation in late July 1944. The memoirs of Krystyna Chiger, written many years after the war, were published in 2008. See Krystyna Chiger and Daniel Paisner, The Girl in the Green Sweater (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008). The Polish version of the book was published in 2011; Krystyna Chiger and Daniel Paisner, Dziewczynka w zielonym sweterku (Warsaw: PWN, 2011). The story about the group of Jews hidden in the Lwów sewers, among them Krystyna Chiger, was also told by Robert Marshall (see Robert Marshall, In the Sewers of Lvov: A Heroic Story of Survival from the Holocaust (New York: Scribner, 1991). The latter book became a basis for the film In Darkness made by Agnieszka Holland in 2011.


38 AŻIH, file no. 301/317.

39 AŻIH, file no. 301/12.
Regina Fingier was a bacteriologist and graduate of Strasburg University. She survived the Warsaw Ghetto and from 1942 lived on the Aryan side; after being denounced, she became an inmate of Pawiak, Majdanek, and other camps. She recalls:

...Here, in the concentration camp, where I lost my son and the whole sense of my future life, I spent 11 weeks.40

Chana Barasz survived liquidation of the Białystok Ghetto, escaped from a transport to Treblinka, and subsequently hid in the forest. Her four-year-old daughter was killed during the war. She recalls:

In mid-July [1944], we finally heard the rumble of cannons, then I knew the hour of liberation was drawing near [...] [and then] the longed-for moment finally came.... It is only now that I feel my loneliness; I am left all alone in the whole wide world.41

From a woman’s testimony (no name given), born in 1924 in the Lublin region, with a Zionist father, and who received a “good and careful” upbringing in a moderately well-off home:

On May 5 [1945], the dissolution of partisan otryads [units] was celebrated. Any girl who wanted to could go and start a private life. A lovely parade was organized, everybody gave a salute as a sign of unity. We were issued with certificates to show we had really been partisans. I got a good job in Kiev. And I was given all kinds of assistance there as everyone respected such people who brought honor to their country. But I came back anyway to weep on the family grave once more in my life.42

Nina Boniówna, born in Warsaw in 1930, wrote in her diary:

On January 15, 1945, the victorious Red Army marched in. Only then, did I begin to cry. After a few days, I realized I felt better during the occupation than now in freedom. It is only now that you miss your family

40 AŻIH, file no. 301/167.
41 AŻIH, file no. 301/15.
42 AŻIH, file no. 301/111.
and friends, and feel the lack of education and upbringing. During the occupation, my thoughts were constantly focused on how to avoid capture and to live to see the end of German crimes, and avenge the blood of our family and friends.  

Sadness, emptiness, loneliness, the sense of abandonment, and the pointlessness of life invoked in the above survivor testimonies are extreme, and cannot be comprehended without referring to factual data. The word “lonesomeness” acquires a particular sense when the following Holocaust statistics are considered: Before the outbreak of the war, there were approximately 40,000 Jews in Lublin, whereas after the liberation, only 594 were left in the city and the neighboring towns and villages; out of the 40,000-strong Jewish population of Białystok, 114 remained alive; out of the 250,000 Jews of Łódź, only 877 were found in the ghetto the day it was liberated. 

Not only were individual families annihilated, but also entire communities, along with the social institutions that used to play specific roles within the communities. The inevitable feeling of alienation after years of struggling for survival, which accompanied the survivors during the early years after the liberation, was aggravated by the loss of roots. Not only was their world of social contacts wiped out, but also the space where they used to live had been brutally stripped of its former, usually automatically attributed, meanings. The initial adaptation required creating basic preconditions for existence. However, in order to put down their roots, the survivors also had to reconstruct and/or reestablish the symbolic order in the surrounding reality.

The end of the war forced the survivors to face the magnitude of their losses. Those who had survived under German occupation could have no doubts as to the actual objectives of the policy consistently pursued by the
invaders. Persecuted, escaping death every day, they constantly experienced the loss of their family members and friends. However, only after the liberation did they fully realize the enormity of the cataclysm. Until then, they had usually only known a small fragment of the reality. Nor did the unique experience of the Holocaust have any parallels in the entire history of the Jewish people. Anyway, knowledge alone did not guarantee understanding. The immensity of the crime was hard to comprehend; what had happened might have seemed impossible, even in the face of the facts. The realization of what had befallen the Jews during the war came later. As Rochel Goldfinger’s concluding remarks in her reflections on the Holocaust in January 1945 state: “It is impossible that all these things ceased to exist — that they all have vanished for ever.”

The Jews who survived in the interior of the USSR experienced incomparably greater shock when returning to their country, even though the Polish-language press in the Soviet Union, which reached the deportees, reported on the German occupation and the situation of Jews in Poland. The subject initially came up mainly in the context of the terror and discriminatory policies of the invader. The first cautious reports on the

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**Footnotes:**

48 The author would like to thank Professor Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska for allowing her access to texts from the anthology she was coediting before publication. Rochel Goldfinger, “Pozdrowienia’ z domu, Lubartów. 1947,” in Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, Adam Kopciowski, and Andrzej Trzciński, eds., *Tam był kiedyś mój dom... Księgi pamięci gmin żydowskich* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2009), p. 448.

extermination of Jews appeared in *Nowe Widnokręgi* in September 1942. On this occasion, the camps in Bełżec and Trawniki, “where reportedly people are murdered with poisonous gases,” were mentioned. “Reportedly,” and therefore not “unquestionably,” the author Stefan Wierbłowski distanced himself from the information presented when he gave the source of the estimated number of victims. Anyway, Wierbłowski was not preoccupied with the fate of Jews as such. Characteristically, it did not explicitly follow from his text that the victims of Bełżec and Trawniki were Jews. In accordance with the title of the article, he treated “the martyrdom of the Polish and Jewish population” as a manifestation of terror, a policy aimed at intimidation, thus retaining at least a semblance of rationality. The policy was perceived as directed in an almost equal measure against Poles and Jews, which seemed to be confirmed by the figures provided:

> According to data available to the Polish government, the number of Poles who have been executed, murdered or tortured to death is approaching the terrifying figure of 200,000, and the number of murdered Jews has already exceeded 200,000.

An article by Andrzej Jarecki, published in January 1943, marked a turning point in the perception of the situation of Jews under German occupation. As he clearly demonstrated, the consistently implemented German ethnic policy was aimed at the total and absolute annihilation of the Jewish population in the subjugated European countries. Therefore, the crimes against Jews were not incidental in nature; they were not mere “excesses,” as he observed. By dispelling illusions, Jarecki closed earlier discussions on the subject. This was also because his claim about the Germans’ special attitude towards the Jews, though obvious in view of the facts, contradicted the Soviet propaganda guidelines, which “did not acknowledge any special categories of suffering.” As Julian Stryjkowski recalled, strict adherence to these guidelines in the *Wolna Polska* periodical was supervised by the

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50 Stefan Wierbłowski, “Terror,” *Nowe Widnokręgi*, no. 9 (September 5, 1942).
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
all-powerful censor. There is no reason to suppose that Nowe Widokręgi’s editors enjoyed greater freedom.

Consequently, the fundamental objective of later authors (almost until mid-1944) came to prove that the extermination of Jews, far from being an end in itself, followed from the German war against Polish society. Many of them made no distinction between the Polish and Jewish experience whatsoever. Some dealt simply with the “experience of occupation,” the description of which evidently corresponded more closely to the Jewish than the Polish fate. Occasionally, the fate of Jews was simply blended into the infernal “occupation experience” of Poles, becoming one of its elements. As Wincenty Rzymowski wrote, “We already know the important role played by ‘chasing the Jew,’ the first step in the process of depraving people through occupation, that first step preparing the country for hell.” Empathic attempts at reconstructing the victims’ psychological situation were the exception. In the second half of 1944, Nowe Widokręgi began to publish reports from the Polish territory liberated from German hands by the Red Army. Their authors, while describing the ravages of war, also reported on the Holocaust. In September 1944, Zygmunt Modzelewski reported from Lublin:

In the space beyond the Łokietek gate, there is an air of emptiness: There used to be a Jewish quarter, which was turned into a ghetto by Gestapo men, then demolished and burned. Deserted streets resemble a cemetery with their deathly silence.

Five years of occupation have completely transformed the face of Lublin. There are hardly any Jews. Several hundred survivors, who have abandoned their shelters at last, are slowly returning to life....

The authors documented the extent of destruction by referring to statistics. As one of them under the pseudonym “P” wrote in Wolna Polska: “The Germans have murdered 3,200,000 Polish Jews. In the ghettos, cities, and

towns, at Majdanek, Auschwitz, [and...] Treblinka, the Nazi death factories operated at full capacity, killing defenseless, innocent people by the tens and hundreds of thousands. The old, familiar ‘de-Jewifying Poland’ program has been almost fully completed.”

The post-cataclysmic world was represented by the motifs of emptiness, the desert, the cemetery, recurrent images of the charred remains of the Warsaw Ghetto, and ruins. In certain texts, nonexistence and nothingness were used as distinctive Holocaust symbols. The same motifs also appeared in the descriptions of liberated non-Jewish Poland. From the point of view of the Jewish reader at the time, it is important to note that the images of ruins, charred rubble, and the “dead” city also typically depicted Warsaw immediately after the liberation, when it was known to be in the process of coming back to life.

The picture of the crimes perpetrated against Jews, as it emerged in reports published in Polish-language periodicals in the USSR, clearly omitted its unique character. Thus, Sobibór and Treblinka were still described as sites of universal mass murder. The victims of Nazism were often written about without differentiating among them, even when focussing on sites of the Jewish genocide, such as Babi Yar or Treblinka. The word “Jew” is completely absent in the report by a special Polish-Russian commission for investigating

61 Jerzy Pański, “Na gruzach getta. W pierwszą rocznicę zburzenia getta,” Nowe Widnokręgi, no. 7 (April 1, 1944). The following report was written when the uprising was still in progress: “It is the besieged center of Warsaw, the Warsaw Ghetto, which still continues to fight, locked in a fierce, tenacious, cruel battle. There are no more houses, no more streets. The shapeless mass of what was once constructed by human hands and served as human dwellings includes Muranów, Leszno, Ogrodowa, and Grzybowska. Yet, there are still people living [...] [there], they still respond by firing at the exploding German mines, they still shoot at the attackers, they still pull down the shaky walls of the houses on the Germans’ heads; they still pour flames on enemy machines.” P.B., “Termopile Warszawy,” Nowe Widnokręgi, no. 10 (May 20, 1943).
62 Janina Broniewska wrote: “Friends, inhabitants of Warsaw! Understand: There is nothing here! Your mother is not here, nor is there any caretaker. There is a cemetery. There is death here. Marszałkowska, Wspólna, and Nowogrodzka [street names] are no longer here. This is the worst nightmare. And words are worn out, words are useless...”; idem, “Powrót,” Wolna Polska, no. 4 (January 30, 1945).
63 Tadeusz Zabłudowski wrote: “We will not forgive the Germans for the...graves in Katyn, we will not forgive the execution of thousands in the Warsaw Ghetto. We will not forgive [the massacre at] Babi Yar in Kharkov [actually, Babi Yar is a ravine near the Ukrainian capital Kiev — E.K.-F.], holding the remains of 20,000 victims, or the mass
German war crimes committed at the Majdanek extermination camp near Lublin, published in *Wolna Polska*.64 Neither does it appear in Zofia Bystrzycka’s report written immediately after Majdanek’s liberation.65 In an article on Auschwitz, published under the telling title, “The German Death Industry,” there is not the slightest mention of the Jewish victims there.66 In the few reports published in *Nowe Widokręgi* and *Wolna Polska*, Jewish readers would find descriptions of the refined cruelty characterizing the German attitude towards Jews. In January 1945, *Nowe Widokręgi* published Jerzy Pański’s commentary on the material collected by the Special State Commission documenting German crimes in Lviv, richly illustrated with an assortment of lurid photographs. However, although the photographs showed Jewish victims, the article’s ending left the strongly misleading impression that non-Jewish inhabitants of Lviv suffered just as much.67

Among the articles concerning the Holocaust printed in *Nowe Widokręgi* and *Wolna Polska*, there are hardly any testimonies either from the victims of, or witnesses to, the crimes. Only three Jewish testimonies68 and three reports by Polish participants in the events, at least partly devoted to the subject of the Holocaust, appeared in *Nowe Widokręgi* throughout the years it was in circulation.69 Only a few writers referred to reports of people directly involved in those events. In April 1944, Pański wrote:

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64 “Sprawozdanie polsko-sowieckiej komisji nadzwyczajnej dla zbadania zbrodni niemieckich dokonanych w obozie unicestwienia na Majdanku pod Lublinem,” *Wolna Polska*, no. 35–36 (October 1, 1944).
65 The report states: “We are standing today over charred remains of our brothers, over an unearthed mass grave, on which someone has put a wreath with white ribbons; we know that the murderers’ endeavors to bury it in the dust of oblivion were in vain. The thirst for vengeance seeps into our hearts and runs deep.” Zofia Bystrzycka, “Majdanek,” *Wolna Polska*, no. 30 (August 18, 1944).
67 “The exterminatory action carried out by the Nazis in Lwów was particularly methodical. The Germans slaughtered Jews everywhere but perhaps destruction in other spheres of the population does not seem to have been equally planned anywhere else.” Jerzy Pański, “Niemiecka dusza,” *Nowe Widokręgi*, no. 1 (1945).
69 Zofia Dróżdż, “Trofim,” *Nowe Widokręgi*, no. 23 (December 5, 1943); Henryk

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What we know so far is still fragmentary information, snippets of the whole picture, isolated shocking snapshots: cursory accounts of Warsaw inhabitants living on the unfenced side, fragmentary reports, journalistic dispatches...

Indeed, the picture of the Jewish fate during the war emerging from these articles consists of freeze-frame images of particular events, which acquired the status of symbols. Divorced from the reality, mostly devoid of emotional background, they became mere abstractions. Without the advantage of using testimonies, the articles had limited credibility, especially as the events described were difficult to believe. Even the writers themselves expressed their incredulity. In November 1944, Pański wrote:

The railway is certainly easier to believe in than Majdanek. It is easier to believe in the greatness of the human soul than in its utter degradation.... Is it conceivable that there are people who enjoy arranging such spectacles? How can we imagine Musfeld from Majdanek stripping a woman naked, tying her up, and sliding her onto a furnace grate, or his helpers, who observed, through a peephole, human bodies, crammed into the gas chamber, climbing on top of one another in agonial spasms?

Thus, these publications provided only fragmentary information, and the writers formulated their statements with great caution, sometimes showing lack of knowledge, which is surprising to today’s reader. Symptomatically, as late as June 1944, Bernard Mark, future Holocaust scholar and Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny — ŻIH) Head, wrote about “electric stoves” in Bełżec that were supposedly used to murder Jews. Nowe Widokręgi and Wolna Polska gave only a fragmentary picture of the fate of Jews in occupied Poland. Only one thing was clear: Unimaginable, terrifying things happened during the war. However, it was an insufficient

Bronisławski, “Warszawa, lipiec 1943,” Nowe Widokręgi, no. 1–2 (January 15, 1944); ibid., no. 3 (February 1, 1944).
Pański, “Na gruzach getta.”
Bernard Mark, “Icchok Zawada,” Nowe Widokręgi, no. 11–12 (1944). Murders by electric current were also mentioned in a note (unsigned) from the Reuters agency. See “Giną ludzie bezbronnii,” Nowe Widokręgi, no. 9 (1943).
basis for imagining the extent of the tragedy. Klara Mirska wrote many years later about her return to Poland from the USSR in 1945:

> Even in the railway carriage, I experienced a feeling of surprise, which had not yet turned into terror, which had not yet been fully realized, but was already slowly and gradually beginning to get through.

And further:

> Next to us sat that nice young man who helped us to get on the train. I suddenly asked him: “Please, tell me why I don't see a single Jew in the carriage? Why don't I see them at the stations?” “There are no Jews, Madam. They are gone. Don't you know?” He began to tell me what had happened. His account defied my imagination, my sense of reality — Poland without Jews!”

The Jews arriving from the USSR, who were the vast majority of Holocaust survivors, faced the enormity of the overwhelming destruction. It could be that, in order to adjust to the Holocaust, they had to reconstruct the train of events, which they had fortunately escaped, and to live them over again — each individual in his or her own way. As Dr. J. Dutschmeister, Secretary on the board of the Lower Silesian branch of the Society for the Protection of Jewish Health (Zarząd Dolnośląskiego Oddziału Towarzystwa Ochrony Zdrowia — TOZ), put it:

> Thousands of Jews started to return from the vast Soviet Union, where they had been temporary guests during the terrible time of war. Depressed over the horrifying cemetery they found in their former homeland, they needed not only immediate medical assistance, but also kind words of comfort from their brothers, the Jewish doctors, and care from the warm-hearted, devoted Jewish nurses.

This is why Jewish activists made the following appeal:

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Our brothers and sisters are returning to Poland, where, during the Nazi occupation, the greatest tragedy of the Jewish people took place. The first question they put to us is whether any of their loved ones has remained alive. When they are faced with the truth, which was known to them before, but now became certain, they are overcome with a feeling of excruciating pain. Our task at this terrifying moment, when the repatriates face this harsh reality, is to meet them with a warm heart and support them morally and materially.75

The majority of survivors who remained in Poland after the war decided not to settle in their pre-war places of residence.76 Some were concerned about their safety; others could not live in the places where their loved ones, and frequently the whole community, had been murdered; still others were unable to accept the unfriendliness of their Polish neighbors. It should also be noted that the migration of masses, including Jews, was a direct consequence of the war, and, in particular, the shift of the Polish borders. A considerable proportion of the survivor community comprised former inhabitants of territories annexed by the Soviet Union after the war. According to Albin Głowacki’s estimates, about 65,000 Polish Jews from the territories annexed by the Soviets in 1939 were deported to the interior of the USSR.77 This figure does not include many thousands of Jewish DPs — also former inhabitants of the Eastern Borderlands — who were “voluntarily” “recruited” for work and relocated to the eastern districts of the Soviet Union.78 The need to adapt to life under new and frequently unfamiliar conditions was certainly an important factor in shaping the survivors’ psychological situation.

Returning to their pre-war dwellings, the survivors were often met with dislike by a great number of their Polish neighbors.79 Nobody was waiting for

75 E. Rostal, “Repatriacja Żydów polskich z ZSRR,” Ichud Biuletyn CK Zjednoczenia Syjonistów Demokratów w Polsce, no. 3 (1946).
76 “Nearly three-quarters of the Jews presently in Kraków are refugees from Warsaw, repatriates from the East and former prisoners of concentration camps.” See “Co piszą o nas za granicą?” (Reprinted from “Życie budzi się wśród Żydów w Polsce” from the London Observer); BŻAP (September 5, 1945).
78 Ibid.
79 On Polish attitudes towards the survivors returning from their wartime wanderings,
them: Their houses and shops already had new owners, and, moreover, the local inhabitants often feared that the Jews would want to recover their former property. “In Lubartów, fixed property is being returned to applicants. In the other localities, the restitution of property is proceeding with great difficulty,” according to the report of the Office for Assistance to the Jewish Population at the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego — PKWN) for the period from September 16 to October 10, 1946. 80 The Jewish population felt helpless, receiving no support in this matter from local authorities. The survivors were simply afraid to demand restitution of their property. Jews who left for Palestine reported:

But until now nothing has been done to make possible the return of even part of the loot to the remaining Jews. The Jews see with their own eyes their stolen property and are unable to do anything about it. 81

Many survivors recalled with bitterness the questions their former neighbors had greeted them with, which they felt were full of unpleasant surprise, such as “So you’re still alive?” As Halina Birenbaum put it:

On returning to their native parts, they [the Jews] found none of their folks, while their former Polish neighbors, especially in small towns, did not appear happy about seeing them. “Oh, you’re alive! You’ve survived?!...and...you had to explain that...you were alive.” 82

Henryk Grynberg made similar observations:

People also looked at us as if we had returned from the world-to-come and asked with surprise: “How come? So Abramkowa [the protagonist’s mother — E.K.-F.] is alive?”

see Alina Skibińska’s article, “The Return of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and the Reaction of the Polish Population,” in this volume.
80 AAN, PKWN, file no. XI/6, Trzecie Sprawozdanie z działalności Referatu d/s Ludności Żydowskiej za okres 16 IX–10 X 1946, sheet 17.
There were different people. Those who used to live there were gone. It was as if we had returned after 200, not two years.83

Jews who survived in the East were met with hostility by Poles directly after crossing the border. Halina Jodko-Kamińska gives the following shocking account:

[In 1946,] we reached Biała Podlaska. The train stood there for a long time so we got off for a breath of fresh air after a long ride in a stuffy carriage. We were walking with my mom towards the forest to find some green space. We saw a group of young people in breeches, long boots, jackets, and cycling caps.
– Where are you ladies returning from?
– From Kazakhstan. We have only now managed to leave.
– Aren’t you Jewish, Madam?
I had red hair, protruding eyes, and a bad thyroid. I explained that I wasn’t.
– And in which carriages are Jews traveling?
– How do you mean “in which carriages”? They’re traveling with us.
– You’re traveling together with Jews?, they asked in surprise.
– We were in exile together, we are returning together. And why are you asking?
– Because we are from the forest, partisans: We fight.
We walked on. A group of youngsters with a basket full of food passed by. They asked where our scouts were. I told them there were no scouts. Then they told us to respond, when they asked about scouts so that it’s clear who is Polish. A scout means a Pole. They did not want to give food to Jews because they had done a lot of harm during the Soviet occupation.
As the train began to pull out, these youngsters ran up with iron rods. They started to bash the legs of the Jews sitting near the open doors. We pulled our Jews deeper into the carriage. We felt sorry for them.
Dusk had fallen. We had been riding for about half an hour when the train stopped. Skirmishes began.
– Give us the Jews.
We heard shots and Jews begging:
– Don’t hand us over to them.

We told them to lie down on the floor. I went up to the edge of the carriage and asked what the problem was.

– Give us the Jews.

I told them:

– They’ve gone through Siberia, just as we did.

And those outside answered:

– But you don’t know how much harm they’ve done here, they collaborated with the Communists and they also tormented you back there.

– That’s true, but leave the Jews alone.

Further on, some scuffling began. They dragged a Jew out and beat him up. Poles from the last carriage got him out of trouble and the train moved on. The railwaymen told us that there had already been such incidents before in other transports.”

The following letter to Władysław Wolski, the government’s Plenipotentiary for Repatriation, from June 25, 1946, reveals the seriousness of the problem:

The Ministry of Public Administration’s (MAP) political department claims to have received data from the Central Committee of Jews in Poland concerning the attacks on trains of repatriates from the USSR carried out by bands of National Armed Forces. On June 8 and 23, this year, several repatriates were beaten up and taken away to an unknown destination by the NSZ.

MAP’s political department deems it necessary to escort trains of repatriates from the Soviet border to their destinations.

The unfriendly attitude of organizations and individuals, whose function was to take care of repatriates, including the Jewish ones, is mentioned in a report on the activity of the Polish Workers’ Party’s (PPR — Polska Partia Robotnicza) Łódź branch from July 1946:

A Jewish repatriate met with a fairly unfriendly attitude by Red Cross nurses (often, Jews were beaten by railway guards, etc.).

85 AAN, MAP, file no. 786, Departament Polityczny, Wydział Narodowościowy, sheet 42.
86 AAN, Spuścizna Zachariasza, 476/25, Sprawozdanie z działalności (koła PPR przy
Concern for physical safety was a very important determinant in the Polish Jews’ post-war attitudes. According to CKŻP data, 350 Jews were killed in 1945, and 800 in the first three months of 1946. MAP political department’s files contain records of 30 assaults on the Jews carried out between March and August 1945.

...of which 11 were assaults and robberies, one was caused by the restitution of belongings stolen from Jews during the occupation, two by the repossession of agricultural property, two by the repossession of fixed property, a house. The other 14 assaults were the result of Nazi propaganda, which poisoned Polish society with racial hatred throughout the occupation.

Leaving aside the potentially disputed number of Jewish victims, danger was common enough to persuade the Citizens’ Militia’s Chief Officer (Milicja Obywatelska — MO), Brigadier General Franciszek Jóźwiak (“Witold”) to issue a special order to “protect the life and property of the Jewish population in Poland.” The Memorial on the Safety of Jewish Life and Property prepared by the Lublin branch of the Voivodeship Committee of Jews in Poland (Wojewódzki Komitet Żydowski — WKŻ), mentions repeated phone threats:

Every now and then unknown individuals demand by phone that we close the committee and that all Jews leave Lublin within a week or else it will be difficult for them....
In view of the deteriorating security situation in various parts of the country, many survivors searched for new places of residence. In March 1946, in a memorandum to the Lublin voivode, WKŻ activists in Lublin wrote:

The feeling of panic among Jews is increasing and spreading more and more widely. Their fragile nervous system, weakened by years of the German ordeal, crematoria, and gas chambers, makes even those Jews who enjoyed a secure existence, based on sound economic and social principles, abandon their homes and workplaces, so as to get away from the area afflicted by the plague of antisemitism.91

Jews moved from smaller localities to larger Jewish centers.92 The CKŻP organized relocations from the most dangerous regions. In May 1945, 500 people left the Kielce voivodeship.93 Upper and Lower Silesia were considered the safest, however, there was alarming news from the Rzeszów, Lublin, and Białystok areas.94

The Kielce Pogrom in July 1946 ultimately convinced many survivors of the vitality of Polish antisemitism, which, as a consequence of wartime demoralization, turned homicidal. Yet, Kielce was only a symbol: There was also Rzeszów in July 1945 and Kraków in August 1945. A Glos Bundu
editorial from August 1946 refers to the “constantly recurring murder of Jews, dragging Jews out of trains and carriages for homicidal purposes in the whole country.”95 A report on the activity of the Central Special Commission, established by the CKŻP in July 1946 to protect and defend Jewish institutions, describes over 2,000 Aktions undertaken in one year.96 Despite an undeniable improvement in the situation in 1947, the Ministry of Public Security of Poland (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego — MBP) files still reported public feeling that might have led to pogroms until as late as 1949.97 Not only a sense of fear among the survivors, but also “a lack of any guarantee of the safety of their lives, drastic evidence of antisemitism in education, the judiciary, administrative apparatus, even in factories,” was exacerbated by the common knowledge of the MO’s frequently equivocal attitude. They were known not only to refrain from rescuing assaulted Jews, but also actually to participate in the assaults, as mentioned in the article in Głos Bundu quoted above.98

The problem of their employment in state enterprises was also closely connected with the survivors’ sense of security. In keeping with the “productivization” principle, the majority of the Jewish political parties made efforts to increase the proportion of Jews in the so-called “productive trades.” According to Major Hershenhorn in May 1945:

Perpetual concern about safety hinders the normal course of life. Under such conditions, Jews cannot purposefully and efficiently engage in productive work, in general, and in cooperative work, in particular. In certain districts, this problem is further compounded by the local authorities’ unfavorable attitude.99

95 “Jakie jest wyjście?” (author unknown), Głos Bundu (August, 1946).
96 AŻIH, Sekretariat CKŻP, file no. 138, sheet 4; the Special Commission at CKŻP was established on the strength of CKŻP’s resolution after the Kielce Pogrom. However, this paid body was dissolved after one year of activity, but it continued in the form of a voluntary welfare institution; ibid., p. 8.
98 “Cases of militia officers participating in pogrom Aktions...” were reported. See “Jakie jest wyjście?”
“On many shop floors, Jewish workers are not welcomed by their Polish colleagues,” wrote Herman Parnas in 1946. In a letter to the Ministry of Industry, in June 1946, Chaskiel Kameraz, Head of the CKŻP’s Department for Productivization, also reported on the difficulties encountered by Jewish craftsmen returning from the Soviet Union. In the absence of appropriate certificates, autonomous local craftsmen’s associations “repeatedly refused to grant permission to practice the craft,” demanding “a certificate after re-taking [underlined in original — E.K.-F.] the craftsmen’s competence examination.” The author of the letter unhesitatingly described such demands as “formalism, unjustified under the given circumstances”:

There is probably no one who does not know what ordeal the Jews, in particular, have gone through during this war [...] and that, under those circumstances, preserving old Polish documents was out of the question. As for Russian documents, it is well known that repatriates are obliged to hand over all Russian documents, including certificates of qualifications and employment, to Soviet border authorities.

The respective authorities refuse to consider these circumstances, unlawfully assuming loss of documents to be tantamount to loss of professional qualifications. Such a position not only harms the craftsmen personally by preventing them from engaging in their given occupation, but it is also socially and economically harmful because, on the one hand, it produces derelicts, and, on the other hand, it deprives the national economy of economically sound and useful elements.

Local Jewish committees also met with difficulties from local authorities when they tried to establish manufacturing cooperatives.

100 Herman Parnas, “Dokąd idziemy?” Opinia, no. 4 (September 10, 1946).
101 A letter dated June 12, 1946, from the CKŻP’s Department for Productivization to the Ministry of Industry’s Department for Artisan Affairs, signed by Chaskiel Kameraz, Head of the Department for Productivization, and without Secretary Paweł Zelicki’s handwritten signature. See AŻIH, Wydział Produktywizacji CKŻP, file no. 84. (At the time of going to print, the Department for Productivization’s files were being re-cataloged and were not paginated.)
102 AŻIH, Wydział Produktywizacji CKŻP, Pismo Zarządu Gł. Związku Rewizyjnego Spółdzielni Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej (illegible signature) do okręgu w Warszawie, Krakowie, Łodzi, Lublinie, Białymstoku, Rzeszowie, Radomiu, Toruniu, Katowicach, Poznaniu, do wiadomości Tymczasowego Komitetu Centralnego Żydów Polskich w Warszawie, Łódź 25 kwietnia 1945. “We have received the provisional CKŻP’s letter of complaint reporting that provincial Jewish committees meet with
Undeniably, in their attempts to settle down, the survivors met with obstacles from the lower-level authorities, as illustrated by many letters of intervention sent by Jewish committees to central government bodies. As shown by these letters, many returning Jews could not count on assistance from the local administration in addressing the most basic material concerns. They experienced dislike, and sometimes even open hostility. In March 1946, WKŻ activists in Lublin noted “a number of antisemitic excesses among certain government functionaries” they encountered in their daily work. They mention, among other things, refusal by the State Repatriation Office (Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny — PUR) to issue a certificate which would have permitted one of the committee members to settle down in Western Poland (in the Regained Territories):

A clerk refused, claiming that such certificates were no longer issued. At the same time, another citizen, of Polish nationality, came to ask for the certificate and it was issued to him without any problem.\(^{103}\)

Another letter of complaint sent to the MAP from the Lublin area concerns the MO chief in Irena (Dęblin). In January 1945, he denied returning Jews the right to settle down in the city until they were able to produce a special permit.\(^{104}\) A letter of intervention sent by the MAP to the Kielce voivodeship office reports:

In the town Jędrzejów, starosta [district governor] Feliks rejects all Jewish requests. The situation is similar in Chęciny and Chmielnik. The Municipal People’s Council of Ostrowiec summoned representatives of tremendous difficulties from the local authorities while trying to establish manufacturing cooperatives. The difficulties were created by administrative authorities and “Społem” branches for branches of the Revisional Association (Oddziały Związku Rewizyjnego). In view of this, the central board of the Revisional Association ordered that affairs of Jewish manufacturing cooperatives should be treated in a cooperative manner, and similarly with the affairs of Polish cooperatives, without doing favors or creating difficulties,” p. 6.

\(^{103}\) AAN, MAP, Departament II Polityczny, Wydział Narodowościowy, file no. 787, Memoriał, p. 116.  
\(^{104}\) AAN, MAP, Departament II Polityczny, Wydział Narodowościowy, file no. 187, Pismo interwencyjne z Wydziału Narodowościowego MAP do Urzędu Wojewódzkiego w Lublinie z 30 stycznia 1945 roku, p. 110.
the Jewish committee, who were then asked to send all Jews to work in a mine.\textsuperscript{105}

Occasionally, the local administration’s antisemitic bias amounted to persecution. In November 1945, the Jewish committee in Tarnów reported:

In Tarnów, the Municipal Government sends obligatory administrators to Jewish houses because of tax arrears from the German occupation period, i.e., from the period when the above citizens were incarcerated in German concentration camps and their property was administered by Germans. An attempt by the city’s mayor to intervene proved ineffective.\textsuperscript{106}

In their contacts with functionaries of public administration and lower-level authorities, the survivors met not only with a more or less explicit dislike on the part of the bureaucrats. Through their conduct the latter also expressed their tacit approval for excluding Jews from Polish society, implemented during the war and regularized by German legislation. “A deputation from the Sanok Jewish committee formally established that the provincial headquarters of the Sanok Civic Militia’s Department of Population Records and Migration issues Jews with provisional certificates with the letter ‘Ż’ [Żyd], following the example of Germans who issued Jews with \textit{Kennkarten} bearing the letter ‘J’ [Jude],” reads the report on the Office for Assistance to the Jewish Population’s activity at the PKWN’s Presidium.\textsuperscript{107} Not without reason did the MO’s chief officer include the following reminder in the order of July 1945, quoted above:

An officer of the Citizens’ Militia takes action in the defense of the Jewish population whenever their personal safety or property is in danger. He acts immediately against any harassment or persecution of the Jewish minority.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{105} AAN, MAP, Departament II Polityczny, Wydział Narodowościowy, 787, p. 8; ibid., p. 12.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., Pismo Powiatowego Komitetu Żydowskiego w Tarnowie do CKŻP, datowane 13 XI 1945, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{107} AAN, PKWN, file no. XI/6, Sprawozdanie z działalności Referatu dla Spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej przy PKWN, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., Rozkaz nr 116 Komendanta Milicji Obywatelskiej z dnia 25 lipca 1945 roku.
The survivors’ poor psychological state was exacerbated by their physical condition and the material situation in which they found themselves. A memorandum from the CKŻP to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry into the Problems of European Jewry and Palestine contained the following information:

At liberation, there were no more than 100,000 Jews on Polish territory. In 1939, about 3,500,000 Jews were living in Poland; hence, less than three percent survived in Poland. Apart from this, about 160,000 Jews survived in the territory of the Soviet Union. Those who survived in Poland are mostly broken, physically and emotionally, after horrible experiences in death camps, forests, and hiding places, [living] in the cemetery of millions of their brothers and sisters, mothers and children. They are usually lonely people, with no roof over their heads, without family or friends, without any moral or material support: human wrecks...109

In many small towns, the proportion of sick former camp inmates and those incapable of work reaches 60 percent, according to the May 1945 Report on the Activity of the Office for Assistance to the Jewish Population.110

As a consequence of their long stays in camps, shelters, and forests, as well as poor diet, considerable physical and spiritual debilitation, and the effects of diseases they had gone through in the camps, their immunity to tuberculosis and other infections has significantly diminished. Apart from this, almost all of them return from camps with nutritional edema. These people are dependent on CKŻP subsidies, since the local social welfare does not offer any medical, sanitary or provisioning assistance.111

According to reports of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, in 1945 and as late as the first half of 1946, Jews in Poland commonly suffered from famine and diseases.112 As the BŻAP reported in July 1945, 75,000 Jews survived in camps on German territory.

109 Przelom, no. 1 (August 1946), p. 11.
111 Ibid.
The physical condition of the survivors is very serious. They are all extremely debilitated; 30 percent of those saved have been found to suffer from tuberculosis. A great number of women are rape victims and have been infected with venereal diseases. These people do not intend to return to their hometowns. They settle down in the Western Territories of Poland, especially in Lower Silesia.113

A large proportion of the people returning must be provided with hospital treatment, sanatoria, and resort hotels, if we are to save them from death and render them capable of work, according to a CKŻP memorandum to the minister of finance in June 1945.114

As the activity report from the Office for Assistance to the Jewish Population at the PKWN’s Presidium notes: "Most of the people in our care [about 2,200 at the time — E.K.-F.] do not have adequate clothing, shoes or underwear; they are worn out from living in forests and hiding places for several years."115

The survivors were deprived of any property. The CKŻP also pointed out to the authorities the need to provide the most elementary necessities to Jewish repatriates:

Repatriates return without necessary clothing, underwear or means of livelihood. Moreover, as far as Jews are concerned, they do not find any family members or friends because of the German extermination of Jewish communities. Consequently, they are obliged to rely on the CKŻP for assistance.116

113 “Szybka pomoc b. więźniom niemieckich obozów — konieczna,” BŻAP, no. 49/59 (July 18, 1945); “Most of the former camp prisoners suffer from or are susceptible to tuberculosis.” See “Opieka nad powracającymi z obozów,” BŻAP, no. 39 (June 22, 1945), p. 49.

114 AAN, KRN BP, Wydział Prawny, 148, Memoriał CKŻP do Min. Skarbu, Konstantego Dąbrowskiego, z 4 VI 1945, sheet 13. In the same memorandum we also read: “Our experience to date in providing assistance to liberated camp prisoners demonstrates irrefutably that the human material we receive requires a long treatment and intensive feeding as well as housing and clothing support.”

115 AAN, Mf 24269 XI/6, Referat dla spraw pomocy ludności żydowskiej, Trzecie sprawozdanie z działalności za okres 16 IX 1944–10 X 1944, p. 16.

116 AAN, MAP, Departament II Polityczny, Wydział Narodowościowy, 786, Pismo Centralnego Komitetu Żydów Polskich do Państwowego Urzędu Repatriacyjnego z 22 I 1946, sheet 27. The situation of Jewish repatriates was thus described by Henryk Szner: “The position of Jewish repatriates was all the worse for the fact that, practically, they
According to a booklet on TOZ activity in Lower Silesia during 1946–1947, published by the society’s Lower Silesian branch:

A large proportion of the arrivals were sick, elderly or infirm, and they were all exhausted by the war and weeks of traveling under difficult conditions. They had to be placed in hospitals, provided with medicine and dressings, all the while overcoming frequent resistance from surprised and unprepared or unwilling “provincial dignitaries” and “jumped-up bureaucrats.”

The survivors’ disastrous housing situation was also pointed out:

The housing problem is very difficult. Sometimes Jews return to their old homes to find them occupied by new owners, and the legal owners cannot even obtain a single room in their own former dwelling.

did not return to their homes, they had no relatives or acquaintances who could support them for some time.” See Henryk Szner, “Oblicze repatriacji ludności żydowskiej z ZSRR,” Nasze Słowo, no. 10 (1946).

117 AZIH, TOZ, file no. 324/574, J. H. Bayer, “Rok TOZ’u na Dolnym Śląsku,” pp. 3–4 in Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia “TOZ” Oddz. Wojew. na D. Śląsku w Dzierżoniowie, Rok naszej Pracy 1946 marzec 1947. As Dr. Schneebaum, Head of a maternity clinic in Wałbrzych, reported, cases of malaria were recorded among the Jewish population of Lower Silesia: “The picture of the children’s health status would be incomplete if we failed to mention malaria. Malaria, a disease unknown in Poland before the war, has become a topical problem because the masses of Jews returning from Russia, and especially from Central Asia, brought the malaria parasite Plasmodium along with them. Last year [1946], in our region, we diagnosed over 30 cases among children, and, what is worse, two cases of malaria in children who have never been in Russia, which means that they contracted malaria here.” M. Schneebaum, “Stan zdrowotny dzieci żydowskich na terenie miasta i powiatu Wałbrzych,” in “Rok TOZ’u na Dolnym Śląsku,” p. 39.

118 AAN, Mf 24269 XI/6, Referat dla Spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej, Trzecie sprawozdanie z działalności za okres 16 IX 1944–10 X 1944; Referat dla Spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej, p. 16, 23, 29, 37. In the office’s report for May: “People returning from Nazi camps found their homes already occupied. In view of this, it is desirable that the central authorities intervene to ensure that Jews who have lost their homes and property should immediately receive housing allocations.” AAN, URM, Prezydium RM, 5/137, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Referat dla Spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej, Jedenaste Sprawozdanie z działalności (za miesiąc maj r. 1945), p. 11.

119 BŻAP, no. 57 (1945), p. 67.
As late as 1947, the authorities were still receiving reports indicating that
the housing problem had not been resolved, which caused a strong sense of injustice. “Nazism murdered 17,000 Jews from our city, who left behind
their flats, furniture, and houses, which should be used for the benefit of
the remaining handful of survivors,” the representatives of the Wloclawek
Jewish committee wrote to the municipal government. The director of a
sanatorium in Jar (Lower Silesia) made the following observation:

Discharging patients, we are faced with unprecedented problems: The
patients, who frequently have no roof over their heads, no family or
resources, without a specialized education, are unwilling to leave the
sanatorium; still others are permanently disabled, which obliges the
TOZ to keep them in permanent care...

Research on families of survivors, carried out by Yael Danieli, demonstrates
the significant effect of modes of survival during the war on later principal
adaptation traits. The survivors themselves point to their living condi-
tions until the end of the war as one of the factors determining their ex-
periences, which varied from one survivor to another. Differences in the
impact of the survivors’ experiences under German occupation on their
psyche certainly depended on their age, among other factors. Although
World War II was an undeniable cataclysm for everyone, older people were
able to compare it to other historic events that they had experienced, such
as World War I or the Bolshevik Revolution. In contrast, for the young-
est survivors, wartime experiences constituted the only reality they knew.

120 In a letter from April 8, 1947: “That handful of Jews [50 families out of 17,000 Jewish
inhabitants of the city before the war — E.K.-F.] is currently living in abysmal condi-
tions, and it is unthinkable that people who have gone through such hell should now
live like this”; AAN, MAP, Departament II Polityczny, Wydział Narodowościowy,
787, sheet 156.
121 Dr. Spiro, “Sanatorium w Jarze,” in “Rok TOZ’u na Dolnym Śląsku,” p. 61.
122 Danieli has developed a typology of those families, classifying them into “victim
families,” “fighter families,” “numb families,” and “those who made it.” For more
on this subject, see Yael Danieli, “Odległe następstwa prześladowań hitlerowskich w
123 During a seminar discussion, Barbara Engelking cited Janusz Korczak as an example,
referring to an entry in his diary in which he denies that the German occupation was
an extraordinary event. However, while making this entry, Korczak may not have
been fully aware of the German plans to annihilate the entire Jewish population.
Unfortunately, the author was not able to find this passage.
However, irrespective of possible references to earlier experiences, all those who managed to survive realized that their return to everyday life after that war would be very different from anything they had known before. Pański writes vividly on this subject:

In the apartment, to which I returned [after World War I — E.K.-F.], I found my father’s desk in its old place and a little Swiss musical chair for calming down children who cried in his surgery. The return from emigration was a return home, return to my own environment — to the smiles of the same people, to the smells of the same shops.

Our return to the country after several years of wandering will not resemble that return [after World War I]. Our house is gone; it has been destroyed by the Germans. The musical chair now serves a lad from Hitlerjugend to while away his time in Swinemünde or Schweinfurt; we may not find any of the people we would like to return to. There are no streets we remember, there is nothing left of the world we left, the smiles that we missed are not there. We return as unknown wanderers to a strange city.¹²⁴

Adaptation to Post-War Reality: Conclusions

As Halina Birenbaum recalled many years later:

I was engulfed by an inconceivable, unknown world and a multitude of problems. I hadn’t imagined that life after the war would prove so complicated and difficult.... One had to learn to recognize, analyze, choose — simply to live in such a way as not to cause suffering to other people, but also to avoid being used and deceived. It was particularly difficult, since in that post-war loneliness, people clung trustingly to any sign of friendliness or affection. In every person I encountered, I saw someone dear, someone who reminded me of long-lost family, warmth, and cordiality. Knowledge and reason were not much use; one needed faith and love. Without them, I wouldn’t have shaken off the past nightmares. I wouldn’t have taken root in the new world.... I returned, after

all: An octogenarian little girl, homeless and lonely, with the inexpressible burden of knowing too much about life and death.”

Research conducted in 1959–1964/65 by a team led by Antoni Kępiński on the former prisoners in Auschwitz initiated reflection on the post-war adaptation of the victims to life. Maria Orwid identified two opposing functioning patterns of adaptation to post-camp life after liberation: one characterized by excessive activity (mostly public or political, but also social and sexual), the other by symptoms of post-camp asthenia (reversible or irreversible). Similar mechanisms could also be observed in communities of Holocaust survivors, and not only former prisoners of concentration camps. In an article on Jewish youth in a periodical published by Hashomer Hatsair, there is a critical, characteristic description of attitudes presented by some repatriates:

Some of them compensate themselves for the years of wandering and privations by pursuing a life of ease and comfort; by contrast, some constantly chase lost time and move up three rungs at a time to succeed in their chosen career as fast as possible.

Analyzing the problem of adaptation to life in the ghetto or camp, and the readjustment to life during peacetime, Mark Dvorjetsky (Dworzecki) listed three factors favoring the post-war adaptation of survivors: desire to live; thirst for vengeance on the Nazis; and solidarity among the survivors. There is no reason to believe that adaptation to their new life, in the case

125 Birenbaum, Powrót do ziemi praojców, pp. 6–7.
127 “Wspólny nurt — ruch młodzieży,” (unsigned) Zew Młodych (supplement to Mosty — a periodical of Hashomer Hatsair), (September, 1946).
128 Mark Dvorjetsky, “Adjustment of Detainees to Camp and Ghetto Life and Their Subsequent Readjustment to Normal Society,” Yad Vashem Studies, vol. 5 (1963), pp. 213–214. Among the factors listed favoring the survivors’ readaptation, apart from thirst for vengeance on the Nazis, were also the will to live, the desire to live, and the sense of solidarity with other survivors. According to Viktor Frankl: “He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.” See Victor Frankl, Man’s Search for Meaning (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959) quoted in Yael Danieli, “The Survivor As Living Witness. An Approach to Understanding the Survivor of Shoah Free from Her Psychiatric Label, and the Impact Her Adaptation Has on the Contemporary World,” in Bauer, Remembering for the Future, p. 1096.
of Jews who survived on the Aryan side, among partisans, in forest shelters or in the East, was determined by other factors. Dvorjetsky’s article is devoted mainly to “homeless [Jews] who had nowhere to go after the end of war,” and those who decided to immigrate from the very beginning, in most cases, to Palestine. Probably for this reason, he stresses the significance of the sense of bonding among survivors, rather than discussing the sense of solidarity with the members of society in which they happened to live. In the case of Jews who decided to remain in Poland, the latter factor played an equally important role. How then, given the scope of public activity determined by the existing political order, could survivors overcome their wartime experiences and make further existence possible? How could they, at the same time, ensure for themselves a sense of relative security? The confrontation between the realities of life in Poland immediately after the war and the policy of newly established authorities towards survivors with the existential situation of the latter (dependent also on subjective perception) defined the range of possible answers to these questions. The changes the community of Polish Jews underwent as a result of the Holocaust were also significant modifying factors. In particular, these include: the secularization process,129 the radicalization of public attitudes,130 and the aforementioned characteristic shifts in the demographic and social structure of the survivor population. An equally important role was certainly played by the models of response to emergencies/extreme situations preserved in the Jewish cultural tradition, as well as ideological projects offered by Jewish social and political organizations — the projects (both rehashed ones and those that developed ad hoc in the face of the catastrophe) that helped the survivors to adjust to post-war realities. Ultimately, the vast majority of survivors found their place, making a more or less deliberate choice between assimilation

129 In research by Hurwic-Nowakowska, as many as 56.4 percent of respondents described themselves as non-believers. See Hurwic-Nowakowska, Żydzi Polscy (1947–1950), p. 102. The author also observes that “religious worship ceased to play the role of the group’s social organizer..., even believers and practising communities have a tendency to maintain a low profile and perform their rites discreetly.” Ibid., p. 105, 112.

into Polishness, mixed marriages, “entering” Poland through Communism, and rebuilding a Jewish community by somewhat modified pre-war rules.¹³¹

Piotr Sztompka, a researcher and theoretician of social change, observed that a cultural trauma is an immanent feature of a social change that is “sudden and rapid” (in its temporal aspect), “radical, profound, broad, and affecting the very essence of social life” (in its scope), “perceived as imposed, exogenous, happening without our participation” (in terms of origin), and “seen as something unexpected, unforeseen, surprising, shocking, disgusting” (as far as the state of mind is concerned).¹³² Sztompka distinguishes three kinds of collective symptoms in trauma:

Firstly, the trauma can strike at the biological or demographic substance of the group.... Secondly, the trauma can strike at the structure of society. It can destroy well-established social relations, break existing arrangements, and topple existing hierarchies.... Thirdly, then, the trauma can hit the culture.... Traumatic events, meaningful in themselves, endowed with sense by members of the community, can destroy the existing world of meanings, symbols, and rules, leading to a cultural trauma. When this happens, symbols begin to mean something different than they used to, values become “valueless”....¹³³

The condition of survivors presented in the second part of this text perfectly illustrates a cultural trauma in Sztompka’s understanding of the phenomenon.¹³⁴ From the perspective of the present discussion, it is important to consider the four typical strategies of social adaptation to the anomie caused by a cultural trauma, listed by Sztompka following Robert K. Merton: innovation, rebellion, ritualism, and withdrawal.¹³⁵ As Sztompka dem-


¹³³ Ibid., pp. 28–30.

¹³⁴ Sztompka’s theory of a cultural trauma, originally developed for the purpose of research on political transformation, was also used by Marcin Zaremba in his studies on Polish society after World War II. He claims that, in the case of Poles, the war resulted in a cultural trauma with far-reaching consequences. See Marcin Zaremba, “Trauma Wielkiej Wojny. Psychospołeczne konsekwencje drugiej wojny światowej,” Kultura i Społeczeństwo, no. 2 (2008), pp. 3–42.

¹³⁵ Sztompka, Trauma wielkiej zmiany, pp. 40–41.
onstrates, only the two first strategies make it possible to overcome “at least some consequences of the trauma.”

The political transformation in the immediate post-war period created a new context for survivors’ activities. Creating an illusion of equality, the authorities enabled citizens of Jewish origin to perform functions and hold positions formerly unavailable to them: New paths of advancement were wide open. Given the limited possibilities of undertaking social initiatives, strictly monitored by the state and constantly reduced until their complete elimination, it was impossible to resort to the rebellion strategy, understood as “opposition towards perceived causes of the threat,” which usually finds expression in the activity of social movements. Nor did any of the adaptation strategies mentioned above have the character of innovation. In fact, the attempts at implementing the pre-war idea of transforming the social and occupational structure of Polish Jews (the so called “productivization”), supported both by the “Jewish Jews” and Jewish Communists, as well as temporarily by the central authorities, were new. In the conditions of rationed and gradually restricted social sovereignty, the authorities’ changing policy was decisive for the success of these efforts, but this policy increasingly supported the de facto assimilation of survivors. However, choosing the assimilation strategy — as well as mixed marriages, which, in most cases, led to assimilation — did not prove to be an effective method of complete adaptation for survivors, nor did the other adaptation strategies mentioned above. None of them offered people of Jewish origin an infallible guarantee of finding their own permanent place in Poland that no one could ever question — as unquestionable as the place of individuals whose parents were “ethnic” Poles.

136 Ibid.
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In 1944, after years of Nazi genocide, the surviving remnants of Polish Jewry, as well as Polish society as a whole, faced an entirely new situation: Political power in Poland had been seized by the Left, acting in alliance with the USSR. With the Communists in power, came genuine — and not just formal — emancipation of Jews and Poles of Jewish origin for the first time in the history of Polish statehood. In those dramatic circumstances of “limited civil war,”1 the Jewish community took the side of the Communists, who offered them a guarantee of equal civil rights. This seemed all the more natural since there were also those, among the opponents of the new regime, who wished to complete the ethnic cleansing started by the Holocaust and they were responsible for antisemitic crimes in Poland after the German withdrawal.

This article deals with the origins, nature, and implications of Jewish support for the Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza — PPR), the new name of the Communist Party in Poland, disbanded by Stalin in 1938 and reactivated in January 1942. The following issues are addressed: the Jewish community’s attitude to the Second Polish Republic between the wars; the political lessons for the Jewish community from their experiences under Nazi occupation; political support by Polish Jews for the new regime, as compared to the other Polish citizens’ attitudes; the new status acquired by Poles of Jewish origin and Jews as a community in People’s Poland; the relationship between antisemitic violence after the Holocaust

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1 Whether the term “civil war” can be applied to the events that took place from 1944 to 1947 is open to discussion. The author uses the term “limited civil war,” coined by Ryszard Nazarewicz. The war was limited in terms of geography (actual fighting took place only in central and eastern Poland) and the nature of the military operations (on the anti-communist side, it was guerrilla warfare, not a full-scale war). See Ryszard Nazarewicz, Armii Ludowej dylematy i dramaty (Warsaw: Oficyna Drukarska, 1998), p. 290. Between 20,000 and 50,000 people were killed in this conflict. See Marek J. Chodakiewicz, After the Holocaust: Polish-Jewish Relations in the Wake of World War II (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2003), p. 25.
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and the political conflicts in Poland at the time; and, finally, the attitude of particular Polish political forces to Jewish emancipation in People’s Poland.

The principal dividing lines are, on the one hand, entry of the Red Army into the ethnically Polish territory in summer 1944; and, on the other hand, liquidation of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce — CKŻP) as Polish Jewry’s national and cultural quasi-autonomy. This began in February 1949, when the committee became dominated by the Communists.

It is impossible to understand the political attitudes of Jews in Poland after liberation from the German occupation without a brief recollection of two earlier phenomena: the various forms of discrimination against Jews in the inter-war Poland, and the political lessons many Jews learnt from their contact with various Polish political forces during the Second World War. Only in this context is it possible to understand why many Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust adopted the patriotic ethos of the Polish Left, which, unlike most other social forces, did not include the element of distrust or exclusion in relation to Jews.

The Jewish Experience in Inter-War Poland

In the early years of the Second Polish Republic, the dominant political camp was National Democracy (Narodowa Demokracja — ND), which regarded Jews as “foreign elements.” After favorable electoral results in 1919 and 1922, the ND was removed from power by the coup d’état carried out by Józef Piłsudski’s camp (supported by most Jews, as ND’s enemies) in May 1926. However, after his death (in 1935), his successors moved closer to ND’s antisemitic ideology for pragmatic reasons.

Toward the end of the Second Polish Republic, the existing discriminatory practices intensified. Until then, Jews had been largely barred from officer ranks in the army, judiciary and administrative posts (at state and municipal levels), teaching in state schools, and as railway workers; they had limited access to university education; they were unwelcome in state-owned enterprises; and they were discriminated against in obtaining licenses to engage in the sale of articles subject to state monopoly (alcohol, tobacco, and matches). Now these practices were compounded with new regulations directed against Jews, banning them from the production and
sale of Catholic devotional items, limiting their access to the legal profession, and attempting to restrict ritual slaughter.²

In addition, after Piłsudski’s death, political elites associated with his camp began to warm to the idea of promoting mass emigration of Jews from Poland. In 1939, presenting the position of the Camp of National Unity’s³ (Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego — OZN) General Council to the Sejm (the Polish Parliament), Col. Zygmunt Wenda stressed that this was not based on racial theories, but on “the cultural strangeness of Jews and [their] economic inconvenience.” At the same time, the OZN did not exclude from Polish society those Jews who “ha[d] a sense of community with the Polish nation,” which was a minor difference, compared to the ND’s position.⁴

From the Polish state’s point of view, the ND’s antisemitism, emanating from the Polish lower middle class’s competing interests with their Jewish counterparts, was dysfunctional, largely because it affected such minority groups among Polish Jewry as Poles of Jewish origin, Poles of Mosaic faith (Polacy wyznania mojżeszowego), and Jews with a good command of Polish.⁵ These groups suffered because of their exclusion from the higher military and administrative posts, and their limited access to university

² For more information, see Ezra Mendelsohn, The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983); Jerzy Tomaszewski, ed., Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950 r.) (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe [PWN], 1993). In 1927, with Jews constituting about ten percent of the country’s total population, the proportion of Jewish officers in the army was only 0.5 percent, and it decreased still further afterwards. See Tomasz Gąsowski, Pod sztandarami orła białego (Warsaw: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2002), p. 20.
³ The party that continued Józef Piłsudski’s political line (translator’s note).
⁵ According to the 1931 census, only ten percent of the Jews declared Polish as their native tongue. With regard to knowledge of Polish culture among Jews, Isaac Bashevis Singer wrote in Żydzi i Polacy (Jews and Poles): “We Jews are at the same time citizens of Poland and strangers in this country. My father, for instance, did not know Polish. I spoke Polish with a heavy accent. My ancestors had lived in the country for several hundred years, yet we were still aliens. I realized that no revolution could unite these two communities, profoundly separate and foreign to each other... Even in the late 1930s, it was rare for a Jew to speak good Polish. They had lived together for 800 years, but had not grown closer together. Of three million Jews living in Poland, about two and a half million were unable to write the simplest letter in Polish, and they made flagrant errors in speech. My father knew only two words in Polish, and it did not even cross his mind that something was wrong.” Quoted in Agata Tuszyńska, Singer. Pejzaże pamięci (Gdansk: Muza, 1996), pp. 151–152.
education — the so-called *numerus clausus*. The extent of antisemitism among the authorities perpetuated incomplete identification of many Polish Jews with the state, noted for example in the 1925 General Staff report describing Jewish soldiers in the following exaggerated terms: “National [Jewish] consciousness: high. Attitude toward the state: indifferent.”

It is worth noting another problem, which was definitely glossed over in the post-1989 historical literature: After 1926, inter-war Poland was an authoritarian and not a liberal-democratic state. Piłsudski’s so-called Sanacja (Sanation) camp, which came to power in a bloody *coup d’état* in May of that year, distorted all subsequent parliamentary election results. In the 1930s, Polish jails were filled with thousands of political prisoners from various factions, and brutal police terror was used against the left-wing labor movement and national minorities, especially Ukrainians. Thus, for many citizens, lack of democracy in Poland after 1944 was not a qualitative but a quantitative change, as reflected in the scale of police repression and curtailment of democracy. In this context, some were willing to sacrifice democracy for the sake of other values, such as, for the Poles, the country’s reconstruction and social reforms, and, for the Jews, personal safety and equal treatment.

This attitude is characteristic not only among the Communists, who described Sanacja Poland as “fascist,” which did not reflect the total reality but expressed the ruling camp’s consciousness after 1944. Hence, People’s Poland was supported by many elements of Jewish public opinion in the West. For example, Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum, President of the World Federation of Polish Jews and a Zionist, remembered inter-war Poland as “semi-feudal and semi-Fascist,” and, therefore, supported the Polish Communists, who were friendly towards Jews.

The American journalist Shmuel Leyb Shnayderman ridiculed the anti-Communist underground propaganda on the lost independence:

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6 Pointing out the dysfunctionality of the ND’s antisemitism obviously does not imply approval of the much less common idea of enforced Polonization of Polish Jews.
7 Gąsowski, *Pod sztandarami*, p. 19.
8 Joseph Tenenbaum (1887–1961), a doctor and a Zionist feature writer since 1920 in the USA, Chairman of the American and World Federation of Polish Jews, Vice-President of the American Jewish Congress in the years 1943–1945.
10 Shmuel Leyb Shnayderman (Samuel Loeb Shneiderman in the USA) (1906–1996), born in Kazimierz Dolny on the Vistula, was editor of a Warsaw newspaper, *Trybuna Akademicka* (1929–1931), correspondent for the Jewish press in Paris (1931–1939), war correspondent in Spain during the Civil War, and resident in the USA from 1940.
The ruling class in Poland interpreted the concept of independence as independence from the external world, as freedom to persecute minorities and opposition parties, organize pogroms against the Jews, undertake punitive expeditions against Ukrainians and Byelorussians, and shoot at striking workers.

The ruling class in Poland treated the state as their own property, a private estate, and felt no connection to the external democratic world, nor did they feel any obligations concerning the universal, generally accepted humanitarian principles they agreed to in various international treaties, beginning with the Versailles...

The Polish state was recently founded on such Bushman morality. The constitution expressed all manner of noble declarations and true democracy, with freedom of speech, press, and religion. But the constitution was a dead, violated, ancient document.¹¹

Shnayderman sketched this gloomy picture of Poland in great detail, including grandiose fantasies of Poland as a superpower, stretching “from [the Baltic] sea to [the Black] sea”; disastrous relationships with its neighbors (“Marshal, lead us to Kowno [Kaunas]!”); occupation of Zaolzie; flirting with Nazi diplomacy; a deluge of ND and clerical antisemitic publications; and antisemitic excesses at universities, among others.¹² Shnayderman contrasted these “Dark Ages” with the serious reforms implemented by the PPR: agrarian reform, eliminating illiteracy, rapidly increasing access to education, and nationalization of large-scale industry (combined with the preservation of small private enterprises).

Some Jewish descriptions of the debacle suffered by leading forces in inter-war Poland express a sense of revenge. As Yaakov Zerubavel (1886–1967), legendary leader of the Zionist Left, who emigrated from Poland in 1935 but attended the first PPR congress held in Warsaw in December 1945, wrote:

The congress exuded hatred towards the gentry and the bourgeoisie of the old Poland, and was filled with combat readiness to defend the new authorities and the new system....


At times, I simply felt happy to have lived to see such a convention in Poland, where I remembered all too well the stifling stench of the ONR, OZN, Brześć, and Bereza Kartuska.\(^{13}\)

**Political Lessons for Jews from the Occupation in Poland**

Although the tragedy of the Holocaust evoked very diverse reactions from Polish society, it did not lead the Polish underground state to recognize the Jews as rightful Polish citizens.\(^{14}\) Clearly, if the Nazis had perpetrated similar exterminatory acts against ethnic Poles in Polish towns and villages, as they did against Jews, the reaction of the Government Delegate’s Office at Home\(^{15}\) and the General Command of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa — AK) would have been radically different. In these circumstances, from the Jewish perspective, the activities of the Communists, who remained on the margin of the Polish underground, acquired considerable importance. During the German occupation, the PPR successively pursued two different political strategies. The first, aimed at an alliance with the London camp, known as “the national front without traitors or capitulators,” was supposed to demonstrate the Communists’ readiness for compromise within the limits of their social program, as well as intending to maximize military operations against the Nazis in order to support the USSR. The first partisan units of the Communist People’s Guard (Gwardia Ludowa — GL) began their activities in late spring 1942. Compared to the London camp's

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\(^{13}\) See Yaakov Zerubavel, *Barg khurbn* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral Farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1946), p. 115. Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny (ONR) — National Radical Camp, a Polish extreme right party founded in 1934, responsible for antisemitic propaganda and numerous acts of anti-Jewish violence; Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego — Camp of National Unity, a Polish political party founded in 1937 by the leaders of the Sanacja movement; Brześć [Brest-Litovsk], the town where more than a dozen leaders of anti-Sanacja opposition were imprisoned and brutally treated in 1930; in the 1933 trial, ten of them were sentenced to one-and-a-half to three years of prison; and Bereza Kartuska, the town in which an internment camp functioned in the years 1934–1939 and where political opponents were kept in harsh conditions and brutally treated; at least 3,000 individuals were imprisoned there throughout its existence.


\(^{15}\) An agency of the Polish government-in-exile — translator’s note.
military formations, the Communists had much weaker partisan forces, lacking arms and a well-trained officer corps. In spite of this, the Communists initiated partisan operations and acts of sabotage against the German communication lines.

Owing to numerous obstacles, such as the failure to reach an agreement with the Government Delegate’s Office, a lack of any essential change in the AK’s approach to fighting the invader, conflicting perceptions of the alliance with the USSR and revision of the Eastern borders, and the discovery of the Katyn massacre, in autumn 1943 the PPR began to implement a different political strategy, known as the “democratic national front.” This involved creating an embryonic new state apparatus dominated by the Left and forces supporting an alliance with the USSR.

Neither the first nor the second conception of the national front developed by the PPR evoked any wider social response, as evidenced by the very limited political basis of the State National Council (Krajowa Rada Narodowa — KRN), established by the Communists in late 1943 and early 1944.16

The Communists’ foremost desire to start immediate partisan warfare was rejected by the London camp, in the belief that this would only provoke unnecessary repression, advocating instead preparations for a general uprising. However, the PPR’s insistence on not putting off the armed struggle until a later stage of the war was well received by Jewish political activists in Poland. In view of the death sentence on the entire Jewish population by the Nazi state, Jewish politicians had a very different perspective on the Communists’ military outlook than the Government Delegate’s Office at Home. Jews did not feel there was time to wait for Poland’s potential liberation by its Western allies.

In AK’s documents dealing with the Polish underground’s fight against the Communist movement, Jews, as a whole, were regarded as the Communists’ dangerous ally. Here is an excerpt of one of many such documents:

It is well known that the KPP [the Communist Party of Poland, as the Communist movement as a whole, was saturated with Jewish elements and directed by jews [original spelling — in Polish the names of adherents of religions are not capitalized, but in this case the word refers to a people and should be capitalized — translator’s note] hostile towards Poland. But also, at present [May 1942 — A.G.], Jewish influence in the

PPR is tremendous.... Indoctrination with Communism and anti-Polish ideology is just as great among Jewish intelligentsia and proletariat. Politically, the Communists champion Jews, promising, in the future, in Poland (which they intend to be Soviet Poland), they will not just enjoy fully equal rights but even a leading position. We should remember the [“disloyal”] attitude of the Jewish masses during the tragic days of autumn 1939 and, later, under the Bolshevik occupation. **Antisemitism is still a very effective weapon in fighting Communism** [emphasis added — A.G.].

The charge of pro-Communist attitudes in the Jewish underground was one of the most important arguments of the underground state for its failure to assist the Jews during the Holocaust. In the Vilnius and Białystok ghettos, the AK refused to help the local Jewish resistance movements on account of Communists in their ranks. The possibilities for Jewish fugitives from ghettos to join AK units were minimal. The AK, and even to a greater degree the National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne — NSZ), is charged with numerous crimes against Jews hiding in forests.

Negative evaluation of the AK and NSZ is ingrained in Israeli historiography. Polish-born historians Yisrael Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski list 120 cases, describing 29, in which Jews were killed by Polish AK or NSZ partisans. Although the AK and the Government Delegate’s Office could also boast some assistance to Jews, it is generally considered belated and insignificant.

Israeli historians considered the NSZ’s attitude towards Jews seeking refuge in the forests even more negative than that of the AK. In the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*’s entry on the NSZ, Krakowski blames this organization for the deaths of “hundreds of Jews.” At the same time, Israeli historians have a higher opinion of the position toward Jewish partisans held by the PPR and GL (which became the People’s Army [Armia Ludowa — AL] after January 1, 1944). Communist and Soviet partisan groups treated ghetto fugitives as good recruit material. Gutman and Krakowski also express their appreciation of PPR propaganda, which called for assisting Jews

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annihilated by the Nazis. However, they point out that the PPR did not establish an organization for helping Jews, such as the Council for Aid to Jews (“Żegota”) reporting to the Government Delegate’s Office. In spite of this, according to Gutman and Krakowski:

The formation of the Polish Workers’ Party and the People’s Guard had positive consequences for Jewish partisans. Under the program whereby everybody who wished to join them was admitted into its ranks, in order to begin immediate resistance against the Fascist invaders, the PPR provided support and assistance to numerous Jewish partisan units formed in 1942 and 1943. In many regions [of Poland], the People’s Guard was the only allied force on which Jewish partisans could rely. Without them, some Jewish units would have been obliged to suspend activities.20

Gutman and Krakowski also list ten Jewish AL units and another 13 AL units in which Jews, at least initially, constituted over one-third of the members. Large groups of Jews also fought in four partisan units operating under Polish Communist command in Wolhynia and Polesie. At the same time, Krakowski does not deny that some Jews fought in AK ranks, especially Jews who enrolled individually.21 However, the number of Jews in the AK was much smaller than in Communist units, which had a lot fewer members than the pro-London underground.22 In the 1970s, the left-wing Zionist Yitzhak Zuckerman recalled contact between Jewish anti-Nazi fighters and Polish Communists:

20 Gutman and Krakowski, Unequal Victims, p. 138.
21 “In central regions of Poland, the Home Army neither enrolled nor attempted to subordinate groups of Jews, Jewish armed units or Jews who endeavored to form partisan units. An unknown number of Jews, probably several hundred, were enrolled into the ranks of the AK individually. The greatest number of Jews joined partisan units of the Socialist Combat Organization (Socjalistyczna Organizacja Bojowa — SOB), under the AK’s,” Shmuel Krakowski, “Podziemie polskie a Żydzi w latach drugiej wojny światowej,” BŻIH, no. 2 (2000), p. 177.
During the Holocaust I had contact with Polish forces. Those who gained our trust and helped us, within their modest means, were Polish Communists. In private conversations with those people — for I had many opportunities to talk with members of their political leadership about the Zionist cause and Palestine — I found that, in their hearts, they were with us. They themselves suffered a great deal under Stalinism: Even before the war, the Comintern (that is, Stalin) disbanded their party; their brothers [in the USSR] were beheaded. In spite of this, they perceived the Soviet Union as a liberating force. They must have forgotten a little something, but people do forget. They felt hatred for the Sanation, the Fascist Poland; they were searching for some support. Among them, Communists of many years’ standing, as well as those who joined during the war, hoped to see a different Poland. They were, above all, Polish patriots who wanted a new Poland, and they were the only force we could rely on because of their attitude to us Jews, our difficulties, and to those of us who survived. They had no obligations to us. We talked openly, and in our conversations we felt their sympathy for the idea of Zionism.23

Even these concise observations explain the fundamental difference in the evaluation immediately after the war by Jewish politicians of such political and military forces as the PPR and the AL, on the one hand, and the AK and the NSZ, on the other. The negative assessment of the anti-Communist camp in Poland, as expressed in post-war declarations of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, was not something artificial that was imposed top-down by the Communists, but rather, to a large extent, the result of wartime experiences reinforced by the post-war antisemitic terror of some branches of the anti-Communist underground. Consequently, right-wing Jewish parties also accepted and supported Communist rule in Poland after 1944. In this matter, the conservative religious Poalei Aguda party used similar language to Jewish Communists in their newspapers.24

During his visit to Łódź in 1946, Shnayderman was amazed to find a portrait of Joseph Stalin in the Aguda party’s office. As it turned out, it had been hung there by party members grateful that their lives had been saved


24 Compare Byuletin fun Poaley Ameynu Yisroel, no. 22 (1946), pp. 10–11.
in the USSR. That is not to say that Aguda members did not remember police terror in the USSR, but most Jewish repatriates were convinced that the PPR’s rule in Poland would prove much more liberal. Shnayderman describes the number of confirmed anti-Communists among Jews as “very small” and consisting mostly of the intelligentsia.25

Post-War Jewish Support for the Communists in a Broader Social Context

The circle of extreme right-wing historians, including Piotr Gontarczyk, Marek J. Chodakiewicz, and Leszek Żebrowski question the hitherto accepted data concerning the PPR’s size and the AL’s scale of military efforts. In July 1944, the PPR reputedly had 20,000 members.26 Gontarczyk, however, estimates the membership of the Communist underground movement, in spring 1944, at between only 2,000 and 4,000.27 Even if he is right, this is a Pyrrhic victory only demonstrating that the PPR had greater appeal to the popular masses after the liberation from Nazism. According to Andrzej Paczkowski, in late 1947, Communist Party membership was 820,000, and, in December 1948, 1.443 million.28

The Communist takeover in Poland was possible primarily because of the protective umbrella of the Red Army and related units of the Polish People’s Army (Ludowe Wojsko Polskie — LWP), which also determined the later imperial division of spheres of influence between the Big Three in Yalta in February 1945. Nevertheless, support for the PPR grew very fast. This was possible thanks to the fact that the new political system propagated by the Polish Communists was not the Soviet model but the so-called “people’s democracy.” It retained certain elements of ideological pluralism, involved a social reform program differing in many respects from the Soviet one, and guaranteed the survival of small farms in the country and small private businesses in the cities. The patriotic orientation of the PPR’s propaganda also played a significant role.29

29 The progressive and democratic version of Poland’s history developed by the Communists
The Communist Party was not supported by the majority of Polish society, and the results of the first post-war parliamentary election in 1947 were falsified. However, as the above-mentioned rapid increase in PPR membership (and many related satellite organizations) demonstrates, the social reforms implemented by the Communists (the country’s reconstruction, stabilization, agrarian reform, increased access to education, etc.) rapidly generated a favorably disposed minority, indicating that the PPR’s rule was not based on coercion alone. Incidentally, this is also confirmed by the latest studies on electoral frauds during the 1946 referendum, most of which estimate support for the Communists at over 25 percent of the votes.30

These observations are important inasmuch as Polish historiography, particularly studies from the Institute of National Remembrance, which enjoys the peculiar legal status of “Ministry of Historical Truth,” describes Jewish access to the PPR camp in terms of civic and national betrayal. Thus, the Jews supposedly betrayed Polish statehood (as they identified with the Polish Second Republic and the London government) and Polish national interests (as they identified with the anti-Communist camp). Such perception of Polish Jews’ attitudes can only be explained by ideological partisanship, disregarding the attitudes of many ethnic Poles.

On the Side of “New Poland”

From the moment the Red Army entered ethnically Polish territory, thus putting an end to the physical annihilation of Jews by the Nazis, a substantial was described, e.g., by Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacionalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warsaw: Trio, 2005).

30 According to Paczkowski, secret PPR estimates indicated that 26.9 percent voted “3 x yes,” (Karta, no. 18, p. 131). Therefore, support for the post-war Communist government was similar in several ways to that of pre-war society for the Sanacja government. The Zionists’ active involvement in the referendum on the Communist side is noted by Cukierman; idem, *Nadmier pamięci*, p. 383. Stefan Grajek, another Jewish Combat Organization hero, who was a Social Democrat and Zionist, goes so far in his support for the Communists in their conflict with the so-called “pro-independence opposition” that, unlike Cukierman, he does not mention falsifying the referendum’s outcome in June 1946, presenting the official results without comment. Stefan Grajek, *Po wojnie i co dalej? Żydzi w Polsce w latach 1945–1949* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny [ZIH], 2003), p. 96. Even Agudat Yisrael appealed in the synagogues to vote “3 x yes.” See Bożena Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku 1945–1950* (Wroclaw: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2000), p. 78.
number of Jews entered into cooperation with the Communist-controlled government. Although the Communists rapidly increased their circle of supporters, Jewish organizations cooperated with the new authorities from the very beginning, which does not necessarily imply their real support for socialism. Jews were not the only minority actively involved on the Communist side. On the local scale, the Byelorussian minority acted similarly.

In the face of two Polish camps [Communists and anti-Communists — A.G.] fighting each other, Byelorussians did not even have to choose which side to support. Even though not all of them were the authorities’ confirmed followers, they found themselves on their side. However, they believed this choice offered them a chance to remain on their land and return to normal life.31

In April 1945, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (in which Communists were a minority compared to Zionists and Bundists) issued a press release once again unambiguously declaring their position on Polish Communists’ rule:

As we have repeatedly stated, the Jewish population in Poland has been receiving help and protection only from the Polish democracy camp in the National State Council; the Polish Committee of National Liberation; and, at present, from the Republic of Poland’s Provisional Government.32

It is worth supplementing this declaration with the not quite objective but politically unequivocal statements by Polish-Jewish politicians associated with the Zionist movement, made outside Poland and beyond the reach of the Security Police (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa — UB). There were also other views, but those quoted below predominated.33

During the European Congress of Polish Jews in Paris, on May 14–19, 1946, the most important speech was delivered by Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum, President of the World Federation of Polish Jews. Delegates from Argentina, Eugeniusz Mironowicz, Polityka narodowościowa PRL (Białystok: Białoruskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, 2000), p. 45.

32 BŻAP, April 12, 1945.

33 Additionally, both views quoted are an interesting contribution by Zionists to General Władysław Anders’s “black name” created by the Communist propaganda.
Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Palestine, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States attended the congress. Among the participants were also Polish Embassy representatives, and the congress hall was decorated with slogans such as “Long live the national unity government” and “Long live democratic Poland.” As Dos Naye Lebn, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland’s newspaper reported:

On behalf of the three million Polish Jews in the federations of Polish Jews all over the world, Dr. Tenenbaum stated that General Anders was the main culprit in the murder of Jews. He sent his emissaries to Poland to incite unrest against the democratic government and, at the same time, encourage bloody murder of the last surviving Jews.

Tenenbaum was reported as declaring: “Anders’s place is in Nuremberg, in the same dock with his ideological brothers: Göring, Rosenberg, Keitel, and Streicher.” Out of 65 delegates, only two Bund members disagreed with his statement about Anders. During the visit to the USA in 1946 of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland’s delegation, Emil Sommerstein, the committee’s Chairman, a right-wing Zionist, stated:

The cases of murder of Jews occurring in Poland today are organized and directed by terrorist groups, such as the NSZ, which is fighting against the present democratic Polish government and remains in close contact with foreign decision centers, [in general], and General Anders’s staff, in particular.

Sommerstein praised the Polish government’s efforts to eliminate threats posed to Jews by the antisemitically inclined sectors of Polish society. He perceived the Communist government as very favorably disposed towards Jews:

34 “Anders iz der hoypt shuldkiner in di itstike mordn iber Yidn in Poyn,” Dos Naye Lebn, May 24, 1946, p. 1. Undoubtedly, Tenenbaum’s views were shaped by meetings with CKŻP members in Poland in April 1946.
35 Emil Sommerstein (1883–1957), lawyer, member of the Sejm for several terms (1922–1939), Chairman of the Jewish Parliamentary Group (1935–1938), was a prisoner in Soviet forced labor camps (1940–1941), PKWN member, National State Council member, and CKŻP Chairman. He died in the USA.
Believing that Jews should enjoy fully equal rights, not just formally but in reality, the government supports all endeavors directed toward the social, cultural, and economic reconstruction of the Jewish population.\textsuperscript{36}

In view of this, the Jews’ behavior in the 1947 election was unambiguous. The Poalei Zion Left declared:

\begin{quote}
The election is a battle for democracy, but for us Jews it is also a battle for \textit{physical} [emphasis in the original] existence. This is why we have no doubts, nor the slightest hesitation. In the forthcoming election, Polish Jews, irrespective of their internal political divisions, will unanimously support the political system guaranteeing them security, fully equal rights, and free access to culture: democracy.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

Even Western Jewish political activists did not lose sleep over the fact that the post-war election in Poland was not free and fair. This is how Khaim Shoskes,\textsuperscript{38} referring to this problem after his visit to Poland in 1946, justified his approval of the potential electoral fraud in Poland to the Jewish reader:

\begin{quote}
Knowing Poland inside out and being personally acquainted with its former leaders in London and the present ones in Warsaw, I quickly understood many circumstances that remain hidden from other visitors. For example, I am entirely convinced that were we to allow truly free election in Poland immediately, no less than 70 percent of ND ignoramuses and the Polish version of \textit{Hitlerjugend}, poisoned by the spirit of wild revenge on the Russian neighbor and the Polish radical elements endeavoring to introduce new conditions in this troubled corner of Europe, would crawl out of their holes. As a result of such an electoral outcome, the officers and soldiers [of the Home Army] who are currently murdering officials and Jews, stopping trains and cars, shooting, robbing, and raping women, would move from the forest to the army.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{38} Khaim (Henryk) Shoskes (1891–1964), member of the Zionist party Hitachdut during the Second Polish Republic, lived in the USA from 1940. He was a well-known journalist.
They are the same people who, as members of the Polish underground army, only two years ago fought against Germans and yet did not miss any opportunity to murder treacherously all kinds of heroic Jewish partisans, who were precisely their most convenient and natural allies in the struggle against Nazism. But no, the angry noble pride [Yiddish: der “pansker” yikhisher shtolts — A.G.] would not allow them to let Jews also defend their right to their country and life.39

Consequently, the Jewish press also welcomed repression against the post-AK underground. Commenting on the trial of Col. Franciszek Niepokólczycki, Chairman of the organization Freedom and Independence (Wolność i Niezawisłość — WiN), a Przefom journalist observed with satisfaction that fewer and fewer people let themselves be fooled by “political degenerates” “playing a criminal political game.”40

**Equal Rights for Individual Jews**

People’s Poland liberated Polish Jews and Poles of Jewish origin from the stigma of second-class citizens. All limitations on the access of Jews to such jobs as civil servants, officers, teachers, and lawyers, as well as all restrictions on the Jewish access to university education, disappeared. Poles of Jewish origin participated in exercising political power to an extent that would have been unthinkable in the Second Polish Republic or in the London government afterwards. Incidentally, this did not alter the fact that, after the Holocaust, the majority of Jews did not see their future in Poland and chose to emigrate for various reasons.

This PPR human resources policy can be attributed to a combination of factors. Most important were the internationalist traditions of the Communist Party of Poland and the relatively large proportion of Jews in the rather weak pre-war Communist movement; antisemitism in the anti-Communist underground, which pushed most Jews into the new rulers’ embrace; the Holocaust survivors’ gratitude to the Red Army; and, finally, the Communists’ shortage of Polish-educated personnel who could be trusted by the new government.

Undoubtedly, from the PPR leadership’s viewpoint, Jews and Poles of Jewish origin, irrespective of their pre-war political background, served as a good recruitment base for the state administration and party apparatus since they had not been involved in the pre-war government and establishment. At the same time, it is noteworthy that, among high-ranking state and party functionaries of Jewish origin, the majority, and maybe even the vast majority, were not Jews but Poles of Jewish origin: People who did not participate in Jewish political life, but preferred the Polish national and cultural option even before the war.⁴¹ Among People’s Poland’s leading apparatchiks before 1956, Jakub Berman, Hilary Minc or Roman Zambrowski did not participate in Jewish cultural life, and even less so in religious life. They did not consider themselves representatives of the Jewish community in the government, they did not seek such a mandate; they acted in their own name as members of a mass Polish political party. (Obviously, Berman, Minc, and Zambrowski, as former activists in the Communist Party of Poland, seemed destined to participate in the power apparatus. However, given the lack of trusted and educated personnel, even without a political past, hundreds of people of Jewish origin could easily obtain high posts in state and party structures.)

The fact that Poles of Jewish origin holding office in the party and state apparatus were generally known by “Aryan” family names was a certain blemish on the PPR’s image as a party free of racial prejudice.⁴² This practise, though not obligatory, was recommended and frequently allowed a particular individual to rise to a higher position. The Jewish origin of most of these officials and functionaries was an open secret. Nevertheless, the PPR adopted this device so as to avoid provoking the plebeian masses, among whom antisemitism was widespread and to whom the Communists’ internationalist slogans were mostly incomprehensible.⁴³


⁴³ The phenomenon of state officials hiding their Jewish identity was also influenced by geographic factors. In Lower and Upper Silesia, “Maranism” was considerably less common than in Warsaw. Shnayderman, Tsvishn shrek un hofenung, p. 256.
Cases of antisemitism that surfaced among the newly recruited local administration personnel were further blots on the PPR’s anti-racist image. This was inevitable since within one and a half years after liberation of the Lublin region, party membership increased more than tenfold. Thus, the party absorbed thousands of members previously beyond the influence of internationalist or leftist ideas of any kind.

Owing to the above phenomenon, during various antisemitic incidents (including the Kraków and Kielce Pogroms), among the mob there were policemen and soldiers overcome with homicidal frenzy. However, such behavior deviated from the ideology promoted by the PPR leadership. This showed how difficult it was for the PPR program to reach the party’s rapidly growing ranks and the Communists’ lack of full control over the state structures they formally managed. Incidentally, Jewish observers detected the presence of armed underground movement agents in these structures.

Owing to the element of violence involved in creating the People’s Poland, the security apparatus was of particular interest to (neo-)ND trackers of the ethnic background of party and state functionaries during the early years. More research has been done on this topic recently, while the common perception in Polish society is that the security apparatus was dominated by Jews. As Stanisław Krajewski put it: “In the public consciousness, the Jews’ role in the first decade of People’s Poland is symbolized by the Jewish secret-police agent.” In autumn 1945, when the Jewish population constituted less than 0.5 percent of society, 67 out of 500 executive positions in the Ministry of Public Security (over 13 percent) were occupied by Jews.

According to Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, between 1944 and 1954, 167 out of 44

450 top functionaries in the Ministry of Public Security (37.1 percent) were of Jewish origin. However, the vast majority of them declared their nationality as Polish. Sometimes, functionaries with “typically Jewish names and surnames” declared themselves as being of Polish nationality, while those with Polonized surnames declared themselves Jews. As a rule, they claimed they were not of any faith, and, only in very exceptional cases, did they admit to the Jewish faith. The large majority, but not all Polish Jews, accepted the participation of Polish Jews in the Communist authorities. In early 1949, marginal Zionist circles stated:

We have nothing in common with all sorts of Bermans, Minces, Modzelewskis, Skrzeszewskis, Olszewskis, Groszes, Góreckis, Różańskis, Mietkowiskis, Borejszaz, Wangs, Nowotnyks, Ziółkowiskis, and others who jeopardize the whole Jewish people. Those renegades and careerists were worthless Jews, and are even worse Poles.... All sectors of the

50 The listed dignitaries, among others, held the following offices: Jakub Berman — member of the Politiburo of the Polska Partia Robotnicza/Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza Central Committee (KC PPR/PZPR) (1944–1956); Hilary Minc — KC PPR/PZPR Politiburo member (1944–1956), Minister of Industry and Commerce (1947–1949), Chairman of the Economic Committee of the Council of Ministers (1949–1950), Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the State Commission for Economic Planning (1949–1954), first Deputy Prime Minister (1954–1956); Zygmunt Modzelewski — KC PPR/PZPR member (1945–1954), Minister of Foreign Affairs (1947–1951), Council of State member (1952–1954); Stanisław Skrzeszewski — KC PPR/PZPR member (1945–1959), Minister of Education; Józef Olszewski — first Secretary of the PZPR Voivodeship Committee in Poznań (1949–1950); Wiktor Grosz (real name, Izaak Medres) — KC PPR member, General and Chief of the Central Political and Educational Authority of the Polish People’s Army, Ambassador to Czechoslovakia (1949–1954); Jan Górecki (real name Mühlrad) — Brigadier-General (from 1947), Deputy to the third Vice Defence Minister, Vice-Chairman of the Supreme Chamber of Control (1950–1953); Mieczysław Mietkowski (real name, Mojżesz Bobrowicki) — KC PPR/PZPR member, Vice Minister of Public Security; Jacek Różański (real name, Józef Goldberg) — Head of the Ministry of Public Security’s Investigation Department; Jerzy Borejsza (real name, Benjamin Goldberg) — Deputy KC PPR member, President of the Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza “Czytelnik” (a leading publishing house), Editor-in-Chief of the weekly Odrodzenie; Adam Wang — Managing Director of the State Commission for Economic Planning, Vice-Chairman of the State Commission for Economic Planning; Eugeniusz Ziółkowski — Director of the Cabinet of the State Commission for Economic Planning. Actually, not all of the listed politicians and officials were of Jewish origin, e.g., Zygmunt Modzelewski and Stanisław Skrzeszewski were Poles.
Jewish people are not responsible for these individuals’ actions, just as other peoples cannot be held responsible for their renegades.  

The above (obviously very incomplete) list of high-ranking government dignitaries of Jewish origin or those declaring themselves Jews could be juxtaposed with the list of Jews who held significant offices in the government bodies before the war. According to Joanna B. Michlic, the list of 600 high-ranking civil servants and diplomats in the Second Polish Republic included only two Jews: Szymon Aszkenazy and Anatol Mühlstein.

The high percentage of Poles of Jewish origin in the PPR/PZPR (Polish Workers’ Party/Polish United Workers’ Party) central apparatus and the Polish state during Stalin's era is one of the most important elements in the nationalist historians’ narrative on People’s Poland. While attributing the key demonic role to decision-makers of Jewish origin, they invariably disregard the fact that Stalinism in Poland was considerably less repressive than in other Eastern Bloc countries. This was evident, for instance, in the absence of forcible collectivization and mass persecution of the Catholic Church. However, nationalist historiography, while emphasizing the dominant role of Jewish decision-makers, chooses to ignore this inconvenient fact.

How did granting equal access to Jews to civil service posts change the Jewish community’s occupational structure? There has been no extensive research on this subject yet. In the case of Warsaw, where proportionately most of the Jews in government offices were employed, they constituted, in January 1947, 35.7 percent (i.e., 700 people) out of all employed Jews residing in Warsaw (i.e., 1,960 people). These data include those individuals who were known to the local Jewish committee. Warsaw was the most assimilated Jewish community, and most Jews and people of Jewish origin there did not maintain any contact with Jewish institutions, so the actual number of Jews in government administration was somewhat higher. The employment structure in Warsaw differed substantially from that in other

51 Nowy Izraelita, no. 1, February, 1949.
52 Joanna B. Michlic, Poland’s Threatening Other. The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), p. 201.
53 This applies, for example, to Jerzy Robert Nowak, Leszek Andrzej Szczęśniak, Władysław Ważniewski, and Jerzy Brochocki (Ryszard Gontarz’s pen name).
54 See Andrzej Rykała, Przemiany sytuacji społeczno-politycznej mniejszości żydowskiej w Polsce po drugiej wojnie światowej (Lodz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2007), pp. 80–81, 83.
Jewish settlements. For example, in Lower Silesia in October 1947, 1,285 out of 14,103 working Jews, less than ten percent, were working in state and municipal offices. In Lower Silesia, probably less than 20 percent of the Jews had no contact with Jewish committees.

Rights of Jews As a National Group

The national policy, originally implemented by the PPR, was based on the idea of an ethnically homogeneous Poland. This approach involved mass resettlement and denying the right of self-organization to the largest territorial minorities: Germans, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians. However, for various reasons, Jews were able to obtain an autonomous position during the early years of People's Poland. This resulted from, among other factors, the Communist Party of Poland's tradition of fighting antisemitism; the large proportion of Jews who were party members and a numerous presence of Poles of Jewish descent in the PPR leadership; mass support among Jews for the Communist authorities; the psychological impact of the Holocaust on the Polish Left; the extraterritorial character of the Jewish ethnic group; and the government's wish to obtain the aid for Holocaust survivors offered by Western organizations.

Jewish committees, set up when Polish territory was liberated from the German occupation, were directed by the multi-party CKŻP, established in Lublin in November 1944. Until 1949, thanks to the voivodeship networks and the local Jewish committees with their institutions and organizations, Polish Jews enjoyed a kind of national autonomy. Under this arrangement,

55 At the same time, 2,855 Jews worked in cooperatives, 892 in heavy industry, 643 in mining and metallurgy, 1,737 in the textile industry, 326 in agriculture, 2,171 in social institutions, 608 in “other government enterprises,” 2,005 in craft workshops, 1,013 in commercial enterprises, 270 in liberal professions, and 338 in productivization centers. AAN, Spuścizna Szymona Zachariasza, 476/26, p. 207.

56 For more information on the policy in People's Poland towards ethnic minorities, see, e.g., Mironowicz, Polityka narodowościowa; Leszek Olejnik, Polityka narodowościowa Polski w latach 1944–1960 (Lodz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2003). In 1946, permission to establish a cultural organization was granted to the Russian minority and, in the late 1940s, to the Slovak and Czech minorities. Other minorities had to wait until October 1956.

57 See Grzegorz Berendt’s article, “A New Life: Jewish Institutions and Organizations in Poland from 1944 to 1950,” in this volume.
Jewish Communists had to compete with as many as ten other political parties: seven Zionist and three non-Zionist. The composition of the committee gave Zionists a slight advantage over the Communists and Bundists. Three parties — Aguda, Folkists, and Revisionists — were not legalized (and did not have any representatives in Jewish committees), but were not persecuted either. Until 1946, the committee was headed by Sommerstein, a member of Ichud, the centrist Union of Zionists-Democrats, and then, until 1949, by Adolf Berman, a leftist Zionist. Among the committee members, Sommerstein, Berman, and Michał Szuldenfrei (Bund) were on the National State Council, while Szuldenfrei and Józef Sack (Poalei Zion-Hitachdut) were elected to the Sejm.

In practice, only a few areas of Jewish activity fell outside the committee’s control, including religious life, contrary to the original plans, and the Zionist-dominated illegal emigration of Jews from Poland. The committee’s weak legal basis was striking. This institution, representing the great majority of Polish Jewry, and which was regarded as such by the Polish authorities (a situation without precedent in inter-war Poland), was registered as a mere association with the Municipal Council of Warsaw. The committee made efforts to attain the legal status of an association of higher social utility with exclusive rights to take care of Jews and represent their interests in all areas; however, the authorities refused to grant this.

The organization model of the Jewish social life that was embodied by the committee can be considered as closely related to the Bund-developed concept of national and cultural autonomy. However, the attitude of the main political forces among the Polish Jews, both the Zionists and Communists, to the committees was instrumental. And yet, their principal aims were entirely different. The Communists wanted the committees to keep

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58 For more information on Jewish Communists after the Holocaust, see August Grabski, *Działalność komunistów wśród Żydów w Polsce (1944–1949)* (Warsaw: Trio, 2004).

59 The post-war activities of the Zionist-Revisionist party are the least well known; however, in the late 1940s, several revisionist activists were arrested.


61 Olejnik, *Polityka narodowościowa Polski*, pp. 366–367. In contrast to the existence of one body representing the majority of Polish Jews, the Polish Second Republic’s authorities prevented Jews from choosing the central leadership of the Jewish Religious Union, membership of which was de facto obligatory for Jews, since they did not wish to deal with such powerful representatives of the Jewish community.
the Jews in Poland, whereas the Zionists were seeking to prepare them for emigration. The Communists active in Jewish organizations wished to develop Jewish culture in Yiddish, whereas the Zionists promoted Hebrew. At the same time, both the Communists and Zionists utilized the committees as a temporary tool to organize Jewish life. It was used by the Zionists to facilitate the mass emigration movement they were coordinating. To the Communists, the committees seemed suspicious in light of Lenin and Stalin’s negative evaluation of national and cultural autonomy. Paradoxically, although post-war social life resembled concepts developed by the Bund, the Bundists and their ideology remained on the sidelines.62

In the years 1949–1950, progressive Stalinization led to the dismantling of the quasi-autonomous committee with the associated institutions and organizations. The authorities decided to narrow down the possible scope of activity within the Jewish community to the cultural and religious sphere. This involved liquidation of the vast majority of social and political organizations and dissolution or nationalization of Jewish institutions. It is noteworthy that many pre-war Jewish parties called for public financing of Jewish cultural institutions. “The liquidation of the Jewish population’s institutional separatism in Poland,” which had been going on since 1949, resulted in nationalization (but not Polonization!) of Jewish schooling, publishing, and the separate health care system — the Society for the Protection of Jewish Health in Poland (TOZ — Towarzystwa Ochrony Ludności Żydowskiej w Polsce), and suspension of aid from Western organizations (especially the Joint), liquidation of the central office of Jewish cooperatives, and, finally, the abolition of political pluralism.63

62 Jewish Communists strove for fully equal treatment of Jews within Polish society and for freedom of cultural development. However, they did not wish to isolate them institutionally from Polish society, as did the Bund with its national and cultural autonomy plan. Following the tradition of polemics between Lenin and the Bund, in which Lenin pointed out the deepening national divisions as a consequence of granting national and cultural autonomy, the Communists countered the Bundists’ plans with the concept of fully equal rights for extraterritorial ethnic minorities. For further information, see Enzo Traverso, Les marxistes et la question juive: histoire d’un débat (1843–1943) (Paris: La Breche, 1997), pp. 145–151. This is why Jewish Communists treated the ethnic autonomy model, as exemplified by the CKŻP and related Jewish committees, as only a provisional mode of organizing Jewish life rather than a kind of bastion to be defended at all costs. As early as August 1945, at a meeting of Jewish Communists in Moscow, Szymon Zachariasz stressed that Jewish committees should not be treated as a permanent form of organized Jewish social life. AAN, KC PZPR, ZPP (1945), no. 216/67.

63 The decision to nationalize all institutions associated with Jewish committees (such
Paradoxically, however, on account of the above-mentioned instrumental treatment of the CKŻP by Jewish political parties, its liquidation alone did not constitute a charge against the state authorities, either from the viewpoint of the Zionist camp, or, even less so, from the Communists’ perspective. Nevertheless, Zionists were credible and justified in their critique of various aspects of government policies, such as the abolition of political pluralism in the Jewish community, a ban on the operation of the Joint in Poland and forming associations, and restrictions on the instruction of Modern Hebrew and emigration to Israel, among others. However, this criticism came mainly from the politicians who had already “packed their bags” and were waiting for an opportunity to leave, and were not planning to remain in the country even before the Zionist movement in Poland was banned.

Antisemitic Violence after the Liberation

During the early post-war years, there were numerous antisemitic incidents: At least 800 Jews were killed in various circumstances, frequently by armed anti-Communist groups. A more exact estimation of the num-

as children’s homes and boarding houses) and to liquidate operation of the Joint as of January 1, 1950, with about two months notice, was taken at a meeting of the KC PZPR’s Secretariat on August 4, 1949. AAN, KC PZPR, Sekretariat, 295/VII, p. 72. The process of nationalizing Jewish institutions was coordinated by Franciszek Mazur (1895–1975), at the time deputy member of the KC PZPR’s Poliburo. He was assisted by Jewish activists Antoni Alster, Mateusz Oks, and Dawid Guterman. Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, p. 161. After nationalizing the Jewish institutions and placing them under the appropriate ministries, the authorities declared their intention to preserve their Jewish character, at the committee activists’ request. Smolar stressed the smooth cooperation between the Jewish Communists, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; ibid., p. 176.

64 See Andrzej Żbikowski’s article, “The Post-War Wave of Pogroms and Killings” in this volume.

65 For several years, there has been a movement in Polish historiography referring to members of such armed groups “powstańcy” (insurgents) or “niepodległościowcy” (independence fighters). These bizarre, previously unknown and pompous terms were popularized, especially by Chodakiewicz. Obviously, this practice is aimed at excluding hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens on the PPR’s side from the range of socially accepted conduct. However, this approach endeavors to impose not only an anti-left-wing model of patriotism, but also a broader political method: “There is a widespread tendency to promote extreme mind-numbing historical romanticism. Armed struggle is worshipped, especially when it is doomed to defeat. Realism is despised.
ber of antisemitic crimes in post-war Poland and their dominant motives, including the extent to which they were related to contemporary political conflicts, requires further research.

Overall assessment of antisemitic crimes in post-war Poland would require systematic examination of CKŻP sources and IPN (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej — Institute of National Remembrance) materials on anti-Communist “bands,” evaluation of the scale of common crime immediately after the war, and, finally, classification of already known and newly discovered cases of antisemitic crimes in terms of their motives. In most cases, the crimes were committed for racist, religious (based on the ritual murder myth) or political (the role of the victim in the new regime's structures) motives, in order steal or “defend” previous appropriation of Jewish property. In many cases, since there were several motives, classification would indicate the overriding one. Only such an approach could lead to more reliable verification of various theories on the dominant motivation for crimes committed against Jews in Poland after the Holocaust.

Therefore, Chodakiewicz’s theory — an apologist for the anti-Communist underground — minimizing antisemitic motives should be considered premature:

Violence against Jews sprang from diverse reactions by Poles to at least three separate phenomena: activity by Jewish Communists who fought for the introduction of the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist system in Poland; avenging actions by Jews attempting to mete out extra-judicial justice to Poles who were reputed to have harmed Jews during the German occupation; and the endeavors of numerous members of the Jewish community to recover their property confiscated by Nazis and subsequently taken over by Poles.67

So is the demand for objective analysis of the opponents’ or even allies’ interests and motivations. Hence, the glorification of the Warsaw Uprising, and recently also of WiN.” An unsigned editorial pertaining to a Sejm debate on the WiN, entitled “Historia manipulowana,” Dziś. Przegląd Społeczny, vol. 5 (2001), pp. 3–4.

66 In 1945 alone, there were 341 such groups; they have not been described in detail and the role of the Jewish issue in their political thought even less so. Rafał Wnuk, Sławomir Poleszak, Agnieszka Jaczyńska, and Magdalena Śladecka, eds., Atlas polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego 1944–1956 (Warsaw-Lublin: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [IPN], 2007), p. 57. Some of them also committed crimes against other national minorities, especially Ukrainians, Byelorussians, and members of religious minorities (e.g., Jehovah’s Witnesses).

67 Chodakiewicz, After the Holocaust, p. 1.
The above approach appears to provide a kind of justification for murderers of Jews since, in the three cases Chodakiewicz mentioned, Jews are generally presented as aggressors, and the Poles as acting in self-defense.

Józef Kuraś alias “Ogień” (Fire), an “independent” armed underground warlord, was responsible for the highest number of casualties among Jewish survivors. In his “struggle for independence,” he is believed to have killed around 30 Jews. In view of the available fragmentary data on illegal armed units, it is interesting that the post-AK underground appears to have killed more Jews than the NSZ. However, NSZ fighters constituted only about 21 percent of all anti-Communist partisans (estimated at 13,000–17,200) in 1945. Despite the great publicity around the American edition of Jan T. Gross’s book *Fear*, it is notable that only a narrow margin of post-war Polish society was involved in killing Jews. How large a margin? Assuming that as many as ten perpetrators, accomplices, and accessories of the criminals were behind the death of every Jewish victim, the number of antisemitic criminals in post-war Poland would amount to several thousand. Extremely shameful and painful as this figure is, it constitutes a fraction of one per 1,000 in over 20 million ethnic Poles at that time. This demonstrates that antisemitism, which was widespread in Polish society after the Holocaust, manifested itself mainly in the social consciousness and communication, but only seldom led to direct violence or murder.

68 In response to attempts to rehabilitate him, it is hardly surprising that Jewish veterans in Poland issued a statement under the dramatic title “Ilu Żydów trzeba zamordować by zostać narodowym bohaterem?” (How Many Jews Do You Have to Kill to Become a National Hero?), *Słowo Żydowskie*, no. 15 (1996). However, this did not prevent “Ogień’s” rehabilitation. President Lech Kaczyński and Andrzej Przewoźnik, Secretary-General of the Council for Remembrance of Struggle and Martyrdom of the Polish Nation attended the unveiling ceremony of the statue of Józef Kuraś in Zakopane in 2006.

69 Chodakiewicz, *After the Holocaust*, p. 148. Antisemitic terror took place principally in Eastern and Central Poland and in smaller towns and villages. A higher level of security in the Regained Territories is related to the weakness of local anti-Communist structures, which obviously did not exclude grassroots antisemitic initiatives. As a rule, however, these were not violent or murderous. Shnayderman mentions the boycott of Jewish shops in Glucholazy in Lower Silesia. Such action was commonplace before the war, but unusual in the post-war reality. Shnayderman, *Tsvishn shrek un hofenung*, pp. 300–301.

70 Wnuk et al., eds., *Atlas polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego 1944–1956*, p. LVII.

71 Compare August Grabski, “Krew brata twego głośno wola ku mnie z ziemi!” (review
The question of whether to issue a special legal act to fight antisemitism was controversial both in the Central Committee of Jews in Poland and among Polish politicians. The idea was raised by Jewish members in the National State Council but the act was ultimately not issued. However, as Shnayerman points out, Jewish circles also “fairly often” believed that antisemitism should be fought using general legal norms since: “...emphasis on the fight against antisemitism will only strengthen the argument of opposition demagogos who claim that Poland is ruled by Jews and that is why they receive [special] protection.”

Of course, the above-mentioned crimes were the qualitative culmination of a much more widespread phenomenon of less serious acts of violence, spoken and written antisemitic propaganda, threats, rejection, and exclusion towards Jews. Therefore, the attitudes of various political camps and social forces towards Jews are examined below, leaving aside the Left, which, as explained above, was the prime mover in initiatives to ensure equal rights for Polish Jews.

Polish Society’s Reaction to Equal Rights for Jews

The attempt at presenting Polish society’s position towards equal rights for Polish Jews has to encompass: the government camp (the Left), legal opposition (the Polish Peasant Party [Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe — PSL] and Christian democratic Labor Party [Stronnictwo Pracy — SP]), the illegal opposition with anti-Communist armed groups, and the Catholic Church.

War experiences and discrediting antisemitism as a political concept after the Nazi era united the Church and the anti-Communist opposition in Poland in their efforts to deny the existence of antisemitism and racism in Poland. After the Kielce Pogrom, Primate August Hlond asserted there was no antisemitism in Poland:

72 Shnayerman, Tsvishn shrek un hofenung, p. 135. Referring to this subject, Yonas Turkov mentions a bitter conflict in the committee’s Presidium, in which a minority of members criticized Sommerstein since they were afraid he would focus too much on the question of antisemitic violence in Poland, thereby undermining the PPR’s power; Turkov, Nokh der bafrayung, p. 85.
As the course of the unfortunate and regrettable Kielce events demonstrates, they cannot be ascribed to racism. They sprang from entirely different, painful and tragic grounds.73

At the same time, Stanisław Grabski, an elder ND statesman, claimed in Tygodnik Warszawski that there had never been any racism in the Polish nation’s soul:

Polish antisemitism was a trickle, and was expressed in words rather than actions.... During the last few years before the war, except for several truly tragic cases, the worst antisemitic excesses were picketing Jewish shops and bench ghetto [seating segregation] at universities.74

Thus, despite large-scale antisemitic violence in Poland in the years 1944–1947, resulting in hundreds of casualties, a phenomenon occurred, or a situation arose, which could be called “antisemitism without antisemites.” The co-responsible political forces not only denied their responsibility for antisemitic attitudes but even its very existence in Poland.

Analysis of the anti-Communist camp’s position towards Jews should begin with the Catholic Church, which “was the only force capable of pacifying anti-Jewish sentiment.”75 That is also the reason Jewish leaders repeatedly solicited the Catholic Church’s denouncement of antisemitism, which, however, was never satisfactory to the Jewish community. After the Kielce Pogrom, Primate Hlond not only denied the existence of antisemitism in Poland, but also accused Jews of ingratitude to their wartime Polish saviors, and of enslaving Poles, thereby implying that the Jews themselves were

74 Stanisław Grabski, “Groźna przestroga,” Tygodnik Warszawski, no. 33 (1946). After the annihilation of 87 percent of Polish Jews, the post-war National Party (Stronnictwo Narodowe — SN) was prepared to accept the existence of a small Jewish community in Poland as a formal part of its political program. As far as the attitude to the Jewish community is concerned, it is worth noting that the ND was the only party represented in the “London government,” under the direction of the right-wing socialist Tomasz Arciszewski, which did not support the special proclamation denouncing the Kielce Pogrom. Tadeusz Wolsza, Rząd RP na obczyźnie wobec wydarzeń w kraju 1945–1950 (Warsaw: DiG, 1998), p. 243.
responsible for anti-Jewish violence. On July 11, 1946, in a statement to American journalists, he declared:

The Catholic Church always...condemns all murders, irrespective of...whether they were committed on Poles or Jews, in Kielce or in any other parts of Poland.... During the exterminatory German occupation, Poles, although they were under attack themselves, supported, sheltered, and saved Jews, at the risk of their own lives. Many a Jew in

Poland owes his [or her] life to Poles and to Polish priests. Responsibility for the present deterioration of this good relationship rests to a very considerable extent with the Jews who hold leading positions in the Polish state and strive to impose a political system unwanted by the great majority of the nation. It is a harmful game since it produces dangerous tensions. In mortal armed confrontations on this political battlefront in Poland, some Jews unfortunately lost their lives, but the number of Polish casualties is incomparably greater [emphases added — A.G.].

76 This is how Col. Balloni, President of the Association of Jews in Italy, and others understood Hlond’s statement: “Jews themselves are responsible for the pogrom because they hold positions in the Polish government, and the majority of the Polish nation does not like that.” These words are unworthy of any decent man, much less of a primate in the Catholic Church”; quoted in Żaryn, Hierarchia Kościoła katolickiego, p. 101.

77 The Catholic Church, accustomed to legal and other privileges in the Second Polish Republic, was obviously unable to accept any Jewish officials in government posts at the time, even if the state had not been ruled by the Communists. As Hlond’s pastoral letter of 1936 dealing with the Jewish community, in which Communists were only supported to a very limited extent, stated: “It is a fact that Jews fight the Catholic Church. They are deeply involved in free thinking. They are the vanguard of godlessness, Bolshevism, and subversive activity. The Jewish influence on morals is destructive, and their publishing houses spread pornography. It is true that Jews commit fraud, and engage in usury and human trafficking. In religious and ethical terms, Jewish youth usually have a negative influence on Catholic youth at schools.... But, to be fair: Not all Jews are like that.” August Kard, Hlond, Prymas Polski, Z Prymasowskiej stolicy “Listy pasterskie” (Poznan: Nazelnny Instytut Akcjii Katolickiej, 1936), pp. 192–193.

Hlond’s statement to American journalists following the Kielce Pogrom, and the way in which he distanced himself from antisemitism, whitewashing himself personally and the Roman-Catholic Church, was associated by numerous Jewish commentators with this pastoral letter issued at a time when the economic boycott of Jews accompanied by numerous acts of violence was at its height. Shnayderman, Tsvisn shrek un hofenung, p. 125.

78 Quoted in Szaynok, Pogrom Żydów kieleckich, pp. 116–117. Following Hlond, Choda-
In parliament, Adolf Berman accused Stefan Wyszyński, the Bishop of Lublin, who later became Primate of Poland, of an ambiguous attitude to the ritual murder superstition:

The Jewish population in Poland is deeply concerned about the behavior of Cardinal Hlond and several other Church dignitaries. Jews experienced particular shock at a remark made by Rev. Bishop Wyszyński of Lublin during a discussion with a voivodeship Jewish committee delegation in Lublin. The Rev. Bishop reportedly made the observation [that] ritual murders were still unclear to him, and Beilis’s trial had not clarified everything.79

Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek of Kielce and members of the diocesan curia described the public dislike towards Jews in greater detail in his secret report to the US Ambassador Arthur Bliss-Lane. This is how he perceived his believers’ attitude toward the Jews:

Jews are disliked or even hated throughout Poland. There is not the slightest doubt about this phenomenon. Jews are disliked not only by those Poles who do not belong to any party or remain in opposition, but even by many of those who are official members of the governing parties. The causes of this general dislike are well known, and are not based on race. In Poland, Jews are the main propagators of the Communist system, which is not wanted by, but forcibly imposed upon, the Polish nation, contrary to the people’s wishes.

Besides, every Jew has a good job and endless possibilities and privileges in trade and industry. There are plenty of Jews working in the

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79 “Przemówienie posła tow. Dr. A. Berman na plenarnej sesji KRN, dnia 22 września 1946 r.” (Speech given by the MP Comrade Dr. A. Berman at the Plenary Session of the National State Council, on September 22, 1946.) Przelom (October 1946). Stefan Wyszyński also remained silent with regard to the antisemitic events in 1956 and 1968.
ministries, foreign diplomatic posts, factories, offices, the army, and they always hold chief, principal or managerial positions. They run the state-owned press and control censorship, which is so strict in today’s Poland; they are in charge of public security offices, and conduct arrests.

Apart from spreading Communism, they are tactless, especially in their dealings with people who do not share their Communist beliefs. They are frequently arrogant and brutal. Many of them do not even come from Poland. They came from Russia, speak poor Polish, and their knowledge of Polish conditions is even poorer.

Based on the above considerations, one might say that Jews themselves bear the lion’s share of the responsibility for the hatred that surrounds them. An average Pole believes — whether correctly or not, which is of no consequence here — that true and genuine supporters of Communism in Poland are mainly Jews, since according to the general public, the great majority of Polish Communists are mercenaries, are people devoid of ideals who are only Communists because it offers them considerable benefits [emphases added — A.G.].

Apparently, Bishop Kaczmarek fully understood the antisemitic attitudes. He wrote about the perpetrators of the Kielce crime, as follows:

Acting with an excess of passion always attenuates the responsibility, especially when the criminals are part of a mob inciting and encouraging them.

The “passion” was supposedly generated by collaboration of Jews with the Communists. However, Kaczmarek did not exclude the possibility that the pogrom may have been inspired by Zionists themselves, since the incident was allegedly convenient not only for the Communists but also allegedly for the Zionists.80

80 Quoted in Adam Michnik, “Pogrom kielecki: dwa rachunki sumienia,” Gazeta Wyborcza (June 3 and 10, 2006); Michnik wrote on Bishop Kaczmarek’s report: “At the bottom of this peculiar text, saturated with understandable and justified protest against Communist terror, there lie two intertwined antisemitic stereotypes: the ‘Judeo-Bolshevism’ and belief in a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. Only in this way is it possible to associate the Zionists’ activities of striving for a Jewish state with the actions of the Stalinist security apparatus in Poland. I do not think one needs to convince anybody today that this reasoning is as absurd as it is antisemitic.” Ibid.
Teodor Kubina, the Bishop of Częstochowa, a noble exception, as far as the conduct of Roman Catholic bishops is concerned, resolutely and publicly denounced antisemitism and the ritual murder myth, and fought pogrom sentiments. However, his attitude was met with disapproval by the Polish Episcopate’s other members. But the Episcopate’s disapproval did not prevent very small progressive Catholic circles, such as those associated with the weekly Tygodnik Powszechny, from unqualified denouncement of antisemitism. After the Kraków Pogrom (August 11, 1945), the weekly published the following declaration:

It clearly follows from the repeated statements of the Holy See and representatives of the Church hierarchy that antisemitism is irreconcilable with Catholicism. Antisemitism is racism, a belief in a natural disparity or even enmity between races. Antisemitism means hatred. The Church teaches that all people are equal before God.... Barbarian customs, mob law, and crimes are the all-too-evident consequences of five years of war and occupation. Especially after...the horrible destruction of the Jewish people by Germany, which no Christian can think of without the deepest sympathy, the Kraków events have a sad significance.

The behavior of the Catholic clergy affected the sense of Jewish security both on the national and local levels. According to the Suwałki yizker (memorial) book, after the Kielce Pogrom, in the atmosphere of anxiety about potential further acts of antisemitic violence, the Jewish community tried to persuade a local parish priest to call on his community not to attack Jews. When he refused, some of the Jews decided to leave the town.

What was the attitude of the legal opposition, the PSL and SP, toward the Jewish issue in the concrete reality of political struggle in Poland during the years 1944 to 1947? Władysław Gomułka, the PPR’s Secretary-General, directly accused the PSL of being co-perpetrators of the Kielce Pogrom, in a speech delivered to PPR activists and the Polish Socialist Party on July 6, 1946:

81 Gross, Strach. Antysemityzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie, pp. 136–137.
82 Tygodnik Powszechny, no. 22 (1945), p. 3.
The PSL-NSZ [opposition], having failed to win the popular vote, endeavors to prevail by plunging the country into the abyss of anarchy.... An extreme proof of this fact is the pogrom against Jews in Kielce.... Polish Fascists, who get so enthused at the sight of Mr Mikołajczyk, and whom he greets with a lordly smile of satisfaction, outdid the Nazi masters in their antisemitic frenzy.84

Although Gomułka’s association of the PSL with the Kielce Pogrom was groundless, and Stanislaw Mikołajczyk immediately denounced the pogrom,85 there is no doubt that the Judeo-Bolshevic myth was accepted by many peasants’ movement members. It was not necessarily like the ND’s ideas concerning the alleged eternal threat posed by the Jews to Poles, in all their historiosophical “wealth.” Thus, for example, Stefan Korboński, who was in the PSL’s top leadership and is one of the “Righteous Among the Nations,” did not treat Jews with dislike because of their Jewishness. However, commenting on the large number of Jews active in the political life of People’s Poland, he referred to all of them as enemies (of his vision) of Poland:

The victims of the first decade of the reign of terror imposed by Stalin and executed by his Jewish subordinates run into tens of thousands.86

According to some Jewish observers, even Mikołajczyk’s very compromise with the PPR, which led to the formation of the Provisional National Unity Government on June 26, 1945, and the emergence of the legal opposition in Poland, led to an increase in the number of antisemitic events.87 Antisemitism was openly manifested in certain low-level PSL branches.88

As Shnayderman stressed, paradoxically, although Mikołajczyk himself favored the English and American liberal democracy model, he was

84 Głos Ludu, July 7, 1946.
85 However, according to Michlic, Mikołajczyk’s statement on the pogrom was “vague and avoided any direct use of the word ‘victims’ in reference to Jews.” Supposedly, this was because “many PSL members believed that Jews were the main executors of the new Communist regime’s [policies].” Michlic, Poland’s Threatening Other, p. 226.
86 Stefan Korboński, The Jews and Poles in World War II (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1989). Some PSL leaders were literally characterized as antisemites. Turkov expressed this view of Władysław Kiernik, when the latter, as the Public Administration Minister, refused Turkov’s request to engage in the campaign to calm down anti-Jewish feelings among the peasant masses. Turkov, Nokh der bafrayung, p. 88.
87 Ibid., p. 83.
88 Michlic, Poland’s Threatening Other, pp. 202–203.
supported by the most reactionary forces. According to him, the PSL was infiltrated by “reactionary elements of all descriptions, headed by the NSZ.” These forces only supported Mikołajczyk’s confrontation with the Communist government, and not his democratic demands. Their political orientation included opposition to agrarian reform, nationalization of industry, friendly relations with the USSR, and participation of Jews in state agencies. Shnayderman ascribed the party’s weak reaction to the Kielce Pogrom to these PSL characteristics, in contrast to the state-owned press, which denounced it as “the Polish nation’s greatest disgrace.”

The PSL, like the Catholic hierarchy, absolved Polish society from the charge of racism. The party was not interested in waging a propaganda battle against antisemitic attitudes, a fact that did not escape the notice of the Jewish press. After the Kielce Pogrom, the PSL suggested the Communist authorities were responsible for the incident. As Gazeta Ludowa, the PSL’s main organ, put it:

The background to the Kielce events is clear. The pogrom was caused by shady elements bent on discrediting the Polish nation in the world’s eyes. The murderers will be executed, but we do not believe that this is the end. The atmosphere which breeds crime must be exposed. The dark criminal forces, which drove the mob to frenzy and madness, must be unmasked. No hesitation should be allowed.

The newspaper Odnowa, published by the small Christian democratic Labor Party, the other legal opposition party, denounced the Kielce Pogrom in a five-sentence note on page 15. A determined battle against antisemitism

89 Shnayderman, Tsvishn shrek un hofenung, p. 140, 143. However, émigré right-wing Bundists were against equating the PSL and the “NSZ bands” before obtaining sufficient evidence. Shloyme Mendelsohn, “Nokh Kelts,” Unzer Tsayt (1946), no. 8–9.
81 Robert Kuśnierz, Pogrom kielecki na łamach prasy w Polsce, in Leszek Bukowski, Andrzej Jankowski, and Jan Żaryn, eds., Wokół pogromu kieleckiego (Warsaw: IPN, 2008), p. 152. The theory about the Communist inspiration behind the Kielce Pogrom, which was insistently promoted in the 1990s, is not supported by the source materials. As a result, the delegation of the Kraków branch of the IPN Commission for Prosecuting Crimes against the Polish Nation discontinued the years-long inquiry into this case. Gazeta Wyborcza, Kielce, March 3, 2005. However, this did not prevent “historians, defending the good name of the Polish nation,” from continuing to promote the thesis about the alleged provocation by the Security Office in Kielce.
was inconvenient since it contradicted some of the newspaper’s supporters’ views.  

In WiN’s (the mainstream illegal underground group) viewpoint and from their propaganda, the Jew-Communist-UB informer was the prevalent image of the Jew. Most of the underground by definition suspected all Jews of supporting the Communists. This explains why armed anti-Communist groups sometimes “fished” Jews out of transports of repatriates from the USSR soon after they crossed the Polish border; and even before they had a chance to take up any political position vis-à-vis the country’s conflicts, they were beaten up or killed.  

As Chodakiewicz, an expert on the anti-Communist underground, admits, their “attitude towards Jews was fairly unfavorable.” However he reassuringly adds that it was mainly manifested as conservative Christian antisemitism, which “at most” favored “expulsion of Jews from the country and isolating those who remained.”  

Confirming the thesis of “antisemitism without antisemites,” WiN officially denounced racism, especially if it led to sheer violence, claiming it was fueled by Communists by using Jews for their purposes. Thus, from the Polish right’s viewpoint, the Communists were responsible for the fact that the underground movement’s antisemitism discredited it in the West’s mainstream (Liberal Democratic) public opinion.  

Of course, WiN demanded that Jews should dissociate themselves from Poland’s Left. Honor i Ojczyzna, WiN’s newspaper for the central district, stated:

Let Jewish clergy take a stand. Let Jewish scholars, artists, and writers express their opinion, just as Poles did in the case of the Kielce events. Let them speak out and dissociate themselves from Jewish thugs and degenerates in UBP uniforms. Otherwise, we will be obliged to charge all Jews in Poland with being hostile, and bearing responsibility for the

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92 Kuśnierz, Pogrom kielecki na łamach prasy, p. 145.
94 Chodakiewicz, After the Holocaust, p. 53.
95 For instance, the article “Kielce,” which appeared in WiN’s newspaper Honor i Ojczyzna, makes such claims. Quoted in Kersten, Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm, pp. 91–93.
96 Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego (Public Security Office).
crimes committed. We are not antissemites, but we put our own nation’s interests first.\footnote{Quoted in Ryszard Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki, “Pogrom w Kielcach — podziemie w roli oskarżonego” in \textit{Wokół pogromu kieleckiego}, p. 72.}

Lack of empathy for the Jewish victims of violence is supported by the complaint in the underground press after the Kielce Pogrom:

Office and factory workers, even scouts, were made to participate in the [pogrom victims’] funeral on [Prime Minister] Osóbka [-Morawski]’s expressed and categorical order.... The Kielce community is outraged by the ostentatious funeral given to the murdered Jews, while those who died at the hands of the Jewish officer and private were buried quietly at night because they were just ordinary Poles without any rights in their own country under the rule of Stalin’s emissaries.\footnote{Quoted in \textit{Żaryn}, \textit{Hierarchia Kościoła katolickiego}, p. 101.}

According to Rafał Wnuk, a WiN apologist, in publications of the AK, Armed Forces’ Delegation, and WiN, Jews were presented in a negative light in (only) ten percent of underground newspapers, but in 40 percent of their leaflets.\footnote{Rafał Wnuk, “Zorganizowany opór wobec państwa komunistycznego na przykładzie Okręgu Lublin AK-DSZ-WiN (1944–1945),” \textit{Dzieje Najnowsze}, no. 4 (1999), p. 183.}

From this perspective, it is not surprising that Shnayderman presented members of anti-Communist armed organizations to the Western reader as “demoralized murderers,” “robbers,” “fascists,” “Gestapo imitators,” and the “razor-men’s heirs”\footnote{Allusion to antisemitic attacks on Jewish students in the inter-war period, when, as well as clubs and brass knuckles, razors were also used.} whose romanticism is limited to beautiful aliases and organization names, and to “guzzling moonshine like water.”\footnote{Shnayderman, \textit{Tsvishn shrek un hofenung}, pp. 236–238.} In this context, Shnayderman gives accounts of several trials he attended as an observer in 1946 in Łódź: of Stanisław Sojczyński, alias “Warszyk,” from the Emergency Special Action Unit (Pogotowie Akcji Specjalnej) of the National Military Union (Narodowe Zjednoczenie Wojskowe); the AK “Błyskawica” (Lightning) sabotage unit; members of Eugeniusz Kolski’s, alias “Groźny,” (Dangerous) unit; and the Directorate of Resistance against Injustice (Kierownictwo Walki z Bezprawiem); and in Warsaw: the trial of 13 student
members of the NSZ-Polish Organization (Organizacja Polska); and the trial of NSZ’s Jerzy Kozarzewski, alias “Konrad.” Radical racist beliefs and the crimes of some anti-Communist armed group commanders, mentioned by Shnayderman, have been confirmed by contemporary research.

WiN’s original contribution to Polish antisemitic thought, based on updating concepts derived from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, includes, in particular, a report by Jakub Berman, “a member of the PPR Politburo and Secretary of the Poalei Zion Left,” which was supposedly presented at a “meeting of the voivodeship Jewish committee’s executive” in April 1946.

According to the WiN apologist Chodakiewicz, this legendary apocryphal work, distributed in 1968 and widely quoted in the Third Polish Republic’s antisemitic publications and propaganda (after 1989), was an appendix to WiN’s memorandum to the UN. What “Jewish machinations” did this document inform the UN about? According to the “Jakub Berman report”:

Jews have an opportunity to take the Polish state’s life into their own hands and bring it under their control without jostling for prominent positions. In ministries and offices, we create the so-called backstage team. Assume Polish surnames. Conceal your Jewish origin. Create and spread the belief that the country is ruled by Poles placed at the helm, while Jews do not play any role. Confirm this conviction in Polish society. To shape the Polish nation’s opinions and worldview in the desired manner, we must primarily take control of the most important propaganda tools: the press, films, and the radio. In the army, fill political, social, and economic positions, and take control of the intelligence service. Consolidate your position in the national economy.

When filling posts with Jews, priority should be given to the

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102 In the NSZ-Polish Organization, members had to prove their “racial purity” for four generations back, which was a stricter requirement than the Nuremberg Laws. Wnuk et al., eds., *Atlas polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego 1944–1956*, p. 27.
103 See, for example, Janusz Wróbel, “W cieniu Holokaustu. Odrodzenie społeczności żydowskiej w Łódzkiem po II wojnie światowej,” *Biuletyn IPN*, no. 11 (2005), pp. 32–35, which mentions Stanisław Sojczyński’s (alias “Warszyc”) radical antisemitism and Eugeniusz Kolski’s (alias “Groźny”) antisemitic crimes.
105 Jakub Berman was never a member of the Poalei Zion Left, but his brother Adolf was in the party’s leadership.
Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Treasury, and Industry, and Foreign Trade and Justice. As far as central institutions are concerned, central offices of industries, state-owned banks, central offices of commerce, and cooperatives. With respect to private enterprise, in the transitional period, maintain a strong position in trade. In the party, use similar methods: sit behind the Polish, but control everything....

The old Jewish policy failed; now we have adopted the new approach of combining the Jewish people’s objectives with the USSR’s policy. The fundamental principle of this policy is to create a governing apparatus consisting of representatives of Poland’s Jewish population.107

In light of research to date, it is possible to conclude that there was no sizeable Jewish support for any legal or illegal Polish anti-Communist opposition faction in Poland. The only anti-Communist opposition faction supported by some emigré right-wing Bund activists was the right-wing current of the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna — PPS), represented by Zygmunt Żuławski. This support was reflected to some extent in the New York Yiddish newspaper Unzer Tsayt and the Parisian Unzer Shtime. Such attitudes, however, were very rare in the Bund in Poland, as well as being entirely alien to the rest of the Jewish Left. After Żuławski was elected to parliament in 1947, he was brutally attacked by a Zionist MP, Józef Sack (Poalei Zion-Hitachdut), among others.

Conclusion

In the reality of the 1940s, the Communists were the only ones offering the Jews equal rights. In such a situation, it is not surprising that they were supported by the Jewish community in Poland (and some of the international Jewish community), or that Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust and decided to remain in Poland accepted various offers of cooperation, advancement, and equal rights made by the Communists. The choice to cooperate with this political movement, representing a minority of Polish society with power based on violence and disregard of democratic procedures, was the only rational solution in the post-Yalta situation, and, above

all, hundreds of thousands and, later, millions of other Polish citizens made the same choice.

Contemporary historiographers and the Institute of National Remembrance, in particular, made attempts to exclude Polish Communists from the national community and stigmatize Polish Jews for their cooperation with People’s Poland, based on pronouncing left-wing, secular, internationalist, and non-Russophobic views as unacceptable and unpatriotic. History, however, does not have an objective mechanism for excluding political movements from the national community, either in the ethnic or civic sense.
Alfred Stankowski

Although 70 years have elapsed since the end of the Second World War, there is no way that a precise answer to the question as to how many Polish Jews survived the Holocaust can be given. This is because Poland is one of the few countries affected by the Holocaust that does not have a full list of the names of those who perished. Unlike many other countries, in the Polish lands, the Germans did not draw up lists of the names of Jews they sent to their deaths or murdered on the spot. Other factors complicating research are the shift in Poland’s eastern borders, and the fact that the surviving Polish Jews are dispersed throughout the world, although information provided by scattered survivors regarding their relatives and friends who died during the Holocaust would be of significant help in compiling such a list.¹

¹ The International Institute for Holocaust Research of Yad Vashem expresses its reservations with respect to the data cited by the author as well as the author’s analysis of the number of Polish Jews murdered in the Holocaust, the number of Polish-Jewish survivors, and those rescued in various ways in occupied Poland. The opinions and findings in this article are solely those of the author.

For many years, the International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem has been gathering such data, which are accessible on the Internet, but, as yet, do not constitute a full list of victims’ names. In recent years, there has been a trend to scale down estimates regarding the human losses among the Polish Jews during the Holocaust. Initially, the figure cited was 3,400,000; but, at present, the number of victims is estimated at approximately 2,900,000.²

Data obtained from Jewish organizations by the country’s post-war authorities is the main source of information for estimations of the size of the Jewish population in Poland. From 1946 to 1989, the Central Statistical Office did not publish statistics by nationality, and, in fact, would have had limited resources for collecting such data owing to the migration of surviving Jews across the country. Furthermore, the countries to which Polish Jews emigrated after the war only tended to record the immigrants’ country of origin, and not their religion or ethnic background.³ Many Jews did not declare their origins and avoided contact with Jewish organizations, and, as such, were not included in any statistics.⁴


³ During the first post-war population census in Poland, on February 14, 1946, in order to augment the Polish population figures in the Western and Northern Territories, the Jewish committees recommended that Jews give their nationality as Polish and write “of Jewish descent” in the “comments” section. See Szyja Bronsztajn, “Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku po II wojnie światowej,” Sobótka, vol. 2 (1991), p. 261.

Data from Russian archives regarding deportees into the heart of the USSR would be helpful for establishing statistics, since it had the highest number of Polish-Jewish survivors of any country. Historians put the figure at anywhere between 300,000 and 600,000, although the latter is probably inflated. There is insufficient information to calculate with any accuracy how many people perished in the USSR due to war activities, epidemics (mainly typhus), starvation, cold, and the inhuman conditions in the camps and prisons. On the basis of Russian documents, Głowacki estimated that 59,000 Polish citizens were "special deportees" into the heart of the USSR whose ethnic status was recorded by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del — NKVD) as “Polish Jews,” as of April 1, 1941. There are no figures for Polish Jews who managed to escape to the east following the Third Reich's invasion of the USSR.

On July 30, 1941, a Polish-Soviet treaty, known as the Sikorski-Mayski Agreement, was signed in London. Among its provisions was the release of Polish citizens from camps and prisons, including 90,662 Jews imprisoned in camps, jails, and spetsposyolki (exile settlements). Another was the formation of Anders's Army for Polish citizens in the USSR, with which some 3,500–4,300 Jewish soldiers and 2,500 civilians were evacuated from the USSR to Iran and, subsequently, to Palestine, between March and September 1942. About a further 10,000 people obtained the Soviet authorities' permission to go to Shanghai, and another 1,000 or so went to Palestine. During 1941 and 1942, a total of some 21,300 people left the Soviet Union. The Sikorski-Mayski Agreement did not define the concept of “Polish citizens,” which led to the refusal by the Soviet authorities to recognize ethnic minorities resident in pre-war Poland as Polish citizens. Only repeated intervention by the Polish Embassy in the USSR resulted in the recognition


7 Teresa Prekerowa, "Wojna i okupacja," in Tomaszewski, ed., Najnowsze dzieje w Polsce, pp. 371–373. Between July 1940 and June 1941, approximately 2,200 Polish Jews from Lithuanian territory managed to reach the Far East via the USSR.
of minority groups living in central and western Poland as Polish citizens. After the evacuation of Anders’s Army to Iran, according to the incomplete NKVD statistics, dating from January 1943, about 102,153 Jews, who were also Polish citizens, remained in the USSR. As a result of the imposition of Soviet citizenship on all permanent residents of Poland’s eastern territories incorporated into the Ukrainian and Belarusian Soviet republics after January 15, 1943, the NKVD registered (on the basis of questionnaires) only 81,217 Jews and their children as former Polish citizens.  

As the end of World War II drew nearer, migration intensified, as did the desire among Polish Jews in the USSR to return to Poland. As already mentioned, the largest group of Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust consisted of those who spent the war in the USSR. The number of surviving Jews who were in occupied Poland throughout the war was much smaller — including those hidden by others, in hiding alone, active in partisan formations, and those liberated from labor or concentration camps. Data from the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce — CKŻP), the Ministry of Public Administration (Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej — MAP), and the State Repatriation Office (Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny — PUR) facilitate a relatively accurate estimation of the number of Jews who returned to Poland from the USSR in 1944–1948 and 1955–1959.

According to Józef Adelson, on the eve of the mass repatriation from the USSR, in January 1946, there were over 110,000 Jews living in Poland, 99,881 of them registered with the CKŻP. Owing to the significant population fluctuations during this period, as mentioned above, the number registered with Jewish committees, as shown in Table 3, does not correspond to the actual figures.

Scholars estimate the number of Polish Jews saved in occupied Poland to be somewhere between 80,000 and 120,000. This figure includes people who did not reveal their true identities after the war and did not register with Jewish committees. Teresa Prekerowa breaks down the number of surviving Jews as follows: 30,000–60,000 survived in hiding among the Polish

8 Głowacki, “Czy i dokąd wracać?,” p. 162.
population in various circumstances; 20,000–40,000 survived in German camps; and 10,000–15,000 survived in partisan formations or forests.11

Based on the initial CKŻP registration procedure, in May 1945, Lucjan Dobroszycki considered the figure of 43,000 survivors in central and western Poland as credible.12 In June 1945, the CKŻP registered a further 5,500 Polish Jews in displaced persons (DP) camps in Germany, as well as about another 10,000 liberated from camps.13 The number of Polish-Jewish soldiers was 13,000–20,000 in the Polish People’s Army,14 20,000 in the Red Army, and about 20,000 in the Polish Army in the west.15

12 Dobroszycki, Survivors, p. 46, 67.
13 Adelson, “W Polsce zwanej Ludową,” pp. 387–390; AZIH, CKŻP Collection, Repatriation Division, file no. 303/V/7, Informacja CKŻP dot. liczby powracających z obozów koncentracyjnych z dn. 2.06.1945 r. gives the figure of 16,900, with 22,200 added by hand in the margin, for those who returned from concentration and forced labor camps. The author is grateful to Alina Skibińska for directing him to this document.
14 Benjamin Meirchak (Beniamin Majerczak), Żydzi — żołnierze Wojsk Polskich polegli na frontach II wojny światowej (Warsaw: Bellona, 2001), p. 519; Kalman Nussbaum, Vehafakh lahem le-ro’ets: ha-Yehudim ba-tsava ha-amami ha-Polani bi-Verit ha-mo’atsot (Tel Aviv: Diaspora Research Institute, 1984). According to Majerczak, there were 20,000 Jewish soldiers in the Polish People’s Army, including 3,200 officers; Adelson, “W Polsce zwanej Ludową,” pp. 387–390.
15 About 20,000 (data probably significantly underestimated) went into the Red Army; 14,000 joined the army in France; over 4,000 served in the Polish Army in the east (in 1943); and approximately 1,000 in Great Britain (the Polish Armed Forces in the West). See Meirchak, Żydzi — żołnierze Wojsk, pp. 514–518.
Table 1. Jewish Population Registered with CKŻP Branches in Poland and Germany at the End of 1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voivodeship or district</th>
<th>Number of localities where Jews lived</th>
<th>Number of Jews registered in large towns/cities</th>
<th>Number of Jews registered in various districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Górnośląskie (Upper Silesia)</td>
<td>11 Katowice — 3,152, Będzin — 1,083, Bytom — 718, Bielsko Biała — 562</td>
<td>6,768</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolnośląskie (Lower Silesia)</td>
<td>6 Dzierżoniów — 2,732, Wałbrzych — 1,634, Wrocław — 901, Sępolno [district of Wrocław] — 584</td>
<td>6,119</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Łódzkie (Łódź)</td>
<td>40 Łódź — 27,459, Piotrków — 543, Kalisz — 308</td>
<td>29,892</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warszawskie (Warsaw)</td>
<td>27 Warsaw — 12,434, Milanówek — 299</td>
<td>13,591</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krakowskie (Kraków)</td>
<td>36 Kraków — 8,961, Oświęcim — 617</td>
<td>10,699</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lubelskie (Lublin)</td>
<td>15 Lublin — 2,447, Chełm — 424</td>
<td>4,223</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Przemyskie (Przemyśl)</td>
<td>6 Przemyśl — 1,044</td>
<td>1,484</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gdański (Gdańsk)</td>
<td>4 Gdańsk-Wrzeszcz — 1,042</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Włocławskie (Włocławek)</td>
<td>20 Włocławek — 200, Ciechocinek — 197</td>
<td>763</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poznański (Poznań)</td>
<td>2 —</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in orphanages</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1,438</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In DP camps</td>
<td>49 Bergen-Belsen — 4,866, Sweden — 3,514, Peterswaldau [Pieszyce] — 1,005, Feldafing — 834</td>
<td>18,288</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>216</strong></td>
<td><strong>99,881</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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The first organized repatriation scheme from the USSR was the result of repatriation pacts, signed on September 9 and 22, 1944, by the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego — PKWN) with the governments of the Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Lithuanian Socialist Republics.\textsuperscript{17} As a result, from 1944 to 1948, a total of 54,594 Jews returned to Poland from the western republics of the USSR: 16,958 (5,371 men; 11,587 women) from the Lithuanian SSR, 4,531 (1,938 men; 2,593 women) from the Belarusian SSR, and 33,105 (12,302 men; 20,803 women) from the Ukrainian SSR. The ratio of women to men in these figures is surprisingly high, accounting for 58–69 percent of the total; one explanation is that more men died in active service or were serving in the army at the time of repatriation.\textsuperscript{18}

Filip Friedman, Director of the Central Jewish Historical Commission, includes repatriates from the western Soviet Socialist Republics in those saved in the former Second Polish Republic (pre-war Poland).\textsuperscript{19} However, this approach is rather dubious, and requires further research on the places of rescue, since at least some of these repatriates came to the western republics after they were occupied by the Red Army.\textsuperscript{20} Most of the Polish Jews repatriated from western Ukraine were wartime refugees who either came voluntarily or were deported to the heart of the USSR, mainly the Central Asian Republics.\textsuperscript{21} There is no way of establishing with any accuracy the number of Jews actually saved in the eastern parts of the Second Polish Republic, but the number was probably between 25,000 and 30,000.

On July 6, 1945, the Polish authorities signed the fourth repatriation agreement with the USSR government. About 200,000 people were expected to return — 177,604 registered with the Union of Polish Patriots, and an estimated 70,000 or more unregistered. Following the agreement, 136,579 Jews returned to Poland in 203 rail contingents between Febru-
ary 8 and July 31, 1946. Yehuda Bauer gives the figure of approximately 175,000 returnees from the USSR between 1946 and 1948. About another 2,000 refugees from Romania, plus 20,000 from displaced persons camps in Germany, also returned to Poland during this period.

The pact of July 1945 did not cover Polish citizens who were in prison camps and other places of confinement. From the files at the Polish Embassy in Moscow, it seems that there were about 50,000 such people, but it is not known how many of them were Jews. On June 30, 1946, there were 240,489 Jews registered with the CKŻP Records and Statistics Office: 130,544 (54.3%) men and 109,945 (45.7%) women.

### Table 2.

**Registered Repatriates by Age and Gender in the First Half of 1946**

| Age      | Registered repatriates |  |
|----------|------------------------|--|---|
|          | Percentages            | Numbers |  |
|          | Men | Women | Total | Men | Women | Total |  |
| 0–6      | 10.3 | 11.1 | 10.7 | 8,800 | 8,000 | 16,800 |  |
| 7–14     | 9.1  | 9.9  | 9.5  | 7,800 | 7,100 | 14,900 |  |
| 15–21    | 8.3  | 10.4 | 9.2  | 7,100 | 7,400 | 14,500 |  |
| 22–45    | 58.0 | 54.3 | 56.3 | 49,800 | 38,800 | 88,600 |  |
| 46–55    | 7.9  | 7.9  | 7.9  | 6,800 | 5,700 | 12,500 |  |
| 56 and over | 6.4  | 6.4  | 6.4  | 5,500 | 4,600 | 10,100 |  |
| **Total** | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 85,800 | 71,600 | 157,400 |  |


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25 Zarys działalności Centralnego Komitetu, p. 23; Dobroszycki, *Survivors*, p. 47, states that the ŻIH Archive holds 228,900 Holocaust survivor registration cards; AAN, MAP, file no. 786, sheet 67, *Sprawozdanie CKŻP*, gives the figure of 243,926 for July 1, 1946.
HOW MANY POLISH JEWS SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST?

Table 3. Repatriates Registered with CKŻP Voivodeship and District Committees in the First Half of 1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committees</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wrocław</td>
<td>37,991</td>
<td>32,002</td>
<td>69,993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Szczecin</td>
<td>16,101</td>
<td>14,772</td>
<td>30,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Łódź</td>
<td>15,699</td>
<td>10,839</td>
<td>26,538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katowice</td>
<td>8,882</td>
<td>8,904</td>
<td>17,786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kraków</td>
<td>3,284</td>
<td>2,142</td>
<td>5,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>1,479</td>
<td>1,308</td>
<td>2,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Białystok</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>1,036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lublin</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Częstochowa</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Przemyśl</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Włocławek</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gdańsk</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olsztyn</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poznań</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bydgoszcz</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>85,823</td>
<td>71,597</td>
<td>157,420</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 4. Jewish Repatriates from the USSR Who Returned to Poland between February 8 and June 28, 1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point of departure</th>
<th>No. of contingents</th>
<th>No. of Jews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Ukraine</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4,972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Russia</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>36,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia and Siberia</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>61,486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>193</td>
<td>120,579</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The previously cited figure of over 240,000, taking into account those who registered more than once, owing to changes in place of residence, is reduced to about 216,000.26 In the future, the electronic registration of

26 Zarys działalności CKŻP, p. 7; see also Albert Stankowski, “Nowe spojrzenie na
ALBERT STANKOWSKI

280,000 cards of surviving Jews, under way at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw since 2005, is expected to give scholars access to more accurate data on the numbers registered with the committees.\(^{27}\) Compiling accurate lists of names and numbers of people registered will be difficult, owing to errors in surnames, given names, and place names that arose when copying this information from the original handwritten filing cards, first onto printed forms, and then into the electronic database.\(^{28}\)

The CKŻP statistics do not include children rescued by Christians during the war; or those who never revealed their origins, only discovered their background many years after the war, or did not contact Jewish organizations or institutions, owing to post-Holocaust trauma. Attempts to reach more accurate figures by accessing Israeli statistics are also in vain, since Israeli data for the 1945–1949 period do not include immigrants’ places of residence before their arrival in Palestine, and later, Israel. The only way of estimating the approximate number of Polish Jews who immigrated to Palestine, and later, Israel, during and immediately after the war, is to make use of data that include immigrants’ places of birth. According to such data, 96,000 immigrants from Poland arrived in Palestine/Israel between 1945 and 1949. These figures are most likely underestimated, since many people entered Palestine via illegal channels, with counterfeit travel documents. The immigrants’ place of birth is relevant since it may be assumed that most of them came directly from Poland, or via DP transit camps in Germany, Austria, Italy, and Cyprus.\(^{29}\)

The final significant wave of repatriation from the USSR to Poland took place from 1955 to 1959. Following the Polish-Soviet agreement on repatriation of Polish citizens from the USSR, signed on March 25, 1957, candidates eligible for repatriation had to prove that they and their spouses

statystyki dotyczące emigracji Żydów z Polski po roku 1944,” in Grzegorz Berendt, August Grabski, and Albert Stankowski, eds., Studia z historii Żydów w Polsce po 1945 roku (Warsaw: ŻIH, 2000), p. 109; Jan Misztal, “Osadnictwo Żydów polskich repatriantów z ZSRR na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych,” Przegląd Zachodni, no. 2 (1992), pp. 161–184. Another hindrance to establishing accurate Jewish population figures is the fact that some people submitted registration forms in several places, at various points on their return from camps, hideouts, etc. Some also entered their non-Jewish spouses as Jews in order to render them eligible for aid from the Jewish committees.


Dobroszycki, Survivors, p. 66.


27
28
29
and children had Polish citizenship before September 17, 1939. Based on this agreement, 267,187 people returned to Poland, including 18,743 Jews (seven percent of this repatriation wave).

Table 5. Polish Jews Who Survived the Holocaust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where they survived</th>
<th>Estimated numbers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>137 + 20 + 25 + 20 + 18 + 12 (,000)</td>
<td>232,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupied Poland</td>
<td>120,000 + 25,000</td>
<td>145,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>425,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Mikołaj Latuch, it is impossible to establish with any accu-

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31 Czerniakiewicz, Przemieszczenia; see also IPN, MSW II, file no. 3316, Informacja dla wiceministra (Information for the vice-minister), sheet 3; Annual Jewish Yearbook 1960, vol. 61, p. 265.
32 Repatriation from February to June, 1946.
33 Soldiers in the First Tadeusz Kościuszko Division (ca. 1,000); soldiers in the Red Army.
34 People resettled from the western USSR republics who survived in central and eastern regions of the USSR.
35 Refugees from the USSR to Iran, Shanghai, Palestine, and Japan.
36 Repatriation from the USSR from 1955 to 1959.
37 Individual returnees from 1944 to 1954 and from 1960 to 1967.
38 Including about 212,000 who returned to Poland from the USSR.
39 According to the borders before September 1, 1939.
40 Those who survived on Aryan papers, hidden by Christians, in partisan units, and in concentration camps and forced labor establishments. (According to Joseph Kermish and Teresa Prekerowa, the highest estimate is 120,000.)
41 Saved in the eastern regions of the Second Polish Republic and returned in the 1944–1948 repatriation wave.
42 There are no figures for survivors in countries that were not under German occupation, such as the UK, Portugal, Switzerland, Romania, Sweden, the USA, Canada, Palestine, South America, and Australia. This is presumed to be a relatively small group: those who were outside Poland at the outbreak of the Second World War, soldiers in the Polish Army in the West (about 20,000), holders of visas for neutral countries, and internees (also about 20,000).
43 Concentration camps.
44 Prekerowa states that 380,000–500,000 Polish Jews survived the war (i.e., between 85 and 89 percent of the pre-war Jewish population of 3,500,000 did not survive; Prekerowa, Wojna i okupacja, p. 384.
racy the number of Jews who returned from the USSR, since the list was only compiled in 1958 and was based on whether the names entered in the ledger of those who passed through repatriation points sounded Jewish. Nevertheless, the figure of over 18,000 Jewish repatriates to Poland from the USSR during the 1955–1959 period seems credible, since it agrees with the Joint data. Only some of these returnees were Polish citizens prior to September 1, 1939, since a considerable number were non-Polish spouses.

**Conclusion**

The above findings indicate that no less than 2,900,000 Polish Jews perished in the Holocaust, and no more than 425,000 survived. Assuming there was about 3,400,000 Jews living in Poland before September 1, 1939, then more than 85 percent were killed and 12.5 percent survived. Neither of these percentages is accurate since available historical sources are incomplete.

It would be possible to calculate more precise statistics if there was full access to the Russian archives. This would certainly make it possible to establish more accurately the number of Jews who fled German-occupied Poland for the USSR and remained there for the duration of the Holocaust, and those who were murdered or died there, or did not return to Poland for other reasons. Another vital statistic would be the breakdown of the number of surviving Polish Jews according to means of survival. This would only be possible by systematic research on their later lives and traces of information they left behind. This is a huge, but not impossible task. Another major blank in the statistics is the number of Jews who fled west via Romania and Hungary or other routes at the outbreak of war. The exact number of Polish Jews murdered in the east by the *Einsatzgruppen* is also not known, and is probably impossible to determine. Further progress in Holocaust statistics depends on the success of research in these fields.

46 On the basis of surveys conducted in Wrocław on a relatively small group of 254 respondents, in the early 1960s, demographer Szyja Bronsztajn estimated that the percentage of spouses who were not Polish citizens before 1939 might be as high as 42 percent. See Szyja Bronsztajn, “Wstępne wyniki badania ankietowego ludności żydowskiej Wrocławia,” *Rocznik Wrocławski*, vol. 6 (1962), p. 101.
47 Andrzej Żbikowski in “Zagłada polskich Żydów w latach II wojny światowej” estimates the number of Polish citizens of Jewish nationality killed at 2,800,000, while August Grabski and Andrzej Rykała estimate the number of surviving Polish Jews at about 13 percent; see “Żydzi w Polsce 1944–2010,” in *Atlas historii Żydów polskich* (Warsaw: Demart, 2010), p. 390 and 393.
Revival and Unfulfilled Hopes
Rescuing Jewish Brothers and Sisters

Dos Naye Lebn (“A New Life”) was the first newspaper in Yiddish issued in Poland after the German occupation, symbolizing both the failure of Hitler’s henchmen to completely annihilate Polish Jewry, and also the survivors’ reconstruction on the ruins of their pre-war existence. When Dos Naye Lebn appeared in 1945, Jewish communal life had already been in place for some time.

After January 1944, the very few Polish Jews who had managed to survive in the Polish Republic’s various former eastern voivodeships were liberated by the Red Army. This was not tantamount to providing them with a sense of safety, but they were able to start building a new life. The Holocaust and Soviet reprisals had exacted a heavy toll on a considerable segment of the Jewish social elites. A few well-known pre-war personalities and new charismatic war-time leaders rallied to the survivors’ cause. They made a joint effort to reconstruct Jewish communal life. From 1944 to 1945, a parallel process involving the independent creation of political institutions took place on Soviet territory and in Poland.

The Organization Committee of Polish Jews (Komitet Organizacyjny Żydów Polskich — KOŻP) was founded within the framework of the Union of Polish Patriots (Związek Patriotów Polskich — ZPP) in July 1944. Its headquarters were located in Moscow and the committee publicly announced its creation a few weeks later, on August 10.¹ At an earlier stage, Jakub Berman, who was an important figure in the Polish Communists’ Central Bureau in

the Soviet Union, made a proposal to the Jewish Communist refugees in the ZPP to form a separate section representing the Jews.²

Non-party members, Zionists, a member of the Socialist Bund party, as well as rabbis,³ were invited to participate in the ZPP’s central board’s work. Dr. Emil Sommerstein, a Zionist and member in the pre-war Polish parliament, headed the KOŻP for a very brief period with Leon Finkelstein and Bernard Mark as his deputies and David Sfard as secretary. After Sommerstein left Poland, Mark became the KOŻP Chairman and Sfard the Vice-Chairman.

The proviso was made that the new institution would not encroach on the ZPP’s handling of Jewish affairs. Consequently, a network of alternative departments and branches was not created, and universal structures already in place were used. Among the KOŻP’s significant tasks was to secure assistance from the Jewish Diaspora and inform them of the Polish and Soviet Communists’ favorable attitude with regard to meeting the Jewish population’s needs.⁴ Furthermore, plans were made to ensure that Polish Jews in the Soviet Union would receive a steady flow of information through the press about the situation in their homeland. They were mobilized to participate in Poland’s struggle for liberation and defeat of the Third Reich. In the long run, the new institution’s work would aim at promoting national culture and professional retraining for people who were unable to resume their former occupations. The KOŻP expected to help prepare the Jews to repatriate in Poland.⁵ As a matter of fact, the committee played a role in negotiating with the Soviet side, leading to the inclusion of Jews in the category of those with the right to return to Poland. Nevertheless, they

² David Sfard, *Mit zikh un mit andere* (Jerusalem: Farlag Yerusholaimer Amanach, 1984), p. 142. Sfard writes that, according to the KOŻP, there were more than 300,000 Polish Jews residing in the Soviet Union in mid-1944; ibid., p. 143.

³ The KOŻP’s main board was made up of Emil Sommerstein, Zionist and MP during the Second Polish Republic; Leon Finkelstein, former member of the Warsaw Jewish community’s board; Rabbis Sztejnberg and Szczekacz; Ida Kamińska, the well-known actress, and her husband, theater director Marian Melman; historian Bernard Mark; Bund member Michal Szuldenfrei; the writers Mojżesz Broderson, Efraim Kaganowski, Rachela Korn, Lejb Olicki, Józef Rubinsztejn, David Sfard, and Abraham Zak; and the Communist activist Szymon Zachariasz. See Norbert Kołomejczyk and Marian Kalinowski, *Polska Partia Robotnicza 1942–1948* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1986), p. 180.

⁴ In this sense, the KOŻP was similar to the ŻKA formed by Soviet Jews in 1941.

⁵ Głowacki, “Uwagi o Komitecie,” p. 286. Sfard claimed that the KOŻP’s self-assigned main task was preparing for repatriation; Sfard, *Mit zikh un*, p. 143.
warned against “unorganized repatriation,” describing the situation in Poland as complicated, making return to former places of residence far from certain and, therefore, advising them to wait for the KOŻP to give the signal to return.6

Apart from the issue of repatriation, the KOŻP’s other tasks were similar to those performed by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (Żydowski Komitet Antyfaszystowski — ŻKA), which was founded by Russian Jews in 1941 with the Kremlin’s tacit backing to rally support from foreign Jewish circles for the Soviet Union’s life-and-death struggle against the Third Reich.7 Several KOŻP activists were former ŻKA members.8 Other Polish-Russian Communists also maintained ties with ŻKA members and collaborators.9 Russian representatives of this institution — among them, well-known actor in the Soviet Union Salomon Mikhoels, and prominent poets Peretz Markish and Itzik Fefer — attended KOŻP sessions in November 1944. So, there was clearly affiliation between the two organizations.

The Polish committee was very efficient at carrying out its assigned tasks. It was recognized abroad as a democratic, pluralistic Jewish organization deserving assistance. Material assistance started arriving from North and South America, Palestine, and the European countries that had been freed from German occupation. Indirectly, the Polish committee was attempting to secure a favorable attitude in the Jewish Diaspora toward the Union of Polish Patriots’ leadership, which was striving to rebuild Poland toward the future political leadership of the Polish People’s Republic according to the new political framework’s guidelines, and, consequently, also toward the future political leadership of the Polish People’s Republic. However, what really mattered to thousands of Polish Jews dispersed throughout the Soviet Union was immediate social assistance. They urgently needed food, clothing, shoes, medication, and care for minor-aged orphans, old people, and the sick. The KOŻP put a lot of effort into securing this expected assistance. The task it faced was tremendous. In the beginning of 1945, 177,604 Jews10

6 The Jewish Chronicle, no. 3984, August 17, 1945.
8 Binem Heller, Ida Kamińska, and Bernard Marek were members of the ŻKA.
9 Sfard, Mit zikh un, pp. 144–147.
10 Elżbieta Hornowa, “Powrót Żydów polskich z ZSRR oraz działalność opiekuńcza Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce,” BŻIH, no. 1–2 (1985), p. 109. In the second half of 1945, the KOŻP at the ZPP informed the voivodeship Jewish committee in Wrocław that the repatriation might involve some 200,000 Jews; ibid., p. 112.
were registered with the Polish patriots’ union. Polish Jews drafted into the Red Army, sent to militarized labor battalions, and held prisoner remained unregistered. An estimated 50–60 percent of former Polish citizens found in areas of the Soviet Union that the Germans failed to conquer were Jews.

The Union of Polish Patriots lived up to its commitment to provide information about the situation in Poland. That is how Jews in the Soviet Union learnt about the antisemitic incidents that took place in Kraków in 1945. This kept some families from returning to the old homeland. The incoming, disquieting news caused the Presidium of the KOŻP’s central board to deliver a memorandum to the Provisional National Unity Government in Warsaw demanding harsh punishment for perpetrators of attacks on Jews and new laws making racism and antisemitism punishable crimes.

According to the Repatriation Agreement signed by the Provisional National Unity Government in Warsaw and the governments of the Soviet Republics on July 6, 1945, assistance to returnees to Poland was the KOŻP’s main task. In 1946, the committee helped in sending approximately 170,000 people back to Poland. This operation required cooperation with Polish and Soviet state administrations, the State Repatriation Office (Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny — PUR) and the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce — CKŻP). As a result of the dissolution of the Union of Polish Patriots and, consequently, the KOŻP, Polish Jews still residing in the Soviet Union had to deal with their affairs on their own, including attempts to join the diminishing stream of repatriates leaving for Poland. Eventually, in 1949, the Soviet authorities totally stopped this part of the repatriation process. David Sfard, KOŻP’s last chairman, left for Poland in October 1946.

The organizers of the Polish-Jewish community in the Soviet Union kept in close touch with their counterparts, who started working openly in the Polish Lublin province in July 1944. This was possible due to the Polish state authorities’ favorable attitude towards most of the surviving Jews’ civic initiatives. As early as March 1944, when Poland was still under occupation, the National State Council’s Department of Jewish Affairs (a sort of underground “left-wing parliament”) began operation, developing a work

11 For more information on the Kraków Pogrom, see Andrzej Żbikowski’s article, “The Post-War Wave of Pogroms and Killings,” in this volume.
12 Hornowa, Powrót Żydów, pp. 105–122.
13 The last minutes from a KOŻP session are dated June 18, 1946.
program for the period after the liberation.\textsuperscript{15} The so-called Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego — PKWN), the precursor of the Polish government formed under the Communist protectorate claimed: “Jews who were subject to savage extermination by the occupier, will be able to reconstruct their existence and will be granted legal and genuine equal rights.”\textsuperscript{16}

For Jews, no less important than these declarations was the official inclusion of Jewish community representatives in the Polish Committee of National Liberation and National State Council (Krajowa Rada Narodowa — KRN). This was a signal that, unlike the Second Polish Republic, the new rulers really did apply the principle of equality of civil rights with regard to the Jews.\textsuperscript{17} Officially, this principle remained in force throughout the entire period of the Polish People’s Republic, from 1944 to 1989. It was in accordance with the Communist manifesto’s proclaimed principle of equality of nations, which was not always implemented. It was also considered to be consistent with the new regime’s political interests. Among these was the promotion of a favorable image of the new Polish government on the international arena and its perception as a democratic state and a determined adversary of antisemitic ideology and its propagators. Efforts at gaining the Jewish Diaspora’s support considerably contributed to the authorities’ liberal approach to legal and illegal emigration of Jews from Poland.

The convergence of the Jewish activists’ principles with the struggle of the People’s Republic to attain recognition of the decision about Poland’s new borders was made during the Potsdam conference in August 1945, affected the issue of domiciling Jewish repatriates in the so-called Regained Territories, which belonged to Germany before 1939. These areas were presented as a new homeland for homeless Polish Jews who, for various reasons, were unable to return to their pre-war places of

\textsuperscript{15} Zionists Adolf Berman and Pola Elster (the latter perished in the Warsaw Uprising) were members of the Department of Jewish Affairs at the National State Council and belonged to the clandestine Jewish National Committee before that. Bernard Mark, “Do dziejów odrodzenia osiedla żydowskiego w Polsce po II wojnie światowej,” \textit{BŻIH}, no. 51 (1964), pp. 4–6.

\textsuperscript{16} The principle of equal rights for Jews in legal orders was never formally questioned in Poland after the Second World War.

\textsuperscript{17} Emil Sommerstein (Zionist) and Michał Szuldenfraj (Bund) were represented on the National State Council. Moreover, Sommerstein was put in charge of the Polish Committee of National Liberation’s War Reparations Department.
residence. The cause of homelessness was their reluctance to live in areas of the Second Polish Republic, which had become part of the Soviet Union, as well as signs of extreme hostility by part of the local population in many small places from which the Jews originated. This last issue was also used as a ploy for the regime’s benefit. Mentioning violent acts against Jews by armed anti-Communist organizations served as a tool for tarring the entire anti-Communist opposition with the antisemitic brush, and accusing them of trying to rid the Polish landscape of Jews. Publications and speeches about acts of violence towards the Jewish survivors emphasized the political and racist context but completely overlooked the state of lawlessness and runaway common banditry of which the most vulnerable citizens were the primary power victims. Anti-Communist underground members attacked mainly, but not exclusively, people affiliated with the power apparatus. Jews not associated with the Communist authorities also perished at their hands. In a few well-publicized cases, individual soldiers, policemen, and state security officers independently perpetrated the murders of Jews.

The Kielce Pogrom, which took place on July 4, 1946, the scope of which was absolutely unprecedented in any European country after the war, cast a grim shadow over Polish Jewry’s life. This act of violence was tragic: Within a few hours, 42 Jews were assassinated, and at least 30 people were killed in the vicinity of the city on the same day. Individual soldiers and police-

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19 For more information on the reaction of the local Polish population to the return of the surviving Jews in the years 1944–1946, see Joanna Tokarska-Bakir’s article, “Ethnographic Findings on the Aftermath of the Holocaust through Jewish and Polish Eyes,” and Alina Skibińska’s article, “The Return of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and the Reaction of the Polish Population,” in this volume.


21 During the Kielce Pogrom on July 4, 1946, more than 20 people were killed as a consequence of gunshot and bayonet wounds.

men had a hand in the Kielce crime, while their commanders showed an inexplicable inability to prevent the pogrom, which should not have been impossible. Under the impact of the Kielce incident, thousands of Polish Jews became increasingly certain that no one in Poland would be able to ensure their safety. Consequently, thousands of Holocaust survivors came to see emigration as the only way out of their situation. By February 1947, some 100,000 Jews had left the country, without passports and the right to return.

The fact that, at the time, the Soviet Union was not yet opposed to the Polish authorities’ Jewish policy was an important factor conducive to the growth of Jewish organizations in Poland. Well-known citizens of the Soviet Union, among them the writer Ilya Ehrenburg, would officially meet leaders of Jewish organizations, indirectly legitimizing them. The Soviet authorities were aware of and tolerated the illegal emigration of Jews from Poland organized by Zionists. This was part of the Kremlin’s overall Middle East policy between 1944 and 1948, aimed at supporting forces destabilizing the situation and weakening the position of Western powers in the region. Zionism was perceived as such a force. Although the activity of Zionist organizations was prohibited in the Soviet Union, they were allowed to develop rather freely in Poland, and the local authorities were not criticized by their Soviet ally on this point.

The Department for Assistance to the Jewish Population, established on the initiative of the Polish Committee of National Liberation on August 8, 1944, was entrusted with the task of providing practical, governmental assistance.

Survivors from former territories of the Polish Republic incorporated


into the Soviet Union gradually joined the few thousand people who left
their hideouts in the Lublin province. Initially, the former were few and
far between because the border was scrupulously guarded by regiments of
the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Narodnyy Komissariat Vnu-
trennikh Del — NKVD), and the agreements concluded in September 1944
pertaining to population resettlement from the former Polish territories
were not implemented until the turn of 1944/1945. This situation changed
following the January 1945 offensive in which the remaining pre-war Polish
territory was liberated from the German Army. The Jewish repatriates who
arrived in Poland from the western districts of the Ukrainian, Belarusian,
and Lithuanian Soviet Republics were estimated at 30,000,26 and those who
survived in territories west of the Vistula required immediate and solicitous
care. In addition to assistance offered to Jews by the PKWN, the KRN, and
the Provisional Government, Jews who came out of their urban or rural
hideouts in major cities of the Lublin province began their own self-help
committees as early as 1944. The first committees were established in Lub-
lin, Biała Podlaska, and Białystok.

A group of Jewish activists sought to create a central institution with
two main objectives: to provide Jews with minimal means of subsistence,
and to represent their interests before state administration bodies and the
KRN. Thus, on November 4, 1944, the Central Committee of Jews in Po-
land27 was formed with the PKWN’s agreement and organizational support.
In February 1945, the committee moved its headquarters to Warsaw, with
local committees at voivodeship, borough, and municipal levels reporting
to it. The CKŻP’s central and local structures became the most significant
institutions organizing Jewish life in Poland in the years 1945–1949. A state-
ment dating back to May 1945, describing “the committees [that] became
the social-political representation of Polish Jews,”28 presented a true picture
of the situation. In mid-1946, small and more significant Jewish population
centers were noted in some 200 localities.

26 Yosef Litwak, “Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union at the End
of the Second World War and Afterwards,” in Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky,
eds., Jews in Eastern Europe and the USSR, 1939–1946 (New York: St. Martin’s Press,
Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe [PWN], 1993),
p. 426 (complete article pp. 387–477).
28 “Rezolucja narady krajowej działaczy PPR w środowisku żydowskim.” See Mark, “Do
Many tasks were carried out by the CKŻP’s specialized departments: population records and statistics, repatriation, social welfare, healthcare, children and youth care, propaganda, and professional training. Within the framework of the local committees, there were corresponding sub-departments. Moreover, repatriates received assistance from civic committees. The Repatriation Department’s Sub-Department of Health, and, from March 1946, the CKŻP’s Health Care Society, was responsible for medical care. This included 60 outpatient departments, seven infirmaries, medical practices, preventoriums, sanatoriums, maternity clinics, mother and child care centers, nursing homes that also housed summer camps for children up to 14 years of age, and disinfection units. Following CKŻP recommendations, ailing people were also referred to state health service establishments.

A total of 35 houses were prepared for Jews returning from the east to Poland — temporary facilities that could house 7,430 people at a time: 10 specially built barracks, 23 hostels, 9 old age homes, and 11 orphanages. In the summer of 1946, soup kitchens under the CKŻP’s supervision served around 241,000 meals on a monthly basis. In addition to the CKŻP’s infrastructure providing assistance for survivors, there were also aid networks affiliated with Jewish political parties and the Supreme Religious Council of Polish Jews. Some institutions created to serve immediate needs were subsequently closed down. In 1945, for example, this was the case with hostels for soldiers discharged from the Polish Army.

The Kielce Pogrom and anti-Jewish incidents in other cities indicated that other similar events were possible, leading to the creation of the so-called special commissions, which functioned from July 1946 to March 1947. They were supervised by the CKŻP’s Central Special Commission. Their main duty was to protect Jewish institutions and facilities, which were guarded by armed sentries. They gathered information about potential threats and passed it on to law-enforcement agencies.

At the same time as the weekly *Dos Naye Lebn* started, a publishing house with the same name was established. By the turn of 1944/1945, the Jewish Press Agency (Żydowska Agencja Prasowa — ŻAP) began operating and proceeded to publish a bulletin with a domestic and foreign information service on Jewish issues. All in all, between 1945 and 1950, some

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29 Hornowa, *Powrót Żydów*, p. 120.
81 press titles were published, including leaflets for special occasions. As early as autumn 1944, the Jewish Historical Commission was established. In an agreement between the CKŻP and the Union of Jewish Writers, the Central Jewish Historical Commission (Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna —CŻK), which collected reports and documents through its local branches from the Holocaust and the period preceding it, was created. The commission also gathered photographs, works of art, ritual objects, newspapers, and other publications.

The PKWN and, subsequently, the Provisional Government financed the CKŻP’s activity. Owing to the tremendous scope of the needs at that stage, the government did not object to the Jewish institutions’ efforts to secure material support from foreign organizations. In the spring of 1945, the first donations began arriving from Palestine and the United States. Some of the American shipments reached Poland via the Soviet Union, and were received by the KOŻP. During 1946, the contributions from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint) and ORT (Organizacja Rozwoju Twórczości), a Jewish organization for advancement through training and education, increased steadily, so that by the beginning of 1947, financial support from the Polish government had decreased to symbolic levels.

It is impossible to overestimate the significance of the aid provided by the Joint from 1946 to 1949 to the Jewish community in Poland, which reached 20 million US dollars. The assistance extended by the Joint and ORT significantly improved the survivors’ living conditions. Henceforth, the allocation of funds gradually changed. At first, support was mostly allocated to ongoing social welfare activity. In the second half of 1946, investment was made in the infrastructure and, as a result, people were able to support their own families.

In 1944, religious Jews applied for a permit to create a nationwide central body responsible for organizing religious worship. Eventually, on February 6, 1945, as a result of their efforts, a circular was drafted by the Ministry

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34 General data relating to the conditions in which Jewish religious institutions in Poland functioned were described by Ewa Waszkiewicz in Kongregacja wyznania mojżeszowego na Dolnym Śląsku na tle polityki wyznaniowej Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1945–1968 (Wroclaw: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1999), pp. 42–63, 102–104.
of Public Administration (Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej — MAP) outlining the legal framework for Jewish religious associations, renamed Congregations of the Mosaic Faith (Kongregacje Wyznania Mojżeszowego) a year later. Their basic role was to organize religious worship. The deeds to the former Jewish community’s properties were not transferred to them, and they were only allowed to make use of synagogues, ritual baths, and other buildings and facilities. An organizational committee of denominational congregations, made up of rabbis and congregation board members, with a three-person executive committee, was established. In particularly complex cases, the Supreme Religious Council (Naczelna Rada Religijna — NRR) and the Council of Rabbis were requested to submit their opinions. Starting in 1945, David Kahane served as Chief Rabbi (chaplain) of the Polish Army and Chairman of the executive committee for a period of four years. He and the other 24 rabbis had to receive the approval from the Ministry of Public Administration.

According to data for 1947, there were 80 congregations and 38 synagogues and houses of prayer. In 1949, it is estimated that 50 percent of the Jews residing in Poland at that time, a total of some 50,000 people, participated in collective religious practice, either sporadically or systematically. However, only a small number were registered as paid-up congregation members. The congregations operated basic religious schools, such as the Talmud-Torah system. By summer 1946, there were 40 such schools with some 2,000 pupils and in 1947 there were 36 and 1,000, respectively. Higher level religious schools (yeshivot) were created in Kraków, Wrocław and Szczecin, but, owing to the decreasing number of students, they were shut down in 1949. The Higher Rabbinical School in Łódź met with a similar fate. The mass emigration of the religiously observant was the main cause behind the decline in religious life.

For almost four years, representatives of the legal Mizrachi party and advocates of the non-legalized Orthodox Aguda or Agudat Yisrael party carried on a discussion regarding the congregation’s organizational committee’s terms of accession to the CKŻP. The Orthodox members feared that the congregation would turn into a secular institution. To break the stalemate, a separate central institution for the congregation was created. The founding meeting of the Religious Union for the Jewish Faith was held in August 1949, and it continued until the end of the Polish People’s Republic.

36 Ibid., pp. 463–466.
Political Players in “The Jewish Street”

The CKŻP consisted of representatives of middle-of-the-road and left-wing currents of the pre-war Jewish political scene. Until 1948, the Zionists were the most numerous, with somewhat fewer Communists and Bund followers, reflecting the degree of its support among the Jews. The situation in the local Jewish committees did not necessarily reflect the CKŻP’s political make-up. In Lower Silesia, for example, the voivodeship Jewish committee was headed by a Communist (Jacob Egit) for a period of five years, although the Communists definitely made up a minority of Jews in this region (3,509:5,200 in 1947).

The Zionists were the most divided. Originally, the Ichud (Union) Zionist Association was created, in the hope that in view of the limited number of Jews, the old differences had become irrelevant. Just a few months later, however, things turned out differently. Gradually, ties were established with foreign organizations. In August 1945, delegates from Poland participated in the deliberations of the World Zionist Organization and of the World Jewish Congress in London. The following month, envoys from the Jewish organizations arrived from overseas on the Vistula River, bringing with them a great deal of politicking and strife, which had never ceased even for a moment, least of all in Palestine. The struggle for political control of the Polish Jews’ souls began.

From the foreign Jewish institutions’ point of view, Poland’s role increased as repatriation of thousands of Jews from the Soviet Union began. First and foremost, the Yishuv was currying favor with them, aiming

37 Stefan Grajek, Po wojnie i co dalej. Żydzi w Polsce w latach 1945–1949 (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny [ŻIH], 2003), pp. 15–16.
to bring more Jews to the Land of Israel in view of the inevitable armed confrontation with the Arabs.

In 1946, the idea of creating a unified Zionist federation in Poland failed completely. Each group started operating on its own in the struggle to obtain foreign donations and British immigration certificates for those heading for Palestine. The CKŻP and local Jewish committees were the most important venues for official contact between representatives of various political options.

In addition to political parties, there were also youth organizations, children’s and women’s organizations, and religious bodies. Adversaries of the theory of class struggle founded the bourgeois Association of Democratic Zionists called the Ichud, that sponsored the Hanoar HaZioni-Akiba youth organization. WIZO (Women’s International Zionist Organization) cooperated with it most closely. General Zionists opted for a liberal approach to the place of religion in community life, facilitating dialog with Mizrachi, the party of religious Zionists whose members were mainly employees of religious congregations and craftsmen.

The Poalei Israel organization functioned as of 1945. In the year that followed, Orthodox religious circles strove to have it legalized under the name of the Poalei Israel Association. In 1947, however, Communist authorities came out against it. The formal state of affairs diverged from the practice of tolerance by local officials towards sympathizers of the Agudat Yisrael party, which was officially considered reactionary, and consequently was not registered. Things were very much the same with regard to the Jewish Democratic Faction (Żydowskie Stronnictwo Demokratyczne — ŽSD), whose members were trying to revive the activity of the pre-war bourgeois Jewish Folkist party (Yiddishe Folkspartei), from September 1945. Its anti-Marxist agenda and hostility towards Communists from the Polish Workers’ Party was the main cause of the new rulers’ reluctant attitude towards the ŽSD. The neo-Folkists intended to cultivate and develop national history and act on behalf of the Jewish petty bourgeoisie. As for the Zionist-Revisionist movement, it was not allowed to establish a separate political organization, or to operate under the Jewish Soldiers’ Union motto — Playing a Part in the Struggle against Fascism. Those Revisionists interested in political activity joined ranks with the ŽSD Ichud, which was closest to the Revisionist ideology.41

The Zionist-Socialist Workers’ Party Hitachdut and the youth coun-

41 Grzegorz Berendt, “Zjednoczenie Syjonistów Demokratów ‘Ichud’ — z biało-niebieskimi sztandarami w morzu czarwonych sztandarów,” in August Grabski and
terpart, Gordonia, represented the Jewish labor movement’s mainstream current. Much hope regarding the establishment of a Jewish national state was pinned on the policy of Great Britain, which held mandatory power in Palestine.

Politically, the Jewish Socialist Workers’ Party Poalei Zion, which was to the left of the above-mentioned groups, aspired to create a socialist state in Palestine. Until 1947, it was the most powerful leftist Zionist group in Poland. On the one hand, the group established the Dror organization to work with youth. On the other hand, the Party’s Left strove to create a binational Arab-Jewish republic with Soviet-style councils, and sought the Soviet Union’s support. Zionist youth organizations, such as Borochow Jugnt and Hashomer Hatsair, also represented Left-leaning positions. As a result of their ideological affiliation with the Communist movement, the leadership of those organizations did not rule out the Jewish community’s further development in Poland.

Left-wing Zionist youth organizations established a head office called the HaHalutz. It served as a platform for coordinating activities directed toward raising children and youth interested in settling in Palestine. The youth organizations were part of the HaHalutz head office. From its inception on November 5, 1945, the HaHalutz membership kept growing and, despite the emigration after the Kielce Pogrom, it still had 3,374 members in 1947.

As a result of the unification of the right wing Poalei Zion Right with Hitachdut in 1947, the Jewish Zionist-Socialist Workers’ Party, Poalei Zion-Hitachdut, was created. In October of that year, the left wing of both Poalei Zion’s Right and Left merged into the United Jewish Workers’ Party Poalei Zion to become the most powerful Zionist political group. At the same time, the Borochow Jugnt and Dror organizations merged under the name Dror-Borochow Jugnt.

One of the last initiatives of the Zionists was uniting the left-wing groups which, in 1949, led to the merging of Hashomer Hatsair and the United Jewish Workers’ Party Poalei Zion to form the Jewish Workers’ Party.

The Zionists went about creating training centers for future settlers in the Land of Israel (kibbutzim) on a massive scale. These centers, mainly


43 Including all the Zionist youth organizations, the total number of kibbutzim created at various times and in different cities exceeded 200; Grajek, Po wojnie, p. 114.
supervised by HaHalutz and Ichud, were collective bodies whose members worked and lived together. They also spent their leisure time together. All the money they earned was earmarked for collective purposes. This austere way of life was aimed at facilitating the selection of individuals with maximum endurance and the highest level of dedication to the group’s ideas.

In 1947, with the Polish People’s Republic’s support, a military training center was set up in Bolków in Lower Silesia. More than 2,000 people, who were later sent to Palestine, completed the courses, which lasted a couple of weeks. A paramilitary organization called GACHAL, the acronym for Giyus Chutz La’aretz [in Hebrew: mobilization outside the country’s borders] was created in Kraków. Its members, who were affiliated with the Association of Democratic Zionists — Ichud (Zjednoczenie Syjonistów Demokratów — ZSD), underwent theoretical and practical training from spring 1946 until 1948. Officers from the Polish Army and the Security Services were released from duty and allowed to go to Palestine. Planes from the Dęblin Flight Instruction School were sometimes used to transfer men to Czechoslovakia. In the years between 1948 and 1949, ships carrying volunteers for the Israeli Army sailed from the Gdynia and Szczecin harbors.

Zionist activists were very mobile, shuttling between centers in Poland and agencies abroad, and intermediary locations and camps for displaced persons, namely those who fled and were unable to return to their former places of residence.

The funds for organizational purposes were raised abroad or came from people with commercial interests in Poland. Everyone was called upon to participate in regularly announced fundraising campaigns for Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel. The pre-war tradition of collecting contributions to purchase land for settlers and equipment was resumed. Two Polish-based branches of the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemet LeIsrael) and the Palestine Reconstruction Fund (Keren Hayesod) were in charge of these initiatives.

Between 1946 and 1948, the Jewish Agency’s Emigration Bureau (the so-called Pal-Amt), which coordinated legal and illegal emigration to the

46 The Jewish Chronicle, no. 4155, December 10, 1948.
Middle East, was located in Warsaw. After the bureau was shut down in November 1948, the Israeli legation took on these activities.

Pre-war Communist party members created a faction of the Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza — PPR) within the CKŻP and following the establishment of the Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza — PZPR), a PZPR team was created within the CKŻP. The PPR faction and the PZPR team had their counterparts on the local Jewish committees’ boards. Since the number of Jews was insignificant at first, only a few experienced and well-prepared activists were sent to do political work in Jewish circles. This situation changed after repatriation of about 200,000 Jews from the Soviet Union because it seemed that Jews would become one of the largest ethnic minorities in Poland.47

As a result of this situation, the leadership of the ruling Communist Party at the time, the PPR, decided to send activists with vast experience in political work in these circles to “the Jewish street.” Among them were Szymon Zachariasz, one of the few survivors of the great Stalinist purge in the years between 1937 and 1938, and a former member of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party dissolved by Stalin in 1938; Grzegorz Smolar, who was active in Poland and in Soviet Ukraine and Belarus between 1921 and 1945; the lawyer and political journalist Bernard Mark; and the teachers and political journalists Michał Mirski and Julian Łazebnik. They carried out the PPR/PZPR leadership’s instructions until the 1960s, assisted by other pre-war Communists who were active on the Jewish committees and those who chose this political option after 1944. In 1947, the number of PPR members registered by the Jewish committees was estimated at 7,000 individuals. The number of Jews who were then members of the PPR at that time is estimated at 10,000,49 which corresponded to 0.84 percent of the total number of PPR members.50

48 In December 1948 the Communist Party in Poland was renamed from PPR to PZPR (Polska Partia Robotnicza — Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza); from Polish Workers’ Party to Polish United Workers’ Party.
During the German occupation, members of the Bund were part of the clandestine Jewish Fighting Organization and the Jewish National Committee. After liberation, the activists who survived in Poland were allowed to legitimize the party. However, its influence was rather limited due to the annihilation of the Jewish proletariat and the mass emigration of Jews from Poland. The maximum number of Bund members is estimated at 1,500 individuals. Their number kept decreasing due to emigration to Western countries, mainly France and the United States. At the turn of 1948/1949, the party numbered some 800 people in Poland. Its consistently anti-Zionist stand was revised after the proclamation of the State of Israel and the Bund leadership called on party members and sympathizers to support the struggle of the Jews in Palestine to create their own state. The Union of Socialist Youth Tsukunft was in charge of children and youth education in accordance with the guidelines of the Bund program.51

All the aforementioned political groups registered in Poland since 1944 repeatedly voiced their support for the changes in the system occurring in Poland. The PPR leadership acknowledged this as long as the Communists were interested in maintaining controlled pluralism in the political arena by building a widely based popular-democratic front.

The Emigration Issue

In the beginning of 1945, party affiliation was only a minor catalyst of divisions within the Jewish community. A much more crucial controversy was the question of whether to opt to reconstruct Jewish life in Poland or to direct their efforts toward encouraging Holocaust survivors to leave Poland as quickly as possible. Yetsiyes Polin (exodus from Poland) was one of the most important topics discussed during public debates and in private conversations.

The first advocates of immediate emigration were Jewish partisans who fought in the Lithuanian-Belarusian Borderlands. Before this, while still living in the territories annexed by the Soviet Union, members of youth organizations, such as Hashomer Hatsair, Noar Zioni, and Betar, set up a

committee (the so-called Coordination) to organize emigration. Without waiting for an incentive from outside, a few months after liberation, they started investigating the possibility of transferring Jews from Soviet and Polish areas to Palestine. Their emissaries would check routes through Romania and from there, to Palestine by sea. However, it turned out to be impossible to use these routes for a large-scale operation because Zionist leaders there were arrested by Soviet counterespionage agents. In December 1944, some of the activists crossed into the “Lublin Poland” area, where they set up a new Coordination, with Aba Kovner as one of the main figures.\footnote{Grajek, Po wojnie, pp. 11–12; Aleksiun, Dokąd dalej, pp. 101–105.}

However, the radical advocates of immediate “exodus” did not manage to establish a dominant position within the Jewish institutions in Poland, and so they left for Palestine. Those who did not opt for immediate emigration prevailed.\footnote{Those who advocated a step-by-step approach to emigration were, for example, E. Sommerstein and Yitzhak Zuckerman, one of the leaders of the Jewish Fighting Organization. Aleksiun, Dokąd dalej, p. 115, 120.} The strategic objectives of both groups were similar — to induce as many Jews as possible to leave for Palestine — but this operation required ideological and professional training beforehand. Possibilities for immigration to Palestine were subject to several factors: the British immigration policy in Palestine hindering the influx of Jews; the Polish authorities’ attitude to the formally illegal and barely tolerated emigration of Jews through the “green border”; and logistic difficulties with regard to transfer points that were not established until 1945.

Jewish Communists and Bund members knew what the Zionists had in mind, but they could only oppose it verbally. The results of anti-emigration propaganda were very limited in scope. Thousands of people, most of whom did not have any relatives, chose to emigrate. They wanted to live in a new country, and not in Poland, which they viewed as the cemetery of the great community of Polish Jews. They were encouraged by the relatively frequent antisemitic incidents. More often than not, living in their hometown or village was dangerous. As of 1947, it became increasingly obvious that the Communists intended to abolish private enterprise and, from the example of the Soviet Union, the consequences of such a policy were well known.\footnote{The Jewish Chronicle, no. 4089, September 5, 1947.} Only the lack of a good alternative kept some of the people and families from leaving. Describing the mood of thousands of
families, Klara Mirska said it was “living on suitcases.” The creation of a Jewish State was far from certain. People were aware of the growing conflict in Palestine between the Jews and their Arab neighbors. Therefore, people leaving for the Middle East confronted the real danger of finding themselves in the midst of another war. The gates to America were barely open to immigrants, and camps for immigrants in Western Europe meant living in a state of suspension.

Nevertheless, emigration would go on uninterrupted from 1945 to 1951. The possibilities of leaving in a legal fashion (with a passport) were limited. Thanks to specialized Zionist agents, people were leaving Poland in informal, but not always safe, ways. Both the fugitives and the smugglers were in danger. At times, they would encounter border guards who did not hesitate to fire at them in fulfillment of their duties. Polish, Soviet, and Czechoslovakian soldiers took part in firing at them. People arrested at border points guarded by Red Army soldiers risked being sent to the Gulag. The transfer routes led through the Carpathian Mountains, the Sudeten (the Kłodzko Valley), and Szczecin, by land and sea. Efforts were made to reach France and Italy and from there, ships took the fugitives to the shores of Palestine.

In 1947, more than 100,000 Jews, mostly fugitives from Poland, were living in camps for displaced persons located on German territory. Those arrested while crossing the border illegally would nevertheless resort to all kinds of tricks to get out of Poland. For example, they would masquerade as foreigners, former concentration camp inmates who were returning home. Single individuals and small groups would join transports of Germans who were forcibly resettled beyond the Odra River between 1945 and 1947. A great many Jewish inhabitants of Szczecin managed to leave using a route through the Soviet occupation zone in Germany.

Following the Kielce Pogrom, the verbal agreement concluded between the Zionists and Marian Spychalski, the Polish Deputy Defense Minister, made it possible for 90,000–100,000 Jews to leave the country between July 1946 and February 1947. When the mass exodus was halted due to British pressure, the operation continued, albeit in a more camouflaged fashion.

57 *Nowiny i Kurier*, no. 144, June 24, 1966.
58 *The Jewish Chronicle*, no. 4037, August 23, 1946.
The Polish counterespionage services and the Polish border guards tolerated it until 1949. Only then did large-scale arrests of smugglers working for Zionist agencies begin.\(^59\) As far as the émigrés were concerned, the security services looked the other way. They took far more interest in people seeking to return to Poland because of poor living conditions abroad,\(^60\) suspecting that there were spies and saboteurs among them. As the Cold War intensified, steps were taken to seal off the border by removing border guards who either ignored the new developments or did not comply with the changes of the border services toward Jews crossing the border. From then on, mass emigration could only take place in a legal and formalized manner.

Several hundred Zionist activists — in the framework of an operation that made history under the name “Bricha” (Escape) — played the major role in organizing the “exodus” of some 150,000 Polish Jews from the end of the war until the establishment of the State of Israel.\(^61\) As of 1945, the operation was coordinated by an institution called Mosad-le-Aliya Bet, which was founded in Palestine as early as 1938. Thanks to funding from various sources, the Zionists created transfer channels, a communication system, a network of transfer points, and interim camps for those who decided to settle in Palestine.

### Economic Activity

Shortage of skilled manpower allowed Jews to find work in nationalized enterprises, public administration, the judicial system, the national health system, and independent, educational, and cultural institutions. KOŻP members estimated that some 30 percent of the Polish Jews residing in the Soviet Union at the beginning of the war were involved in so-called productive activity, while merchants, small traders, manufacturers, people living on interest, and property owners were considered to be unproductive. In the final stage of the war, the percentage of those who were in productive

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60 In the spring of 1947, according to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman, hundreds of Jews inquired about the possibility of returning to Poland at Polish consulates in Germany. *The Jewish Chronicle*, no. 4067, April 4, 1947; no. 4081, July 11, 1947.

61 Bauer, *Flight and Rescue*. 
activity rose to 70 percent of the total of those who were professionally active, with thousands of Jews working in foundries, metal works, textile plants, mines, the oil industry, power plants, the construction industry, communication, and haulage.\textsuperscript{62}

Although Jews formally had unlimited access to any available position in accordance with their skills and professional experience, this was not always the case in reality. Sometimes representatives of the ruling Communist party would limit access of Jews to refute their political opponents’ claim that Jews were overrepresented in public institutions. Zofia Gomułkowa, wife of the Secretary-General of the PZPR Central Committee, was among those who allegedly practiced such a hiring policy.\textsuperscript{63} There were instances of enterprises with manpower shortages that simply rejected Jews out of antisemitism. This was one of the reasons that Jews would look for work in workshops and industrial enterprises established by Jewish organizations. Another significant reason for this tendency was people’s widespread aspiration to work in their own businesses. Some Jews favored Jewish environments because they felt more at ease among Yiddish-speaking people. This is why Jews were very much interested in working in Jewish cooperative factories established in Warsaw and Łódź as early as the spring of 1945.\textsuperscript{64}

At the CKŻP’s initiative, Centrala Spółdzielni Wytwórczych i Konsumpcyjnych “Solidarność” — the Jewish Center of Manufacturing and Consuming Cooperatives — “Solidarity”)\textsuperscript{65} was established on November 21, 1946. In spite of the Kielce “exodus,” more and more industrial enterprises were affiliated with Solidarność. Overall, in the years 1945–1949, Jews established 232 work cooperatives. Due to organizational changes, some of the cooperatives were liquidated, while others were placed under the management of general cooperative centers. In 1949, Solidarność included some 166 cooperatives employing 15,546 people,\textsuperscript{66} more than half of whom were Jews,\textsuperscript{67} and most of whom were tailors and shoemakers. In


\textsuperscript{64} Mark, \textit{Do dziejów}, p. 17


\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p. 89.

\textsuperscript{67} Adelson, “W Polsce zwanej,” p. 462.
December 1949, Jewish cooperatives were put under the supervision of the newly established Union of Cooperative Work. However, for the next few years, or even decades, its character was determined by the significant number of Jewish employees. All this changed as a consequence of successive waves of emigration (in 1949–1951, 1956–1959, and 1967–1971). Jewish cooperative activity in Poland, as a separate industrial category, drew to an end, as a result of decisions made at the end of the 1960s during an antisemitic campaign unleashed by the Communist authorities. Only a few cooperatives outlasted the campaign.

Craftsmen went back to work in their own workshops. In the first half of 1946, 988 workshops were established, employing 1,124 people.\(^6^8\) In some cities, local Jewish craftsmen’s associations, which were dissolved between 1949 and 1950, were established.

**Education, Upbringing, and Culture**

In as early as mid-1944, caring for children and youth took on a very important place in almost all Jewish institutions. Orphanages were established for children who had lost their parents. A coordination committee was set up to search for Jewish children who had been under Christian care since the Occupation, very often in monasteries and orphanages. Thousands of children found shelter in institutions maintained by the CKŻP. The Zionists also created their own childcare institutions. PPR members thought it important that the children should not leave the country. Very often, however, they were not able to prevent them from being taken abroad. Usually, this would happen as a result of the activity of Zionist organizations. In addition, representatives of religious circles also took a keen interest in taking Jewish children out of Poland for fear that leaving young people under the influence of atheists and exposed to assimilation would mean their loss to the Jewish national-religious community.\(^6^9\) In 1946, through the efforts of Yitzhak Halevi Herzog, Chief Rabbi of Palestine, 600 orphans and their guardians\(^7^0\) left Poland.

The CKŻP’s education department and Zionist organizations set up a

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\(^{68}\) Grajek, *Po wojnie*, p. 113.

\(^{69}\) Representatives of religious communities established an organizational unit called the Pidjon Jeladim to search for Jewish orphans and attempt to take them over from their Christian wardens; Adelson, “W Polsce zwanej,” p. 446.

network of schools for Jewish children.\textsuperscript{71} In CKŻP institutions, the classes were conducted in Yiddish. Insofar as possible, the Zionists tried to teach in Hebrew\textsuperscript{72} with only some classes held in Polish.\textsuperscript{73} Gradually, however, children would naturally switch to Polish for everyday communication among themselves. By August 1, 1946, 3,300 children attended the 36 CKŻP schools. As a result of the “exodus” triggered by the Kielce Pogrom, the number of schools decreased to 29, and the number of pupils to 2,500. However, this situation began to change after a few months, since the parents felt that children would be more at ease in these institutions than in other schools. Consequently, at the turn of 1948/1949, some 3,000 children attended the CKŻP schools. As a practical consideration, schools with fewer than 30 pupils were closed. At the same time, negotiations were conducted about nationalizing the remaining institutions, and this took place at the beginning of the 1949/1950 school year. In 1950, owing to the emigration of families who had sent their children to Jewish schools and budgetary cuts, the number of the CKŻP schools was reduced from 18 to 9, and then to 7, in the years that followed.\textsuperscript{74}

In as early as 1945, actors who had been former German concentration camp inmates started establishing theater ensembles. They traveled in small groups from one Jewish population center to another, presenting a repertoire that could be performed in almost any conditions. With great emotion, people heard poetry, prose, and Yiddish songs. The artists, strengthened by repatriates from the Soviet Union, established the Union of Journalists, Actors, and Jewish Artists.\textsuperscript{75} After her return from the Soviet Union, Ida Kamińska became the Union’s chairwoman.

In 1946, artists, painters, and sculptors resuscitated the Jewish Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts (Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych — ŻTKSP).\textsuperscript{76} Their board strove to obtain funds to

\textsuperscript{72} The Hashomer Hatzair organization achieved the best results with schools using Hebrew as the spoken language.
\textsuperscript{73} Further information about Jewish education can be found in Helena Datner’s article, “Children in the Polish-Jewish Community from 1944 to 1968,” in this volume.
\textsuperscript{74} Berendt, \textit{Życie żydowskie}, p. 216.
\textsuperscript{76} Renata Piątkowska, “Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych,” in Magdalena Ruta, ed., \textit{Nuseh Pojln. Studia z dziejów kultury jidysz w powojennej Polsce}
purchase materials the artists needed for their work. It also endeavored to support young artists financially and fund scholarships for them. Some artists who traveled abroad received financial assistance. Exhibitions of work created before 1944 and after the war were a growing area of activity. The group of artists who were well known before 1939 was shrinking due to emigration. The ŻTKSP eventually ceased to exist, and its tasks were taken over by the Jewish Art and Cultural Society’s Fine Arts Section. Some of the Jewish artworks collected by these organizations eventually wound up at the Jewish Historical Institute, where they are kept to this very day.

Artists who were organizationally active in the Communist movement or sympathizers attempted to establish a representative body to advocate changes in the system then being made in Poland. They founded the Jewish Art and Cultural Society (Żydowskie Towarzystwo Kultury — ŻTK) in November 1947, with full backing of the CKŻP’s PPR Faction (the PZPR team).

The ŻTK Congress that convened in Wrocław in 1949 was a very important turning point in post-war Jewish culture. Several Congress participants made a case for directing Jewish artistic, literary and, generally speaking, artistic activity towards social realism and connecting it with the changes implemented in Poland. The content of the artistic message had to take precedence over form, and form had to be easily understandable to the general public. Above all, the role of the artist was limited to propaganda to justify the authorities’ policies. Whoever would attempt to create art cut off from the social, political or industrial topics recommended by the political authorities would risk being accused of “culturism” — art offering no benefit from a social point of view.

The Communists viewed full integration of the Jews into society as one of the goals of their cultural and social activities. Literary works were translated into Yiddish to make the Jews more familiar with the achievements of Polish culture. There was no support for attempting the opposite — namely, trying to make Polish society familiar with the Polish Jews’ cultural achievements.


78 For more information on this matter, see Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska and Magdalena Ruta’s article, “From Jewish Culture to Culture about Jews,” and Joanna Nalewajko-
The artistic “space” was reserved exclusively for politically oriented art, so it was rather pointless to conduct separate courses on Jewish themes or run a classical dance school. However, the emphasis on creation of politically oriented art produced limited results. Artists devoted considerably more energy to commemorating images of their childhood world and its annihilation.\textsuperscript{79}

From the beginning of 1950 onward, all Jewish institutions, including the cultural ones, were to be financed by the state. The Communists pointed out the positive aspects of the new situation, as they saw it. First of all, they stressed the value of financial stability guaranteed by state sponsorship. Very often, they would refer to the financial insecurity plaguing authors writing in Yiddish before 1939.

The End of Controlled Autonomy

A PZPR decision put an end to the regulated pluralism that ruled “the Jewish street” for the first five years after the war, following directly from the general changes taking place in Poland. Under pressure from the Soviet Union, the Communist Party imposed forced collectivization of agriculture. Efforts were intensified to break up the Catholic Church — the most important competitor to the PZPR in the struggle for the souls in the Polish People’s Republic. Various organizations were either liquidated or merged, and newspapers closed if their program profile was considered harmful or useless in terms of building a socialist system. Spheres of political pluralism, only present to a very limited extent and on a temporary basis until then, were further reduced. The tendency to liquidate and unify very quickly spread to Jewish issues,\textsuperscript{80} and was welcomed by Communists active in Jewish circles. For a very long time, they could hardly reconcile themselves with the activities of Zionists, Bund members, and other political rivals, and only tolerated them because party discipline imposed obedience with regard to PPR leadership tactics. In October 1948, during an advisory session of 80 representatives of the PPR Faction in Jewish organizations, the decision was made to intensify the struggle against Jewish

groups and circles considered bourgeois, reactionary, and nationalist. In his introductory speech, Szymon Zachariasz outlined the principles, which were fully supported by Edward Ochab, a Politburo member of the Central Committee of the Polish Workers’ Party, who called for an ideological offensive against Zionists who discouraged Jews from staying in Poland. However, as Ochab repeatedly emphasized, administrative measures were not the right way to limit, and eventually eliminate, the influence of circles viewed as socially and politically harmful. He recommended carrying out extensive consciousness-raising work among Jews. From his statements, it appeared that the days were numbered for separate Jewish schools and cooperatives. After the creation of the PZPR in December 1948 (not without pressure from Moscow), by merging the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna — PPS) and the PPR, Stalinized policy in Poland was greatly intensified. An ideological offensive targeting “class enemies” was revived. The secretariat of the PZPR Central Committee, and consequently the government, adopted a different unification method for “the Jewish street” than that suggested by Ochab. The decision was made to apply administrative measures probably in view of the growing tendency of Jews to emigrate. The CKŻP’s PZPR team and the PZPR Central Committee differed with regard to the measures that should be taken. The team arrived at the conclusion that leaders of non-Communist organizations should be forced to emigrate, and then their organizations should be liquidated. The PZPR leadership went along with the second part of the proposal, but with regard to emigration, suggested that mass immigration to Israel would be allowed.

The faction within the Bund, which recommended that the party dissolve itself, prevailed. The dissolution took place on January 16, 1949. Only part of the Bund members joined the PZPR. The first national congress of representatives of the Jewish committees took place in February. The Communists were the dominant factor there. The Zionists, with the minority of delegates (61 out of 267 participants), adopted a conciliatory position, aimed at the maximum extension of the legal activity period. They constituted a minority in the newly elected CKŻP and, on April 13, former chairman and Zionist, Adolf Berman, conferred the role of chairman on Grzegorz Smolar,

82 Ibid., pp. 286–287.
83 Ibid., p. 318.
who was a Communist. On August 4, 1949, the secretariat of the PZPR Central Committee passed a motion to liquidate the Polish branches and offices of all foreign Jewish institutions and allow mass immigration to Israel.\(^{84}\) On August 12, Władysław Wolski, Head of the Ministry of Public Administration (MAP), informed the representatives of Jewish religious institutions about the new emigration policy, triggering an avalanche of applications to emigrate.\(^{85}\) Another confirmation of the new policy appeared in a MAP communiqué published in the Polish and Jewish press on September 2 and 4.\(^{86}\) MAP ordered the liquidation of the Keren Kayemet LeIsrael and Keren Hayesod Funds on November 4. The ministry also dispatched a circular to the voivodeship offices, dated December 13, indicating the final deadlines for self-dissolution of Zionist organizations.\(^{87}\) They were to disappear from the Polish political arena by February 1, 1950.

At the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, the reduction and inclusion of Jewish activity in Polish state structures in all areas of public life became a fact. In October 1950, on the Jewish Communists’ initiative, the ŻTK and the CKŻP and their local structures were dissolved and replaced by the Social-Cultural Society for Jews in Poland. It had barely 32 departments (at times 35) and local branches.\(^{88}\) This was a relatively insignificant number considering that, in spite of the emigration, organized Jewish communities still functioned in some 140 localities in 1949. The society was given the opportunity to influence the Jewish educational and care institutions (which had been nationalized by then), the Yiddish press, the State Jewish Theater, and the Jewish Historical Institute. Representatives of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów — TSKŻ) also made their mark in work cooperatives, where Jews were still a significant part of the workforce.\(^{89}\)

By the first half of the 1950s, national-cultural autonomous features were gradually disappearing from the TSKŻ’s work. The authorities exploited the TSKŻ to indoctrinate the Jewish community in the Marxist spirit. However, maintenance of public institutions, in which thousands of Jews

84 Szaynok, Z historią i Moskwą, p. 185.
85 The Jewish Chronicle, no. 4191, August 19, 1949.
86 Dos Naye Lebn, no. 94, September 2, 1949; Rzeczpospolita, no. 243, September 4, 1949.
87 Grabski, Działalność komunistów, p. 326.
88 The small number of TSKŻ branches was due to the shortage of funds earmarked by the state for the maintenance of Jewish institutions and to the lack of alternative ways of subsidizing them.
89 Berendt, Życie żydowskie, pp. 103–107.
could freely use Yiddish and refer to elements of secular classical, national culture, slowed down the breakup of the Jewish community, and played a positive role in preserving its identity. The Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith in Poland (Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego w Polsce — ZRWM) played a similar role with regard to the religious identity of Polish Jews. Thanks to the ZRWM, 20 houses of prayer, where believers could cultivate their Judaism together, maintained their religious function. The traumatic experiences from the German Occupation period or the ordeals experienced in the Soviet Union, combined with manifestations of antisemitism, were the main reasons why the majority of Polish Jews did not see a permanent future for themselves in Poland. Moreover, at the turn of the 1950s, emigration was spurred on by the rapidly progressing adjustment of the political and industrial system in Poland to Soviet patterns — a development not viewed favorably by “the Jewish street.” As a consequence, under the impact of various factors, 180,000 out of 250,000 people registered with the Jewish committees to emigrate between 1944 and 1951. Several thousand others were determined to remain in Poland, some of whom maintained ties with Jewish institutions. In 1955, the number of Jews in Poland was estimated at 72,000–80,000,90 50 percent of whom lived in Lower Silesia, mostly in Wrocław, Wałbrzych, Legnica, and Dzierżoniów. Other large Jewish population centers in Poland during that period were in Łódź, Szczecin, Warsaw, and Kraków.

The scope of the Jewish community’s activity between 1944 and 1949 was exceptional in the annals of the Polish People’s Republic. Many initiatives came from the bottom up. After that, until 1989, there was no such multilateral and rich activity in the areas of social care, culture, education, politics, and industry conducted under the umbrella of Jewish institutions. Emigration of people who had taken an interest in developing a Jewish life before 1989 greatly contributed to the progressive weakening of the community.

After World War II, the kehillot (Jewish religious communities) no longer encompassed all Jews residing in Poland. Before the war, membership in a religious community was in fact obligatory, imposed by the state, formally distinguishing Jews from the rest of Polish society. This was contrary to the religious freedom guaranteed by the constitution of March 1921, but managed to avoid problems with registering birth, getting married, and burial conducted mainly by denominations. As a result all Jews and Poles of Jewish origin, who were either not official converts to a religion other than Judaism or had not declared themselves as nondenominational, had to belong to religious communities. Their function was not strictly religious; they were also a form of national self-government, with a range of activities including charity, social welfare, education, culture, and, to some extent, also politics.

The Second World War had an enormous impact on the Jewish community’s religious life owing to the Holocaust and the post-war transformation of Poland’s political system. After the Holocaust, only 12.7 percent of the 3,300,000-strong pre-war Jewish community survived, and the number of Jews in post-war Poland never exceeded 200,000 or so (reaching a maximum in July 1946). Jews from the most religious circles, who strictly observed Jewish religious principles and were mostly not well assimilated linguistically, had the least chance of surviving the German occupation.

Part of the Jewish community, particularly the Left, opposed the revival

of Jewish religious communities in their pre-war form. The Left could count on support from the Polish authorities, who aimed at separating religion and state, as well as weakening the role of religion in society. The authorities saw no grounds for compulsory membership for any ethnic group in a specific religious union.

The Central Committee of Jews in Poland, established in November 1944 in Lublin, declared “the fulfillment of religious needs of the Jewish population in Poland” as a statutory objective. However, the committee’s domination by secular forces provoked indignation and protests among the Jewish community’s religious sector. As late as 1944, also predominant in the committee was the view that religion is the individual’s private matter and, as such, should be dealt with by a separate organization. Michał Schuldenfrei, an activist in the General Jewish Workers’ Union, known as the Bund, and head of the legal office of the National State Council, presented to Prime Minister Edward Osóbka-Morawski in November 1944 a similar position, emphasizing the need to separate the secular and religious spheres. His proposal viewed the rebuilt Jewish communities as “organs of secular (Jewish) self-government,” in accordance with the Bundist concept of national and cultural autonomy, while separate “religious associations” would be established by the Jews themselves to deal with their religious needs.

Taking all these considerations into account, on February 6, 1945, the Ministry of Public Administration issued “Circular No. 3 on the Temporary Regulation of Religious Affairs of the Jewish Population” to the voivodes. It stated that there were no plans to establish “Israelite Religious Communities” as envisaged by regulations from the Second Polish Republic of 1927 to 1928. However, creation of “Jewish Religious Associations” (Żydowskie Zrzeszenia Religijne) was sanctioned so as to enable free religious practice, in accordance with Article 111 of the March constitution. Clause 8 of the circular ordered the starostowie (district governors) to allow them to use real estate that formerly belonged to “Israelite” religious communities and associations. The Provisional Chief Religious Council (Tymczasowa Naczelna Rada Religijna), consisting of three rabbis appointed by

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the Ministry of Public Administration, was designated as the consultative organ for questions of religion and religious worship. The council had to present their candidates for positions as rabbis and assistant rabbis for ministry approval. Thus, the ministry acquired control of religious life in the local Jewish communities.5

On May 17, 1945, the Office for Denominational Affairs at the Ministry of Public Administration appointed the Representation of All Jewish Religious Associations, headed by Dr. Dawid Kahane, Chief Rabbi of the Polish People’s Army,6 with Rabbi Mojżesz Steinberg as his Deputy.7 The representatives had all the rights and obligations of the Provisional Chief Religious Council.

The Council (consisting of Rabbis Kahane, Steinberg, and Abraham Krawiec of Łódź) and the Organizational Committee of Jewish Religious Associations (Komitet Organizacyjny Żydowskich Zrzeszeń Religijnych) were officially established on November 21, 1945. The Organizational Committee of Secular Activists were from the following parties: Agudat, Mizrachi, and Ichud (including Zionist-Revisionist members). The first and foremost duty of the committee was to prepare the National Convention of Delegates of Religious Associations, which was held in Kraków, in February 1946. In practice, matters of crucial importance were resolved jointly by the Provisional Chief Religious Council and the Organizational Committee. In June 1946, at the request of religious activists, the name Jewish Religious Associations was changed to Jewish Religious Congregations (Żydowskie Kongregacje Wyznaniowe), which was considered more appropriate and rooted in tradition.8

In the post-war period, the Central Committee for Jews in Poland primarily determined the Jewish community’s activities. While the state authorities trusted the committee, the Jewish Religious Congregations lacked

5 Dziennik Urzędowy Ministerstwa Administracji Publicznej, No. 1/1945, April 1, 1945, pp. 21–22.
6 Dawid Kahane (1903–1998), Rabbi and Zionist activist in Lwów, was a member of the Rabbinical Council of Lviv during the occupation, and then in hiding. Following repatriation, he was Chief Rabbi of the Polish People’s Army with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. After leaving Poland in 1949, he became Chief Rabbi of the Israeli Air Force and was Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Argentina in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
7 Mojżesz Steinberg, born in 1901 in Przemysłany near Lviv, was the rabbi of the town of Brody from 1933. After the Germans came, he went into hiding. He became a rabbi in Lwów in July 1944, and in Kraków after the repatriation. He left Poland for the USA in 1947, and died in 1987.
8 Olejnik, Polityka narodowościowa, p. 379; Waszkiewicz, Kongregacja Wyznania, p. 49.
outstanding religious leaders, and the range of their activities was limited by their ambiguous legal status. This resulted from the break in continuity between the congregations and the pre-war kehillot as well as the Office for Denominational Affairs reluctance to resolve the congregations’ legal status. This was due to the state authorities’ unwillingness to satisfy the religious activists’ demands to restore the pre-war Jewish communities’ property. The authorities were unwilling to do this in view of the large-scale material damage inflicted by the Nazis, the greatly decreased number of Jews, and the general state policy to nationalize private property. Except for the few buildings the Jewish religious associations were allowed to use, the property of former religious communities was subject to the “Decree of March 8, 1946, for Abandoned and Post-German Estates.” Consequently, the issue of the property of pre-war kehillot and Jewish religious organizations was left to the public administration’s discretion.

In addition, the press of the religious parties (a few periodicals with very limited circulation) did not affect the Polish-Jewish consciousness as much as the publications of the Jewish committees and secular parties. Sometimes the congregations were utterly disregarded by the committees, which excluded them from important events in the Jewish community.10

The difficulties incurred by the Jewish Religious Associations and the Jewish Religious Congregations in obtaining restitution of pre-war Jewish religious communities’ property via the public administration and the judiciary prompted representatives of the Jewish Right to speak out. Among the parties represented in the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, Ichud raised the issue of the restitution most insistently, not hesitating to criticize the government openly in the party press. Szymon Rogoziński, Ichud activist and lawyer, invoked provisions of the Polish Committee of National Liberation’s manifesto11 and the Provisional Government’s Decree of March

9 See Monika Krawczyk’s article, “The Effect of the Legal Status of Jewish Property in Post-War Poland on Polish-Jewish Relations,” in this volume.

10 For instance, on January 23, 1948, Dos Naye Lebn published a letter by Rabbi Kahane, protesting against the failure of various committees to invite representatives of the religious congregations to Jewish rallies in December 1947, celebrating the UN General Assembly’s decision to divide Palestine.

11 The July manifesto unambiguously stated: “The property robbed by the Germans from individual citizens — farmers, merchants, artisans, institutions, and the Church — will be returned to its rightful owners. Jews, who were brutally exterminated by the occupants, will be guaranteed legal and real equality, as well as the possibility to rebuild their lives.”
2, 1945, for Abandoned Estates. He demanded transferring the ownership rights of pre-war kehillot and Jewish institutions to the Jewish committees and religious associations:

Which population groups were persecuted by the invaders more than the Jews? Who, then, should be allowed to use that real estate, if not Jewish committees or religious associations, which have been established to provide assistance to the Jewish population? Why does the Polish Committee of National Liberation’s Manifesto and the relevant law remain a dead letter in this case? That our government, which established the Jewish committees, enabling them to operate at the most difficult moments by offering them subsidies, especially when foreign assistance was not forthcoming, has little sympathy for this cause of bitterness among the Jewish community is truly incomprehensible. Is it really necessary for the Jewish committees to start building new orphanages, old people’s homes, schools, and kitchens? Surely it is time that the Jewish community, as a whole, receives, through right acts and justice, what other citizens got long ago.

The Ministry of Public Administration promised to take measures to determine the Jewish Religious Congregations’ legal status. In early 1947, the Office for Denominational Affairs commenced work on a relevant bill, but it was made conditional on the Congregations joining the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, so as to create a uniform representative body for all Jews in Poland. However, the negotiations did not go smoothly. The committee had to consider a long list of demands from the Orthodox Jews, who insisted on the practice of kashrut (Jewish dietary laws) in the various committee canteens, keeping their offices closed on Saturdays, teaching religion to the children, and preserving the financial autonomy of the congregations and religious children’s homes. There were ongoing negotiations with the committee from May 1946. The resolution to join the Central Committee of Jews in Poland was ultimately passed at the plenary session of the Orga-

12 Dziennik Ustaw, No. 9/1945, March 22, 1945, the regulation was replaced with the above-mentioned decree of March 8, 1946.
nizational Committee of Jewish Religious Congregations on June 1, 1948.\textsuperscript{15} There were, however, still some protests from ultra-Orthodox Jews, including Rabbi Zew Wawa Morejno of Łódź, among others, who were against joining the “godless organization.”\textsuperscript{16}

At the first General Convention of the Organizational Committee of the Jewish Religious Congregations in Poland, held in Warsaw from August 9–10, 1949, the delegates decided to accept the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith in Poland’s (Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego w Polsce — ZRWM) statute, put forward by the Office for Denominational Affairs. On November 16, 1949, Władysław Wolski, the Minister of Public Administration, “acknowledged” the Convention’s decision to establish a new religious union, since the union was “legally extant.” However, this internal statute was not formally recognized. The ZRWM soon became subject to the amended law on associations, which seemingly ignored the decision of November 16, 1949, to recognize it. In the years that followed (until 1961!), the ZRWM was denied the status of legal entity, and was consequently under strict control of the Office for Denominational Affairs, established in 1950. Nevertheless, certain provisions of the statute of August 5, 1949, constituted the basis for mutual relations between the state authorities (the Ministry of Public Administration and, after 1950, the Office for Denominational Affairs) and the union’s leadership and internal organization.\textsuperscript{17}

The first ZRWM executive committee consisted of Rabbi Dr. Shulim Treystman (Wroclaw) as Chairman;\textsuperscript{18} Eliash Segal (Łódź) as Vice-Chairman;

\textsuperscript{15} Waszkiewicz, Kongregacja Wyznania, pp. 49–53.
\textsuperscript{16} Olejnik, Polityka narodowościowa, p. 380. Zew Wawa Morejno, born in Warsaw in 1916, received his rabbinical diploma from the Das Moshe School in Warsaw. He survived the Holocaust in Lithuania and Estonia, and after the war, served as a rabbi in Łódź. He was elected Chairman of the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith’s Chief Religious Council in 1956, and deposed as a rabbi in the ZRWM towards the end of the same year, a decision he refused to acknowledge. He left for the USA in 1971, where he continued to present himself as the Chief Rabbi of Poland. He died in 2011. August Grabski, “Współczesne życie religijne Żydów w Polsce,” in August Grabski, Maciej Pisarski, and Albert Stankowski, Studia z dziejów i kultury Żydów w Polsce po 1945 roku (Warsaw: Trio, 1997), pp. 187–191.
\textsuperscript{17} Kazimierz Urban, Cmentarze żydowskie, synagogi i domy modlitwy w Polsce w latach 1944–1966 (wybór materiałów) (Krakow: Zakład Wydawniczy ”Nomos,” 2005), pp. 29–30.
\textsuperscript{18} Shulim Treystman, born in 1892 in the town of Żelechów, studied in Vienna and Berlin. He was the Chief Rabbi of Finland from 1927 to 1932, a rabbi in Warsaw, and one of the leading activists of the Mizrachi party. He lived in the USSR throughout the war.
JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE IN POLAND AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

and Aron Prudental (Warsaw) and Julian Blaskowski (Wałbrzych) as Pre-
sidium members; as well Yezayash Drucker (Warsaw) as General Secretary.
According to the statute, the union was allowed to consult the Chief Rabbi
of Israel on strictly religious points after obtaining prior permission from
the Office for Denominational Affairs. Rabbi Kahane did not seek re-elec-
tion to the ZRWM Chair since he was preparing for his departure from
Poland in September 1949.

Religious life in Poland from 1945 to 1949 was financed by subsidies
from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint), which
constituted over 80 percent of the budget, for both the Central Commit-
tee of Jews in Poland and the ZRWM. In 1948, out of the 1,325 million
zlotys allotted by the Joint for aid to Poland, 74 percent was allocated to
the committee, ten percent to Zionist organizations, and only six percent to
religious ones. The remaining ten percent was spent on direct aid, as well as
administrative, organizational, and transport costs.

According to data provided by the Organizational Committee of Jew-
ish Religious Associations to the Central Statistical Office in late 1946,
there were 80 congregations in five districts (with central offices in War-
saw, Łódź, Kraków, Katowice, and Wrocław). In response to a question on
the number of religiously observant, the committee declared: “We consider
all Jews in Poland, numbering approximately 80,000, as members of our
Congregations.”

The congregations ran 38 synagogues (and even more houses of prayer),
three yeshivot (talmudical academies) in Kraków, Szczecin, and Wrocław, 36
elementary religious schools (Talmud Torah schools), 34 day care centers
for children, 51 kosher kitchens and canteens, 17 mikvot (ritual baths), 4
night shelters, and 68 active cemeteries. The Jewish community was served
by 22 rabbis (as well as 3 military rabbis). Eleven congregations failed to
provide information about their activities, and there were also some com-

19 Waszkiewicz, Kongregacja Wyznania, p. 55.
20 Ibid., p. 56.
21 Olejnik, Polityka narodowościowa, p. 369.
22 In 1948, the number of students in 36 such schools was estimated at 1,100, as compared
with 2,942 students in 34 schools under the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, and
1,000 students in 11 Hebrew language schools. See AJYB 1948–1949, p. 399. Altogether,
67 percent of the Jewish children in Poland attended Jewish schools of any type. See
Helena Datner-Śpiewak, “Anfangs-shuln funem Tsentral-Komitet fun Yidn in Poyln
letter from the Organizational Committee, out of 2,500 rabbis who were living in Poland before the war, approximately 100 survived.\(^{23}\)

The Jewish cemeteries, desecrated by the Nazi invaders and later vandalized by the Polish population, posed a considerable problem to the ZRWM. Whereas the authorities generally still respected their inviolability in the 1940s, the situation later deteriorated.\(^{24}\)

During the post-war political struggle in Poland between the Left and the anti-Communist camp, the Jewish religious leaders declared their sympathies for the Left.\(^{25}\) In the face of a wave of antisemitic violence, Jewish organizations unsuccessfully appealed to the Roman Catholic Church to condemn such acts. Rabbi Kahane’s condemnation against the Catholic Church, in a speech he gave at the funeral of the Kielce Pogrom victims, was particularly dramatic:

Another grave is added to a number of tragic graves: the grave of Kielce Jews, who were murdered in the reborn Poland, the grave of people miraculously saved from Nazi hands.... It is not up to us to investigate who organized the atrocious pogrom. But there is one thing I would like to say at this solemn moment. There is one category of people, one class in Poland, who could have prevented this...the clergy, the Catholic Church’s official authorities in Poland.... Priests of the Polish people..., after leaving this place, can you say with a clear conscience, “Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it?”\(^{26}\) What have you done since the regaining of independence to inform or educate the masses poisoned by five years of Nazi venom? Bishops of Poland, where is your pastoral letter on this issue? Are you not acquainted with papal encyclicals that clearly belie all the ritual-murder nonsense? Does

\(^{23}\) Urban, *Cmentarze żydowskie*, p. 33, 163.

\(^{24}\) Since the 1950s, the state authorities decided to use some of the cemeteries for development or to turn them into parks. This practice violated the ”Act of March 17, 1932, on Burying the Dead and Ascertaining the Cause of Death,” which specified that a cemetery could be liquidated only after at least 50 years since the last burial. However, it is worth noting that, according to Judaism, burial grounds remain inviolable forever. For more information on the fate of Jewish cemeteries after the Holocaust, see Eleonora Bergman and Jan Jagielski’s article, ”Traces of Jewish Presence: Synagogues and Cemeteries from 1944 to 1997,” in this volume.

\(^{25}\) See August Grabski’s article, ”Jews and Political Life in Poland from 1944 to 1949,” in this volume.

\(^{26}\) Deuteronomy, 21:7 (King James Bible — translator’s note).
the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” not apply with respect to the Jews?  

Progressive Secularization

According to Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska’s sociological survey, carried out among Jews in spring 1948, 461 out of 817 (56.4 percent) Jews (the highest percentage of respondents) described themselves as non-believers. The other responses were as follows: practicing believers — 56, believers — 121, non-practicing believers — 67, attached to tradition — 38, indifferent — 26, undecided — 2, no response — 41, baptized — 5.

The respondents indicated wartime experiences as among the causes of their loss of faith in God: “Before the war, I used to be a believer; unfortunately, tragic wartime experiences cost me my faith. In this respect, I am actually a Jew by tradition.” Others simply declared their atheism: “Religious upbringing is harmful; it inculcates hatred, pointing out differences that make one person better than another.”

Lack of a declaration of faith in God was not tantamount to complete abandonment or condemnation of religious traditions. As one of the respondents, a 50-year-old craftsman from Łódź, explained his participation in Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement): “I am irreligious, but traditions attract me. They remind me of family reunions and the family I have lost.”

A Warsaw doctor, a cantor’s son, who described himself as an atheist, led services as a cantor, which he saw as a national duty towards Jews who needed communal prayer. An office employee, aged 45, claimed:

I’m not a believer and I don’t practice. Still, I think that the Jewish religion contains a great number of strictly national elements, which — despite my indifference towards religion — I consider beneficial for preserving the Jews’ national identity.

For nonbelievers or culturally assimilated Jews, the last link with Judaism

27 Quotation from Rabbi Kahane’s speech, Opinia, no. 2 (July 25, 1946), p. 7.
29 Ibid., p. 102, 104.
30 Ibid., pp. 76–77.
was frequently their participation in a *Yom Kippur* service. Such people would sometimes ask their acquaintances not to mention they had met in synagogue.\(^{31}\)

As Hurwic-Nowakowska points out, the weakening of a religious element among the post-war Jewish community was caused by dispersion (lack of neighborly contacts) and the disappearance of various centers for religious worship (e.g., those associated with the pre-war *tzadik* [holy man] courts). Life outside Jewish environments and increased contacts with ethnic Poles led many Jews to work on Saturdays and abandon *kashrut*. The number of mixed marriages was also growing. Once Sabbath was no longer religiously observed, Judaic practices associated with other holidays, which would have identified them as Jews in a Christian environment, went the same way, e.g., building a booth for *Sukkoth* (Tabernacles), lighting *Hanukkah* (Festival of Lights) candles, or eating *matzot* (unleavened bread) on *Pesach* (Passover). Another growing phenomenon was holding parties on Christian holidays especially on Easter and Christmas, with Christmas trees for the children in Jewish homes.\(^{32}\) A considerable number of Jews no longer knew when particular Jewish feast days should be celebrated.\(^{33}\)

Hurwic-Nowakowska’s observations suggest that the traditional Orthodox model of Judaism, only practiced by a small group of mostly elderly people, was already disappearing in Poland in the late 1940s.\(^{34}\) As she wrote:

> The group of Orthodox Jews in contemporary Poland [1948] is dying out; they are the last of the Mohicans of Jewish traditionalism. In fact, they are fully aware that their role is coming to an end. What I describe as their “ghetto attitude” is very interesting.\(^{35}\)

The failure to uphold tradition engendered a feeling of regret and bitterness among Orthodox Jews. Among them, a religious Jewish tailor from Dzierżoniów expressed his opinion about this:

> Terrible times have come: People don’t believe in God, nothing is sacred

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\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 76.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., pp. 104–105, 112.
\(^{33}\) Ibid., pp. 113–114.
\(^{34}\) Ibid., p. 107.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 108.
to them, they eat *treyf* (non-kosher) and they work on Sabbath. Their forefathers must be turning in their graves. At least, those who fast on *Yom Kippur* and say a prayer for the dead are still Jews.  

In the late 1940s, there were mixed marriages not only among Jews dispersed in major cities, but even in tightly knit Jewish communities in the small towns of Lower Silesia. As the tailor from Dzierżoniów (see above) lamented:

> In the old days, would you find a Jewish boy going out with a *shikse* [a non-Jewish girl] or a Jewish girl going out with a gentile? This was only done by a rotten apple who brought dishonor to the family. And today..., take a walk around the town and see how many young Jewish men are out strolling with blondes.  

The number of synagogue marriages was falling, many newborn boys were not circumcised, and an increasing number of Jews Polonized their first names and family names. As a rule, this can be put down to post-Holocaust trauma and a feeling of insecurity. Another important reason for this situation was the contrast between the legal equality of Jews in terms of their access to government offices and posts that had been unavailable to them before the war, and their lack of social acceptance or, in other words, the still high levels of antisemitism in Poland.

The process of assimilation affected all social groups: the intelligentsia as well as workers and artisans. However, it was less in working class circles. The large number of Polish Jews who completely broke off contact with the Jewish community occurred in parallel to secularization and ethnic assimilation. In 1947, the number of such new marranos (Jews who concealed their identity) was estimated at 10,000, but there might have been considerably more.

Despite the secularization processes described above, various religious

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36 Ibid., p. 108.
37 Ibid., p. 109, 115.
38 Only about 12 years earlier, the fact that Wiktor Alter, the leader of the Bund, had refused to circumcise his son became the subject of a heated public debate provoked by religious circles when he was elected to serve on the Warsaw *kehilla* (community) Council.
practices were still widespread. For instance, 2,544 circumcisions and 1,896 religious weddings took place in Poland in 1948.41

The Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith in the Stalinist Period

According to data from 1949, there were 62 Jewish congregations, 68 synagogues (not counting smaller houses of prayer), 17 mikvot, and 42 Talmud Torah schools with 984 students at that time. They were served by 13 rabbis, four mohelim (those who carry out circumcisions) and 30 shokhetim (ritual slaughterers).42 However, after 1949, the number of congregations began to decrease rapidly, mainly due to another wave of emigration, including leading religious activists and almost all the country’s rabbis.

The progressive Stalinization of life in Poland resulted, among other things, in the state authorities’ decision to put an end to the Joint’s activities on January 1, 1950, cutting off the ZRWM from its main source of funding. The Joint’s remaining resources were put into a bank account, which could only be used by the ZRWM with permission from the Office for Denominational Affairs.43

The ZRWM was also attacked by the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów — TSKŻ) as a breeding ground not only for clericalism, but also Zionism, and “profiteering elements.” The latter referred to representatives of private enterprise in the ZRWM (working in their own shops and stores enabled them to observe the Sabbath). These attacks were particularly vehement since, until 1956, the association did not see any need to celebrate Jewish feast days (Hanukkah, Purim, and Pesach), even in a secular form, as practiced by various left-wing Jewish organizations in the West.44

42 Urban, Cmentarze żydowskie, p. 196.
43 Ibid., p. 348.
44 The above feast days were celebrated (in the form of national and historical holidays), for instance, in American schools run by Jewish Communists. Not celebrating Jewish feast days by Jewish schools in People’s Poland of the early 1950s can also be explained by the general tendency against religious tradition in educational institutions.
The ZRWM declared its full support for the contemporary political reality. A resolution at a special ZRWM congress on September 23, 1951, couched in a characteristic language of the times, stated:

If we do not want to repeat the experience of unemployment and poverty, discrimination, pogroms, concentration camps, and mass annihilation, we must resolutely stand arm-in-arm with those fighting for the new social order, for a world without exploiters, for social justice, for socialism.... Long live People’s Poland and President Bolesław Bierut. Long live the Polish People’s Army led by Marshal Konstanty Rokosowski. Long live the peace camp headed by the heroic peoples of the Soviet Union. Long live the heroic Red Army led by Generalissimo Joseph Stalin.45

Moreover, ZRWM representatives joined in condemnations of the arms race in the West and the remilitarization of the Federal Republic of Germany;46 and appealed to their coreligionists in other countries to act in the same spirit.47

The Polish authorities subjected the ZRWM to close scrutiny, especially between 1952 and 1956, when the organization was, in fact, managed by appointed administrators, described in correspondence with the Office for Denominational Affairs as the “Presidium.” This body consisted of the Acting Chairman Abraham Bankier from Kraków, the treasurer Hersz Jabłko from Łódź, and Rabbi Ber Percowicz from Warsaw.48

At the same time, however, as Waszkiewicz observes, in the first half of the 1950s, the Office for Denominational Affairs demonstrated a “decidedly favorable” attitude to the needs of Jewish congregations, such as requests for the allocation of wheat to produce matzoth, the import of liturgical objects and prayer books, and printing religious diaries in Poland. In 1956,
the Office accepted a request to organize a course in ritual slaughter for *shokhetim* from all over Poland.\textsuperscript{49}

In 1953, according to union estimates, there were 8,100\textsuperscript{50} members of 23 congregations (at the time, the total number of Jews in Poland was estimated at over 70,000\textsuperscript{51}). The largest communities of the faithful existed in Łódź — 3,000, Wałbrzych — 1,500, Szczecin — 1,000, Wrocław — 500, and Legnica — 260. In Warsaw, the local congregation had only 150 members.\textsuperscript{52} The ZRWM employed 158 staff. The union had 14 synagogues, 19 houses of prayer, and 22 residential buildings. There were only two active rabbis.\textsuperscript{53} Union membership was less than the TSKŻ’s, which had 11,640 members in 1954.\textsuperscript{54}

Although the emigration waves of the late 1940s radically reduced the number of the most devoutly religious Jews, in the 1950s, many Jewish community members still demonstrated their attachment to various religious practices. This was evidenced by the continuing interest of some Jews in access to kosher meat and the observance of *Rosh Hashanah* (the Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur*. In Szczecin, in 1953, when the number of Jews in the entire Szczecin voivodeship was about 2,200, a shop selling kosher food had 750 registered customers (including whole families). In 1955, an estimated 4,000 customers were buying kosher food in Wrocław, when the city’s total Jewish community was about 8,000. In 1952, in Kraków, about 800 out of approximately 2,000 Jews in the city collected *matzoth* before

\textsuperscript{49} Waszkiewicz, *Kongregacja wyznania*, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{50} According to ZRWM statutes, only adults (or people who had come of age) could become members.
\textsuperscript{51} Stankowski, “Nowe spojrzenie na statystyki,” p. 120.
\textsuperscript{52} In Warsaw, one of the largest Jewish population centers in Poland, secularization and concealment of identity were among the highest. For instance, although there were approximately 5,000 Jewish inhabitants in the city in the mid-1950s, fewer than 100 attended the *Rosh Hashanah* service in 1955. *AJYB* 1956, p. 436. See also Szymon Rudnicki and Marcus Silber, eds., *Stosunki polsko-izraelskie (1945–1967). Wybór dokumentów* (Warsaw: Naczelnia Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych, Archiwum Państwowe Izraela, 2009), pp. 348–356.
\textsuperscript{53} The decrease in the number of congregations was primarily due to the Office for Denominational Affairs policy aimed at eliminating the smaller congregations, explained as the need to “rationalize” the ZRWM’s financial management; Urban, *Cmentarze żydowskie*, p. 34, 37, 39, 358.
\textsuperscript{54} “A naye dergraykhung in der kultur gezelschaflekher arbet tswishn der yidisher bafelkerung,” *Folks-Shtime*, April 7, 1954, p. 3.
Pesach. Only 80 people, however, made regular financial contributions to the local congregation.  

Despite agitation by Communist activists in the TSKŻ to work during the High Holidays in 1951, in 12 Łódź enterprises employing Jewish workers, 308 out of 935 Jews did not come to work on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In Szczecin, of seven enterprises, 102 out of 270 Jewish employees were absent on these holidays in 1953. They all risked punishment for breaking work regulations.

The Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith from 1956 to 1968

After October 1956, a new wave of immigration to Israel began. At the same time, new repatriates from the USSR began arriving in Poland. Over 18,700 Jews, approximately 13,000 of whom soon emigrated from Poland to capitalist countries, were repatriated between 1955 and 1959. Altogether, 51,000 Jews left Poland between 1955 and 1960, declaring Israel as their destination. In 1964, the Jewish community in Poland was estimated at 31,000 Jews plus 5,000 marranos.

Thanks to the “post-October [1956] political thaw,” the Joint was able to resume activities in Poland with the Polish authorities’ consent in 1957. Assistance for the ZRWM also came from a Geneva-based Jewish organization, La Societé de Secours et d’Entre-Aide. The total assistance provided by the Joint to Polish Jews between 1958 and 1965 amounted to approximately five million dollars. In the late 1950s, the Joint’s subsidy to the ZRWM was between 6,000 and 8,800 dollars a month. On the Joint’s initiative, the Central Jewish Commission for Social Assistance (Centralna Żydowska Komisja Pomocy Społecznej) was established, including both ZRWM and TSKŻ representatives. The commission’s main objective was to provide aid for repatriates. In late 1958, thanks to financial support from the Joint,

55 Berendt, Życie żydowskie, p. 126. Nevertheless, the above number of Jews buying kosher meat did not correspond to the number of people who actually observed kashrut, which was primarily practiced by the elderly. Izaak Gross, a shokhet from Łódź, wrote in 1955: “Jews [in Łódź] eating kosher are mostly the elderly, who are supported by their children who work in Warsaw,” AAN, Urząd ds. Wyznań, 22/454, p. 6.
56 Berendt, Życie żydowskie, p. 127.
59 Urban, Cmentarze żydowskie, p. 349.
there were 15 kosher canteens in Poland, providing meals for 2,000 people, 90 percent of whom were repatriates. In mid-1960, the Joint provided assistance to 15,000 Jews in Poland. By mid-1965, the number of recipients decreased to 11,000.

In 1964, the structure of ZRWM expenditure was as follows: 68–76 percent for charity, 18 percent for administrative purposes, and 5–14 percent for needs related to religious worship, partly confirming the charges — made by both the state authorities and Jewish Communists — that ZRWM activities went beyond the strictly religious domain.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs also raised objections about contact between the ZRWM and Israeli diplomats:

Based on the available materials, it has been concluded that the [Religious] Union of Mosaic Faith and its local counterpart, Jewish Religious Congregations, do not play the role they should according to their statute and obligations, and engage in political activities harmful to People’s Poland, inspired by employees at the Israeli Diplomatic Mission, among others. The Israeli Diplomatic Mission was found to have considerable influence on the Joint’s funding to the Union of Mosaic Faith, and decreases or increases the Joint’s subsidies for alleged religious or charitable purposes, depending on political needs and other objectives. Some employees at the Israeli Diplomatic Mission are regular Israeli intelligence agents, who operate a spy network among the Union of Mosaic Faith members and executive committees, through whom they implement Israel’s political line and collect political and social information. From this data, it appears that the number of religiously observant Jews...is small. The Union of Mosaic Faith has few community activists; rather, their members join the union exclusively for the sake of material gain, which they receive either in the form of various allowances, limited grants, or free lunches.

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60 AJYB 1960, vol. 61, pp. 292–293.
63 The Joint was an organization of American, and not Israeli, Jews.
The ZRWM's financial audit, conducted in 1966 by a commission including a representative from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, confirmed an imbalance between contributions from the ZRWM members and the assistance they received from the congregations:

The ZRWM revenue structure shows that donations from the members are minimal. In practice, this means they do not provide funding for the religious union's needs and for religious worship, but on the contrary — as some items of expenditure suggest — they benefit a great deal from religious union funding.65

In April 1961, after the death of Chief Rabbi Ber Percowicz (1873–1961), the Office for Denominational Affairs appointed Uszer Zibes from Wrocław as the Chief Rabbi of People's Poland.66 The authorities considered him loyal; and he was also given a positive testimonial by the USSR authorities. In the period under discussion, Aleksander Libo, a doctor from Łódź, was the ZRWM Chairman and after his emigration from Poland in 1958, Izaak Frenkel, an engineer and former Vice-Chairman, replaced him.67

In late 1963, there were 20 local congregations (Bielsko-Biała, Bytom, Częstochowa, Dzierżoniów, Gdańsk, Gliwice, Katowice, Kraków, Legnica, Lublin, Łódź, Sosnowiec, Szczecin, Świdnica, Tarnów, Wałbrzych, Włocławek, Wrocław, Zgorzelec, and Żary) and one in Warsaw associated with the union's head office. There were 27 active synagogues and houses of prayer. By then, Uszer Zibes was the only ZRWM rabbi. As regards ritual slaughter, it was carried out by eight shokhetim. The congregations took care of 53 cemeteries. The number of community members was estimated at approximately 6,000 (1,300 in the Katowice voivodeship, 2,260 in the Wrocław voivodeship, 1,020 in the Kraków voivodeship, 1,020 in the Kraków voivodeship, 480 in the Łódź

65 AAN, Urząd ds. Wyznań, 75/32, pp. 258–265, Informacja w sprawie kontroli przeprowadzonej w ZRWM w PRL (marzec 1966) (Report on the Audit of the ZRWM in People's Poland [March 1966]).
66 Uszer Zibes, born in 1912 in the city of Równe (Rivne), received semikhah (rabbinical ordination) in the Beyt Josef Yeshiva in Pińsk in 1935. He was Assistant Rabbi and shokhet in Równe from 1935 to 1941; from 1941 to 1945, he served in the Red Army in auxiliary units; worked as a rabbi in Równe from 1946 to 1954; and after repatriation, was a shokhet and rabbi in Wrocław. He died in the United States in 1992.
67 Izaak Frenkel, born in 1915 in Łódź, was a textile engineer. He was in the Łódź Ghetto during the Holocaust. He was ZRWM Vice-Chairman from 1956, Chairman from 1958 to 1966 and 1969 to 1973, and, after 1968, was a secret collaborator with the Security Service.
voivodeship, 440 in the Szczecin voivodeship, 220 in the Warsaw voivodeship, 160 in the Zielona Góra voivodeship, and 120 in the Lublin voivodeship). Religious objects were imported from Israel with permission from the Office for Denominational Affairs. The union derived considerable income from certifying the kosher status of export goods — e.g., slivovitz (a distilled beverage) and stuffed carp — produced by state enterprises. Since the early 1950s, a small, pocket-sized Kalendarz Żydowski (Jewish calendar), in several thousand copies, has been published.68

In 1959, Jewish religion was taught in 17 localities. In 1961, the Talmud Torah schools had 600 pupils. However, the number of institutions providing religious instruction systematically decreased. By 1966, there were Talmud Torah schools in only three localities. A diminished interest in religion among Jewish youth was observed throughout the 1960s.69 The ZRWM’s activities for young people could not compete with the youth clubs run by the TSKŻ.

In view of the extension of its charitable and social activities after 1956 and aid from Western organizations, especially the Joint, the Office for Denominational Affairs approved the ZRWM’s internal statute, and decided to create some formal basis for inspecting it. On June 28, 1961 (12 years after the ZRWM was established), the Office for Denominational Affairs registered the union. The ZRWM as a legal entity could make claims for restitution of the property the Jewish Religious Congregations had been allowed to use or administer by the Liquidation Offices. However, the Union’s registration did not lead to the restitution of the property of pre-war kehillot, but at least the union was no longer obliged to pay rent for the rooms used by congregations for religious worship.70

The ZRWM remained helpless in the face of the growing vandalism at Jewish cemeteries. The act on cemeteries and burying the dead, passed by the Sejm (the Polish parliament) on January 31, 1959, allowed for their liquidation 40 years after the date of the last burial.71 Although such closures could only be carried out after consultation with the appropriate religious associations, in practice the authorities arbitrarily liquidated cemeteries. In June 1966, representatives of eight influential Jewish organizations in the USA submitted a memorandum on the preservation of Jewish cemeteries

68 Urban, Cmentarze żydowskie, pp. 40–41.
70 Waskiewicz, Kongregacja wyznania, p. 131.
71 Dziennik Ustaw, no. 11 (1959), item 62.
in Poland to the Polish Embassy in Washington. From the end of the war until the early 1970s, Rabbi Zew Wawa Morejno was very active in efforts to protect the inviolability of Jewish burial grounds and sent numerous letters regarding this issue to the public administration.

In March 1966, elections were held for congregation leaders and delegates to the Convention of Congregations. The Office for Denominational Affairs required the convention to adopt a new statute and appoint a new leadership. The elections were fully controlled by the Office for Denominational Affairs, which approved delegates to the convention and future members of the union’s central executive committee. The convention was held on November 20, 1966, with the participation of 32 delegates from the congregations, and Serafin Kiryłowicz, Head of the Department of Non-Roman-Catholic Denominations, represented the Office for Denominational Affairs. At the convention, the delegates unanimously accepted the draft of the new statute. The most important statutory changes were related to increased control by the central executive committee over local congregations and supervision of the ZRWM by the Office for Denominational Affairs. According to the new statute of 1966, the “forms and scope of religious, charitable, and economic activities of the Congregations had to be decided in consultation with the state supervisory body,” i.e., with the Office for Denominational Affairs (Art. 32.2). Thus, unlimited intervention by the Office for Denominational Affairs in the ZRWM management acquired full legal sanction. Such intervention was invariably related to union administration, including property and personal issues, rather than to religious life itself in the narrow sense of the term. The new statute was approved by the Office for Denominational Affairs on December 28, 1966, and remained in effect until 1988.

The union’s executive committee, elected in 1966, consisted of Chaim Rotner as Chairman (from Katowice, born in 1909, and an accountant by profession); Adam Brandys as Secretary (from Sosnowiec, born in 1911); and, as members, Izaak Frenkel (from Warsaw, born in 1915), Maciej Jakubowicz (from Kraków, born in 1911), Jakub Aszkenazy (from Wrocław,
born in 1910), Dawid Goetz (from Wrocław, born in 1894), and Henryk Kind (from Łódź, born in 1896).77

In late 1966, the ZRWM had 5,500 members in 19 congregations (including the one in Warsaw); 11 synagogues and 19 houses of prayer; and also took care of 67 cemeteries. The ZRWM managed 18 kosher canteens, and 16 kosher meat outlets. The Union employed 30 people and had an annual budget of 11 million złotys, most of which invariably consisted of subsidies mainly from the Joint.78

After Uszer Zibes left for the USA in 1966, there was no longer a rabbi or a mohel in Poland. Although there were still a few shokhetim, seven Israeli shokhetim had to come to Poland to prepare kosher beef for export to Israel in June 1966.79

In the 1960s, competition between the TSKŻ and the ZRWM continued. As Lejb Domb,80 Chairman of the TSKŻ, claimed:

The Congregation of Jewish Mosaic Faith has been a contemptible creation of the bourgeois Jewish religious community in Poland since 1949. It is a nationalist and Zionist organization. The congregation’s statute goes beyond the purely religious domain, allowing it to engage in charitable, social, cultural, and other types of activity. In a word, the organization is competitive with the TSKŻ. The congregation cooperates with the Israeli Embassy. The Israeli ambassador and embassy employees, who travel all over the country, visit the congregation in Warsaw and provincial Congregations. ...The Joint’s funding for the congregation is not an act of altruism either. Who gives money for nothing?

Running canteens offering dirt-cheap dinners, for example in Wrocław, enabled the congregation to attract a considerable number of students, Jews, but not only Jews; this considerably complicates TSKŻ

77 AAN, Urząd ds. Wyznań, 75/32, p. 534.
80 Lejb Domb (alias Leopold Trepper), 1904–1982, was a Communist activist. During the Second World War, he was head of the Soviet intelligence network in the West, known as the “Red Orchestra.” He was TSKŻ chairman from 1962, and published his memoirs, Le Grand Jeu, in 1975 (Paris: Albin Michel). After the events of March 1968, he began making plans to leave Poland, and arrived in Israel as a new immigrant in 1974.
activities since some TSKŻ members also use this kind of assistance. On various feast days, which are no less numerous than Catholic ones, the Israeli Embassy distributes all kinds of gifts, bulletins, and the like. Prayer books are imported by the embassy. They do not only contain prayers, but also present pro-Israeli propaganda.

Lejb Domb called for:

Changing the congregation’s statute so as to reduce it to a purely religious organization, which means [organizing] prayers in the synagogue, baking ritual matzoth, [providing] kosher meat, and [maintaining] the Jewish cemetery; and preventing the Congregation [from carrying out] charitable activities in the same way as the Catholic Church was not allowed to supervise the Caritas [a charitable organization with a long tradition connected with the Catholic Church — authors’ note].

Domb’s highly critical attitude towards the ZRWM was representative of the TSKŻ leadership. The TSKŻ central executive committee objected to the closing of TSKŻ clubs on Jewish religious holidays; they were against Purim and Hanukkah celebrations organized jointly by TSKŻ branches and local religious congregations, since this would have been incompatible with their secular character; and they opposed the presence of religious activists in the executive committees of the TSKŻ branches.

The Arab-Israeli war in June 1967 and the subsequent events in March 1968 prompted another mass emigration of Jews. The ban imposed by the state authorities on the activities of the Joint and La Societé de Secours

81 AIPN, 00231/229, vol. 28, Notatka z posiedzenia Komisji Narodowościowej przy KC PZPR z 18 III 1965 (Memo from the Session of the Commission for National Minorities at the PZPR Central Committee on March 18, 1965).

et d'Entre Aide in Poland cut the union off from its principal sources of funding. ZRWM's continued functioning became highly uncertain.

The Climax of the Crisis

In the 1970s, the ZRWM reported a membership of 2,000 to the Central Statistical Office. This meant a decrease by two-thirds, compared to the mid-1960s. In fact, even the figure of 2,000 was overstated. According to a report submitted to the Office for Denominational Affairs, in 1974, there were 16 congregations and 24 synagogues and houses of prayer; the union had 11 employees responsible for religious life (two cantors, two shokhetim, and seven shamosim [beadles]); the congregations had 1,319 members (Wrocław voivodeship — 318, Katowice voivodeship — 284, Łódź voivodeship — 242, Kraków voivodeship — 183, Warsaw and Warsaw voivodeship — 134, Szczecin voivodeship — 86, Zielona Góra voivodeship — 25, Lublin voivodeship — 22, Gdańsk voivodeship — 21, and Bydgoszcz voivodeship — 4). They took care of 78 active cemeteries (in practice, there were only a few more cemeteries in actual use than the number of congregations).

The rapid decrease in the number of observant Jews was not only a consequence of the post-1968 emigration wave, but also because some people, who had hitherto considered themselves Jewish, broke off contact with the Jewish community. The loss of the majority of ZRWM members was all the more painful since most of those remaining were elderly, with considerably fewer middle-aged members and hardly any young people. In 1978, about 80 percent of the 1,884 ZRWM members were male, and around 80 percent of the members were retired. The average age of the members was estimated at 67, with only five under the age of 40!

In 1978, the ZRWM employed 12 people in posts carrying the responsibility for religious life (two cantors, two shokhetim and eight shamosim), but the total number of employees was 71, including administration and kitchen staff, as well as caretakers. The union continued to publish 600 copies of the pocket-sized Kalendarz Żydowski for the religiously observant.

Ritual slaughter was carried out in Warsaw, Wrocław, Łódź, and Kraków. In practice, owing to age structure and dispersion of the religiously observant, as well as progressive secularization, only a minority of union members actively participated in religious life. In 1978, a total of 475 people attended a Seder (Passover service and festive meal) in all the congregations.85

Throughout the 1970s, it was generally believed that Jewish religious life in Poland would cease after the older Jews passed away. The unfavorable age structure also persisted in the two decades that followed. In the mid-1980s, the average age in the Kraków congregation was 69, and the two youngest among the 204 members were over 30. Before 1989, it was difficult to find a religious Jew under 50 in Poland.86 As recently as the early 1990s, when clear harbingers of revival began to appear, over 85 percent of Polish Jews were over 60 years old.87

After Chaim Rotner resigned his position as chairman of the union in July 1969, he was succeeded by Izaak Frenkel. After Frenkel’s emigration to Israel in 1973, he was replaced by activist Mozes Finkelstein from Wrocław, who owned a car repair workshop. According to a report submitted to the Office for Denominational Affairs in 1977 by Maciej Jakubowicz, Secretary of the central executive committee and Chairman of the Kraków congregation, the central executive committee had been practically inoperative for ten years, and only two of the nine members, appointed at the convention in 1966, remained: Maciej Jakubowicz and Henryk Kind. Likewise, no elections were held in the congregations. Under these circumstances, the ZRWM executive committee sometimes described themselves as “provisional.”88

The religious life in the 1970s and 1980s was weak at all levels. The union had no rabbi after Usher Zibes emigrated in 1966, and there was no organized religious instruction. Religious practice was limited to services and funerals, and there were no circumcisions, bar mitzvoth (induction of boys into the adult community) or weddings. Hardly anyone, even among

87 AJYB 1994, vol. 94, p. 354. These estimates may be overstated by 12 percent or so. This assumption is based on the age-structure analysis of TSKŻ members in 1995, presented by Andrzej Rykała. The analysis indicates that people over 65 constituted 60 percent of the 2,300 TSKŻ members at the time. Idem, Przemiany sytuacji społeczno-politycznej, pp. 233–235. There are no such data for the Union of Jewish Religious Communities, but their average age was probably higher.
Jews who ate at the kosher canteens run by the congregations, observed kashrut at home. Even celebrations of the most important holidays were poorly attended.

In 1986, the Union included 16 congregations: Bielsko-Biała, Bytom, Częstochowa, Dzierżoniów, Gliwice, Katowice, Kraków, Legnica, Lublin, Łódź, Szczytno, Walbrzych, Warsaw, Wrocław, Zgorzelec, and Zary near Żagań. Some of them had problems in getting a minyan. In Warsaw, the ZRWM central executive committee carried out the role of executive committee for the congregation until 1989, when an Executive Council for the congregation was appointed. However, a separate religious community was permanently revived in Warsaw only in 1997. In 1986, the Union had 11 employees responsible for organizing religious life (two cantors, one shokhet, and eight shamosim).

As a consequence of the unfavorable age structure, ZRWM membership gradually declined. The ZRWM reported 1,560 members in 1988, and the Union of Jewish Religious Communities, ZRWM’s successor, only had 1,220 members in 1992. At that time, the TSKŻ had about 2,300 members; the Association of Jewish War Veterans, 1,300; the Association of Children of the Holocaust, 500; and the Polish Union of Jewish Students, 150. It should be noted that some people belonged to more than one organization. Thus, in the 1980s and 1990s, Union members might have accounted for approximately 20–25 percent of the total Jewish population in the narrow sense (members of Jewish organizations and environments).

89 In the early 1980s, ritual slaughter in Poland was carried out in Warsaw by a shokhet who came expressly for that purpose from Hungary and by Zygmunt Warszawer (1906–1997), the only shokhet in Warsaw.
90 In 1978, the number of those observing the High Holidays in Warsaw fluctuated at around 100, and the prayers were led by a cantor invited from Budapest. At the same time, the number of Jews in Warsaw was estimated at 2,500. AJYB 1980, vol. 80, p. 249; AJYB 1981, vol. 81, p. 246.
91 A quorum of ten Jewish men over 13 years of age required for community services.
93 The Union was renamed in 1992.
95 At present, the TSKŻ membership is around 2,700.
97 The size of the Jewish community in Poland after 1968 is disputed. In the late 1970s (AJYB 1979, vol. 79, p. 256), the number of Jews in Poland was estimated at approximately 6,000 (not counting those who had completely broken contact with the Jewish
The Revival Process

One of the first harbingers of renewed interest in Judaism in Poland was the so-called Jewish Flying University, founded in 1979 in Warsaw. It consisted of a group of educated people of Jewish origin, most of whom were born into assimilated, Communist families after the war. This group, which existed until December 1981, studied diverse aspects of Jewish history, literature, and religion. Among them were several figures who would later become involved in the revival of Jewish religious life in Poland, such as Stanisław Krajewski and Konstanty Gebert. In the 1990s, they assumed various official functions in the Union of Jewish Religious Communities. They gradually grew closer to the ZRWM, which was dominated by the pre-war generation of those raised in religious homes and who often spoke Yiddish among themselves. People born after the war, who took an interest in Judaism in the 1980s, generally learned about the religion from “American books,” outside the ZRWM framework.

The ZRWM revival began in the early 1980s. This process was favored by the positive attitude of the state authorities. One of the signs of their changing attitude towards the Jewish community was their consent to the Joint's return to Poland, in December 1981, which enabled the ZRWM to engage in extensive welfare and charitable activities under the conditions of acute economic crisis. Apart from the pocket-sized liturgical diary, the...
Union began publishing the book-sized *Kalendarz Żydowski* (The Jewish Calendar) in 1983. In 1995/1996, it was renamed the *Almanach Żydowski* (The Jewish Almanac). The authorities also consented to the activities of various groups interested in preserving the material heritage of Polish Jews in general, and Jewish cemeteries in particular. In April 1983, during the ceremonies to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the Nożyk Synagogue, which had been renovated by the authorities, was reopened for use by the religiously observant. Many delegations representing world Jewry attended the opening, where the speakers included Yitzkhak Yedidya Frenkel (1913–1986), Ashkenazi Rabbi of Tel Aviv; Mozes Rosen (1912–1994), Chief Rabbi of Romania; and Bishop Kazimierz Majdański (1916–2008).

In December 1984, the first ZRWM convention since 1966 was held. Mozes Finkelstein remained head of the organization. Mateusz Kos’s *bar mitzvah* in May 1985, the first in Warsaw in 20 years, was one of the symbols of revival. Altogether, between 1985 and 1996 there were three *bar mitzvoth* and two *bat mitzvoth* (induction of girls into Judaism), not counting such celebrations in Poland for children of foreign Jews. There was also a gradual revival in weddings and circumcisions, the latter not only for newborns. In August 1994, circumcisions were carried out in Warsaw on 11 men aged 15–40. At present, in the community of Polish Jews, the practises of circumcision, *bar mitzvah* and Jewish weddings are no longer considered extraordinary, although they are rare on account of the size of the community there.

Various educational initiatives, notably the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, which launched its operations in Poland in 1991, played an important role in the revival of the Jewish community. By 1993, 400 people aged between 15 and 45 were involved in various activities organized by the

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101 For more information on this subject, see Eleonora Bergman and Jan Jagielski’s article, “Traces of Jewish Presence: Synagogues and Cemeteries from 1944 to 1997,” in this volume.
103 Mozes Finkelstein carried out this function until 1991. After him, the Orthodox community was headed successively by Colonel and Assistant Professor Paweł Wildstein (1929–2008) until 1997; and by the engineer Jerzy Kichler (born 1947) until 2002. At present, Piotr Kadlicz (born 1962), a translator from English and Czech by profession, is chairman of the union.
In view of the increasing number of youth and the middle generation in the Jewish community, Western Jews began to modify the nature of the material assistance provided to their Polish coreligionists. As a result of the greater emphasis on education, the Joint’s expenditure on welfare was reduced from 90 percent of the allocated budget in the early 1990s to about 67 percent in 1994–1995.

The Lauder-Morasha School, the first Jewish elementary school since 1968, was opened in 1994. At present, the Lauder-Morasha Schools in Warsaw at 10, Wawelberga Street include: the Lauder-Morasha Nursery School, the Lauder-Morasha Private Elementary School No. 94, and the Lauder-Morasha Middle School No. 22. A total of 240 children aged 3–16 (from the nursery school to the last form in middle school), not all of them of Jewish origin, attend the schools. The children study Jewish tradition and the Hebrew language; they celebrate Jewish feast days and observe kashrut. Helise E. Lieberman, a United States citizen, was the school’s first principal, from 1994 to 2006, and it is now headed by Rabbi Maciej Pawlak. In 1998, the Lauder-Etz Chaim Elementary School was opened in Wrocław at the initiative of the local religious community and with support from the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation. Initially, 15 pupils attended the school, and by now, the number has grown to approximately 90.

After the ZRWM’s efforts to find a candidate for the Rabbinical Seminary in Budapest failed, the Office for Denominational Affairs helped to find an appropriate person. The union has had its own rabbi again since May 1989. Pinchas Menachem Joskowicz, an Israeli, was their rabbi, and he later became the Chief Rabbi of Poland. Rabbi Michael Schudrich, representing the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation in Poland, has been his assistant.

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106 Ibid.
107 In 1993, the Joint provided assistance to 3,000 Jews; ibid., p. 354.
108 The last Jewish school in Warsaw existed until 1949; until the mid-1960s, there was a Talmud Torah school in Warsaw, attended by a dozen or so pupils.
109 Maciej Pawlak was born in 1977 in Szczecin. He studied in the Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary at Yeshiva University in New York from 2002 to 2006.
110 Information provided by the school staff. For more information on Jewish education in Wrocław, see Tamara Włodarczyk and Tomasz Duda, Szkoły żydowskie we Wrocławiu (Wrocław: Fundacja Kultury i Edukacji Żydowskiej GESHER, 2008).
111 Pinchas Menachem Joskowicz, born in Zduńska Wola in 1924, was a Ger Hassid. He was in the Łódź Ghetto and concentration camps during the war, and arrived in Palestine in 1947, where he succeeded as a tutor of orphans in a boarding school, an office worker, and a businessman. He was the Chief Rabbi of Poland until 1999, and then returned to Israel. He died in 2010.
since 1992. Zew Wawa Morejno, who lived in New York and visited Poland regularly in the 1990s, also claimed the title of Chief Rabbi of Poland. Although his conflict with the union attracted media attention, this beligerent, fundamentalist rabbi only enjoyed the support of a very narrow group of Jews in Poland.

The ZRWM raised the idea of reviving the institution of the pre-war kehillah (Jewish religious community) in the late 1980s. This would have restored the primacy of religious circles in the life of the Jewish community, and was criticized by TSKŻ activists. However, the idea of returning to the tradition of the kehillah not only had an ideological meaning, but also a deep material one: It would have made the existing Jewish religious communities heirs to the pre-war kehillot in Poland as well as to the religious communities of German Jews located in Germany before the Second World War and now in the Regained Territories. The question of changing the names of the “congregation” and the ZRWM to the “Jewish Religious Community” and the “Association of Jewish Religious Communities,” respectively, was discussed at the ZRWM convention in early July 1988. Eventually, the ZRWM was renamed the Union of Jewish Religious Communities (Związek Gmin Wyznaniowych Żydowskich — ZGWŻ) in 1992. The process of returning the property of Jewish religious communities to the ZGWŻ followed the “Act on the Relation of the State to Jewish Religious Communities in the Polish Republic” of February 20, 1997. The restitution of property and the associated material benefits is one of the important underlying causes of the changing balance of power between the TSKŻ and the ZGWŻ in favor of the latter, which took place in the Jewish community in recent years.

In the early 1990s, there were two distinct groups among Polish Jews: the older Jews, born before the war, who had experienced the Holocaust;

112 Michael Schudrich was born in 1955 in New York to a family of Polish Jews, and graduated from the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary. He headed the Jewish religious community in Japan from 1983 to 1989, and was the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation’s representative in Poland from 1992 to 1998. In 2000, he returned to Poland as an Orthodox, and not a Conservative, rabbi and became the Rabbi of Warsaw and Łódź. He was elected Chief Rabbi of Poland by the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in 2004.

113 For instance: Ekspres Wieczorny, July 29, 1992; Przegląd Tygodniowy, no. 35, 1992; Gazeta Wyborcza, no. 21, 1993; Sztandar Młodych, no. 81, 1993.


115 For more information on this subject, see Monika Krawczyk’s article, “The Effect of the Legal Status of Jewish Property in Post-War Poland on Polish-Jewish Relations,” in this volume.
and the almost entirely assimilated young Jews and those of the middle generation, who were just beginning to discover their Jewish identity and learn about Judaism. Members of the latter group frequently only found out about their origins as teenagers or even as adults, since their families had concealed this from them, considering it a source of stigma and potential reason for persecution.

The two groups had little in common, and conflicts sometimes arose between them. This came to the surface, for instance, during an argument about electing the ZGWŻ chairman, when two candidates for the position, the engineer Jerzy Kichler (born in 1947) from Wrocław and the businessman Feliks Lipman (1918–2002) from Katowice, confronted each other at the ZGWŻ General Assembly in May 1997. The older delegates objected because Kichler was a non-halakhic Jew (only Jewish on his father’s side), and his conversion had not been Orthodox. The younger delegates accused Lipman of “consolidating the people’s rule” (i.e., introducing Communism). The middle generation were considerably more critical of People’s Poland than the older generation, some of whom actively fought for Communist Poland. The ZGWŻ chairmanship finally went to Kichler, while Lipman became the Deputy Chairman. This broke the domination of the pre-war generation in the ZGWŻ leadership.

Among the 39 delegates (from nine communities) who attended the ZGWŻ General Assembly, there was one woman. Helena Datner from Warsaw was the first female delegate in the history of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities. Until then, the ZGWŻ statute did not give women the right to stand for election, and the General Assembly enacted a change in that regulation. Another radical change was the decision to admit non-halakhic Jews into the union. This was a matter of crucial importance to the younger generation, of whom the vast majority come from mixed families. The admission of non-halakhic Jews and converts to Judaism into religious communities not only halted the erosion of ZGWŻ membership, but actually led to an increase in its size. At present, the largest Jewish religious communities are in Warsaw (over 500 members), Wrocław (about 300), Łódź (about 250), and Kraków (about 160).

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118 This information is based on the ZGWŻ website and Almanach Żydowski. There are other communities in Katowice (150 members), Gdańsk (80 members), Szczecin (60 members).
In a paradox of sorts, on the one hand, religious communities accept all those who have the right to apply for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return (i.e., at least one Jewish grandparent) while, on the other hand, in Orthodox circles, people whose mother is not Jewish are not considered Jews. On the one hand, until October 2010, the Jewish community carried out all religious practices in the form prescribed by Orthodox Judaism; on the other hand, only a minority of the community members have been followers of Orthodox Judaism. This paradox is due to the fact that, since 1989, the Jewish religious community has been continuing in the tradition of pre-war kehillot: Its mission is Jewish self-government, which goes beyond strictly religious activities; and covering social, educational, and cultural aspects. Community members receive social assistance, which is available to Holocaust victims and people in difficult material circumstances. Aid is also given to those awarded medals of the Righteous Among the Nations. It takes various forms: financial or material, as well as legal counselling, medical services, and voluntary assistance. The difference between the pre-war kehillot and the ZGWŻ is voluntary membership in the latter. In the authors’ estimation, fewer than 50 percent of the Union members practice Judaism minimally, participating in major holidays (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Pesach), and approximately ten percent are religiously observant on a regular basis.

The ZGWŻ operation has also been marked by internal conflicts, which have even led to the creation of separate religious unions. Of particular note was the establishment of the Independent Religious Community of Mosaic Faith in the Polish Republic (Niezależna Gmina Wyznania Mojżeszowego w RP) in 2000, headed by Jakub Szadaj (born in 1948, and who served as Chairman of the Jewish Religious Community in Gdańsk in the 1990s and ZGWŻ treasurer) and the Old Testament’s Believers in Poland (Gmina Wyznaniowa Starozakonnych w RP) in 2003, headed by Bolesław Szenicer (born in 1952, and former director of the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw). Both Szenicer and Szadaj accused the ZGWŻ executive committee of numerous members), Bielsko-Biała (50 members), and Legnica (40 members). It is also worth mentioning a fairly sizeable ZGWŻ branch in Poznań with 50 members. The exact ZGWŻ membership is not known since, in recent years, the union has not responded to the survey on religious denominations conducted by the Central Statistical Office. The number of members is estimated at over 1,600. For detailed information on the activities of the Jewish kehillah in Warsaw, see Gmina Wyznaniowa Żydowska w Warszawie. Sprawozdanie 2006–2010 (Warsaw: Gmina Wyznaniowa Żydowska, 2010), p. 238.
misappropriations of funds and gross negligence regarding the preservation of Jewish monuments.\textsuperscript{119} In practice, neither of these organizations developed on a broader scale.

At the beginning of the new millennium, further progress was made in the area of education. From 2001 to 2006, the Kraków publishing house, Pardes, put out the first post-war Jewish translation of the Pentateuch in Polish by a team headed by Rabbi Sacha Pecaric.\textsuperscript{120} The translation is accompanied by the Hebrew text, a selection of rabbinic commentaries, as well as the Hebrew text of Rashi’s commentary and \textit{haftarot}\textsuperscript{121} with the appropriate blessings. The prayer book entitled \textit{Sidur Shaarey Teshuva} (The Gates of Penitence), with Polish translations of the prayers, came out in 2005.\textsuperscript{122} It replaced the \textit{Shaarey Shammaim} (The Gates of Heaven) prayer book by Salomon Spitzer, which had been used until then.\textsuperscript{123} Moreover, Pardes published more than ten Judaic books and three Talmudic treatises — \textit{Berakhot}, \textit{Kidushin}, and \textit{Bava Kama} — in 2010.

In 2004, a Chabad-Lubavitch group, from a Hassidic movement known for missionary activities among Jews, headed by Shalom Ber Stambler (born in 1982) from Israel, settled in Warsaw. They started another Orthodox Jewish center for prayer and instruction on Słomiński Street, in addition to the Nożyk Synagogue, and the ZGWŻ building on Twarda Street in Warsaw. In 2008, the first \textit{smikhot}\textsuperscript{124} were awarded to ten rabbinical students in the Warsaw yeshiva, headed by Stambler. Those were the first rabbinical ordinations in Poland since the late 1940s. The Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, Israel Meir Lau (who was the Chief Rabbi of Israel from 1993 to 2003) attended the ceremony. However, none of the ordained rabbis were Polish. They had

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{120} Sacha Pecaric, born in 1965 in Slovenia, studied in Prague and New York. He managed the Kraków branch of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation from 1997 to 2004; and, at the time of going to print, he is an academic teacher at Stern College, Yeshiva University, New York. He continues to be involved in translation and publishing activities in Poland.
\item \textsuperscript{121} \textit{Haftarah} (conclusion) — a fragment from the books of the Prophets read out on the Sabbath, feast days, and fast days after the \textit{Torah} reading (from the Pentateuch).
\item \textsuperscript{123} Salomon Spitzer, \textit{Modly Izraelitów na dni powszednie i święta, uroczystości i posty oraz obrzędki i ceremonie religijne} (Krakow: S. Spitzer, 1926), p. 628.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Diplomas certifying rabbinical qualification.
\end{itemize}
come to Warsaw from the USA and Israel. So far, Polish candidates for the rabbinical office have preferred to study in the West and, to date, Maciej Pawlak and Mateusz Kos have obtained rabbinical ordination.

In February 2008, the Rabbinical Council of Poland was established in Łódź. The letter of intent regarding this was signed by Yona Metzger, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel. The ZGWŻ Rabbinical Council consisted of Rabbi Michael Schudrich, Assistant Rabbi Simcha Keller, Rabbi Maciej Pawlak, Rabbi Efraim Meisels, Rabbi Boaz Pash, Rabbi Icchak Rapaport, and Rabbi Edgar Gluck. Its functions include the following: taking the most important decisions relating to the Jewish community in Poland; coordinating the activities of Jewish religious communities in Poland; resolving religious disputes; as well as setting standards regarding kashrut, education, and prayers.

The revival of religious life in Poland does not apply to all Jewish religious communities. There is a considerable difference in this respect between Warsaw, Łódź, and Kraków, and the other communities. This is how Mikołaj Rozen (born in 1945), Chairman of the Szczecin community, describes this pessimistic situation:

At the moment there are about 62 members, including those who are taken care of by the community. Treated as members, they are not Jews in a strict sense, but frequently widows of Jews. Apart from the right to vote and be elected, which they are denied by the statute, they are

126 Mateusz Kos, born in 1972, studied at Ohr Somayach Yeshiva in Monsey from 2001 to 2006. He was the director of the Hamburg branch of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation. At the time of going to print, he was living in the United Kingdom and since 2011 he has been chaplain of University Northwestern, England.
127 Simcha Keller (formerly Krzysztof Skowroński) was born in 1963. He served as Cantor and Assistant Rabbi in the Łódź Jewish religious community. He studied in the USA and Israel from 1988 to 1992.
128 Efraim Meisels, an Israeli rabbi, worked in the Warsaw religious Jewish community from 2007 to 2009. He returned to Israel.
129 Rabbi Boaz Pash, Rabbi of Kraków, was born in 1966 in Jerusalem. He worked previously in Portugal, Brazil, Ukraine, and India.
130 Rabbi Yitzkhak Rapaport, Rabbi of Wrocław, was born in 1976. His mother left Poland in 1968 and he was born and grew up in Sweden, but speaks fluent Polish. Before going to Poland in 2006, he taught in Norway.
131 Edgar Gluck, who was born in Hamburg in 1936, lives in New York. He occasionally visits Kraków.
traditionally treated as members because they had once been admitted as members.... In Szczecin there is no rabbi, so there is no spiritual leader. We have serious problems with that. There are fewer and fewer people who know Yiddish; and there are also fewer and fewer people who can lead prayers [in Hebrew]. In my opinion, all this is slowly, slowly dying out. That is what I think; I have a sharp tongue so I can say what I think. So I will say this: There are two sides to everything. If you take young people of Jewish origin and give them the right impulse in the form of knowledge and culture, which would strengthen their sense of Jewish identity, I would guarantee you that 99 percent of them would leave Poland. I know this from my personal experience as a young man in the 1970s, when I gathered about 30 people in a Youth Club at the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland: All of them have since left. It is difficult to work here, because the more you give of yourself, the sooner they will leave. Such is reality.132

Other Jewish Communities

Owing to the fact that only a small number of Polish Jews are interested in Orthodox Judaism, a Jewish Reform community was revived in Poland in the late 1990s as the Beit Warszawa (Warsaw House) Association. In 2000, about 100 religiously observant Jews in Beit Warszawa and over 200 in the Nożyk Synagogue attended the opening prayers for the New Year celebrations in Warsaw.133 The initiators of Beit Warszawa were Jewish emigrants who had returned from the West to Poland. In 2002, Beit Warszawa was registered as the Beit Warszawa Jewish Cultural Association134 and, in 2003, it became a member of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. In the years 2006–2011, Rabbi Burt E. Schuman was employed by the community

134 In general, registering an association requires an application from at least 15 adults, citizens of the Polish Republic or people with permanent-residence permits. However, since 1998, registering a religious union requires an application from at least 100 legally eligible Polish citizens.
on a permanent basis.\textsuperscript{135} As elsewhere in the world, the Reform community is more open to converts than the Orthodox. For instance, there were eight conversions in 2008 and 15 in 2009.\textsuperscript{136}

The ZGWŻ leadership has a reserved attitude to the Beit Warszawa community. The process of registering the Reform Jewish community as a religious union met with strong opposition from the ZGWŻ, which they communicated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration. Aside from doctrinal differences, the ZGWŻ was afraid that the new union might claim a share in the restitution of Jewish property. Nevertheless, in 2009, the ministry entered the Reform community into the register of religious unions under the name of the Union of Progressive Jewish Communities, Beit Polska (Poland House).\textsuperscript{137}

As a result of Beit Polska’s registration, the Jewish community of Warsaw (which is part of the ZGWŻ) took on Rabbi Stas Wojciechowicz in October 2010.\textsuperscript{138} Employing a Reform rabbi was supposed to prove that there was no need for another (Reform) community in Warsaw or another

\textsuperscript{135} Burt Schuman, born in 1948 in the USA to a family of Polish Jews, was formerly the rabbi in Altoona, Pennsylvania.

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Sprawozdanie Zarządu Beit Warszawa przygotowane nawalne zebranie w dniu 6 września 2009 r.} (A report by the executive committee of Beit Warszawa prepared for the general meeting on September 6, 2009). Preparations for a conversion in the ZGWŻ can take several years (in one case, it took as long as eight years), whereas in Beit Warszawa a nine-month course is usually sufficient. The authors do not know the exact number of Orthodox conversions in Poland, but it is approximately 50. Preparations for the first conversions in Poland, since at least the 1960s, were made under the direction of Rabbi Schudrich in the mid-1990s. From 2001 to 2003 alone, four families and four individuals converted to Judaism under Rabbi Schudrich’s guidance. In 2006, one Orthodox newspaper in Israel accused Rabbi Schudrich of having participated in a Beth Din (Jewish court of law), in which member Chaim Druckman, an Israeli rabbi, falsified his own signature on the document of conversion in Warsaw, casting doubt on the validity of the entire conversion process. Despite his signature on the document, Druckman, as a member of the Beth Din, could not have interviewed the candidate for conversion since he was not in Warsaw at the time. The affair complicated the situation of people who had converted to Judaism under Rabbi Schudrich’s guidance and subsequently went to live in Israel. See Jonathan Rosenblum, “A New Conversion Scandal,” \textit{Yated Ne’eman}, May 17, 2006.

\textsuperscript{137} Since 2009, a Reform community has also been active in Kraków. The Beit Kraków congregation is headed by a Russian-Israeli woman, Rabbi Tanya Segal, who worked for Beit Warszawa in the years 2007–2008. Beit Kraków is not part of Beit Polska.

\textsuperscript{138} Stas Wojciechowicz, born in 1977 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, moved to Israel in 1994, and was ordained as a rabbi at Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem in 2006; from 2007 to 2010, he worked as a rabbi in St. Petersburg.
congregation like Beit Polska. Obviously, the role of the minute Reform congregation within the Jewish community of Warsaw in particular, and in the ZGWŻ in general, is very modest. The Orthodox group has the decisive position in religious matters.

On the subject of religious diversity in contemporary Jewish communities in Poland, it is also worth noting a new group practicing Conservative Judaism. To a considerable extent, its emergence was due to the American Conservative Jewish Rabbi Ivan Caine (born in 1918), who was employed by the ZGWŻ as the Rabbi of Wrocław from 2002 to 2003. In 2002, he announced preparations for conversion of a group of 19 people — a process that was completed in September 2003. However, contrary to the original agreement with Rabbi Schudrich, Rabbi Caine decided he would not send his group to appear before the Orthodox Beth Din. On this account, Rabbi Schudrich prevented the converts from using the Warsaw mikvah (ritual immersion bath), so they had to use a private one in Kraków. This issue caused a great deal of controversy within the Jewish community.139

Rabbi Harry Levin (born in 1955) from the USA is Rabbi Caine’s successor as the leader of the small Conservative community. From time to time, he visits this community in Poland from the US. By 2009, a total of 32 conversions to Conservative Judaism took place in Poland and another 35 people were preparing for this.140 People who have converted according to the Conservative rite are not admitted into the ZGWŻ, but their participation in services is accepted. In 2009, steps were taken to register the Akhavat Shalom (Love of Peace) Association of Conservative Jews.

To complete the varied palette of Judaic practices in Poland, mention should be made of the congregation associated with the Messianic Jews’ movement. Located in Koszalin, the Shelakheni (Send Me) Messianic Society has over 100 members. However, in Poland, as elsewhere in the world, Messianic Jews are not recognized as part of the Jewish community. In addition, this group of Messianic Jews is isolated even in a geographical sense, since there are no other Jewish organizations in Koszalin.

Conclusion

After the Holocaust, the Jewish survivors remaining in Poland rapidly succumbed to secularization and national assimilation. The traditional Orthodox model of Judaism had practically disappeared by the late 1940s and was only cultivated among a narrow group of Jews. The decline of religious life in Poland followed the rhythm of consecutive waves of Jewish emigration. In new political circumstances — after losing the property of the pre-war Jewish kehillot — religiously observant Jews in Poland became dependent on financial assistance from their Western brethren, in particular, the Joint. The ZRWM, established in 1949, was also subject to close scrutiny by the state authorities.

In the wake of the great wave of emigration after March 1968, it seemed that Jewish religious life in Poland would peter out with the demise of the old Jews who chose to remain. The ZRWM almost completely lacked young and middle-aged members. In the 1980s, however, the Union began to come back to life. Owing to the gradual influx of younger members into the union, as well as the revival of religious instruction and practices, there are small but enduring, multigenerational religious communities on a strong material footing based on the restitution of Jewish property. Moreover, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, new Jewish religious communities (the Reform and the Conservatives, in particular) began to function outside the ZGWŻ framework. Undoubtedly, Warsaw remains the leading center of Jewish religious life today, which is paradoxical, since in the post-war period, it was the city most afflicted by “marranism,” i.e., the phenomenon of Jews concealing their identity.

Assistance from coreligionists in the West (particularly the Joint and the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation) and the 1989 political transformation, which expanded the scope of religious freedom and ideological pluralism in Polish society, were important forces enabling the revival of religious Jewry in Poland.

The identity of most Polish Jews today is based mainly on the memory of the Holocaust and their ancestors, opposition to antisemitism, and solidarity with Israel, but lacks a solid cultural foundation.

Owing to the disappearance of a secular Jewish culture in Yiddish, religion is becoming an attractive model for Jewish identity to some members of the Jewish community. At the same time, however, the revival of Jewish religious life should be perceived as a process involving only a small minority of organized Polish Jews.
The fate of children offers a better and clearer picture of certain phenomena that are important for the community as a whole. Particularly important after the Holocaust, the number and characteristics of children give indications about the continued existence of the community, providing a measure of the advancement of processes in the community and the internal power of the group. The content of education programs always reveals a great deal about the character of a community. The present study measured changes in various assimilation indices along with educational concepts (not necessarily in systematic, written form). Schools are evaluated in detail. As well as the history of the education system, schools are one of the few institutions that reflect the fate of national minorities. Discussion of the school’s scope and curriculum, and the attitude of the state towards them aptly point to certain significant issues for the minority at a given moment.¹

“Jewish children” as a topic is at the intersection of two research perspectives: one in which social phenomena and processes (which are partly autonomous from the political sphere) are the most important; and the other in which the emphasis is on the role of institutions, organizational forms, and state policies. It is interesting to analyze the interplay between these two spheres in Poland from 1944. The present study seeks to examine the problems faced by Jewish children in the first decades after the Holocaust from both these perspectives.

In the immediate post-war period, members of the Jewish community who survived the war considered care of the children as one of their most urgent tasks. Apart from being a natural act of kindness toward the “most

¹ Each period has particular problems, which are reflected in the history of education. For instance, in the 19th century, it was secularism versus religiousness; in the inter-war period, it was the debate between Yiddish culture and Zionism.
innocent” victims, taking care of children was also crucial for pragmatic reasons. They were the most helpless among the victims, requiring immediate and effective assistance in the material sphere, which was, in a sense, the easiest to deal with; in education; as well as in the psychological and moral sphere, which was the most difficult of all. In the early post-war period, care of the children occupied a prominent place in the agendas of all the political parties. Aside from sentimental and pragmatic issues, there was also another major consideration: the fate of the nation, which depended on the number of children in the community. More than ever before, children became a national asset. For this reason, children who were with Polish families or in convents during the war were of particular concern. Efforts were made to reclaim such children for the Jewish people, and there was significant agreement on this issue among various Jewish groups. This was the need of the moment in the face of the Jewish people’s tragedy, one of the most dramatic chapters of early post-war history for Jewish children, even if not all of them were involved.

Poetry is the most direct and powerful literary expression. Children feature in post-war poetry in several roles. They are not only supposed to bring consolation after a loss, but also act as an “answer to the victims’ pleas for resurrection.” Having children is perceived as a moral imperative that would shatter the enemy’s dreams of annihilating the nation. Jews who saw Jewish children for the first time after the long years of war were deeply moved.

I. The Direct Aftermath of the Holocaust — Demographic Consequences

How many Jewish children survived the Holocaust? For biological reasons, the youngest and the oldest are the least likely to survive under extreme conditions. During the war, this pattern was intensified by the German invaders’ ruthless genocidal policy of first annihilating all the young children and elderly as they were unfit for work. There are no conclusive statistics

3 See, for example, the interview with Paula Goldhar in the Spielberg Archive.
4 The Ringelblum Archive contains shocking material by an anonymous author, who compared the age structure of the Jewish population in the Warsaw Ghetto in early 1942 and in October of the same year. Using the euphemistic expression “the resettlement
on the survival of Jewish children outside the ghettos. As with the adults, some children survived in camps (mostly forced labor centers and concentration camps, with small groups even in Auschwitz and Majdanek), bunkers, dugouts, forests or among the Polish population (including being hidden in convents). The most numerous group of Polish-Jewish survivors, including children, was in the USSR. There are huge gaps in statistical data on the number of Jews who survived in specific places. A large group survived in forced labor camps, but it is not clear how many children were included. There are reliable data on children saved by “Żegota” (codename for the Polish Council to Aid Jews, an underground Polish resistance organization). According to a statement by the four “most active rescuers of Jewish children” — Irena Sendler, Jadwiga Piotrkowska, Izabela Kuchowska, and Wanda Drozdowska-Rogowicz — approximately 500 children were placed in convents, 300 in orphanages of the Central Welfare Council (Rada Główna Opiekuńcza), 200 in the Rev. Boduen Emergency Shelter for Children, and about 1,300 with foster families. However, as they pointed out, the total number of children rescued by “Żegota” was, in fact, greater. A large number of children were also saved by Poles without the assistance of such organizations. The total number of Jewish children rescued under the German occupation is usually estimated at 5,000, the number reported as living in Poland in the summer of 1945, but a smaller figure has also been put forward. This does not include “concealed” children (the term appears in the sources of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce — CKŻP), i.e., those saved by Polish families, some ratio,” he demonstrated that for children under nine years of age and for people over 70, the ratio was 99 percent, while, for the group aged between 30 and 39, it was the lowest at 77 percent. At the beginning of 1942, there were over 25,000 children under nine years of age in the ghetto, while by October of that year, there were only 243. “Struktura ludności żydowskiej pozostającej w Warszawie (wedle stanu z końca 1942),” BŻIH, no. 37 (1961), p. 105.

5 Ida Merżan reported about seven or eight children who were discovered at Majdanek and became the first charges of the Jewish committee in Lublin. The radio program “Nasza Praca” (Our Work), April 15, 1946; AŻIH, CKŻP, WO, file no. 839.

6 According to an undated report by the Department for the Care of Children at the CKŻP (probably from 1946), 1,000 children were found in Germany. AŻIH, WO, file no. 640, p. 48.


8 For instance, at a meeting of the CKŻP Presidium on June 9, 1945, the number of saved children was estimated at 3,700. AŻIH, CKŻP Prezydium, file no. 303/1.
whom only found out about their origin when they reached adulthood, or children who survived in the camps in Germany. It can be assumed that survival in camps was more likely for boys who were fit for work. It is also reasonable to assume that most of those rescued on the Aryan side were girls, but the exact proportion of girls is more difficult to estimate if boys in partisan units and very young children, such as infants left with Polish families (the child’s sex was largely immaterial in such cases), are taken into account. There are data confirming the predominance of girls among children rescued in Poland. Maria Hochberg-Mariańska made the interesting observation that children from small towns or villages were the most likely to survive on their own (as cowherds, household help or child carers) and were found to be in the best physical and mental condition. They were more resilient physically and psychologically, spoke the local dialect, knew Polish customs by observation, and were acquainted with the surrounding area.

The demographic structure of Jews in Łódź in 1945 is typically presented as a model of the Jewish population who survived in Poland. This is a mere approximation, but it cannot be claimed with any confidence that the entire population of survivors displayed the same characteristics, however,

9 In forced labor camps, children capable of working due to their age and health status naturally had the best chance of surviving. For instance, in one of the camps for displaced persons (DP), 60 percent of the children were 8–16 years old. Mark Wyman, *Europe’s Displaced Persons, 1945–1951* (London: Balch Institute Press, 1998), p. 89. In a camp in Bielawa, the liberated Jews were between 10 and 50 years old, with almost 90 percent of them between 15 and 40 years old, 11 percent were over 40, and only 0.8 percent were between 10 and 14. Szyja Bronsztejn, “Uwagi o ludności żydowskiej na Dolnym Śląsku i pierwszych latach po wyzwoleniu,” *BŻIH*, no. 70 (1970), p. 34. Nothing is known of the children’s sex. In the Buchenwald camp, the vast majority of the 90 children bearing Jewish names were born between 1928 and 1929, which means that they were 16–17 years old at the time of liberation. AŻIH, WO, Lista osób młodocianych urodzonych w Polsce, uratowanych w Niemczech (List of Juveniles Born in Poland and Rescued in Germany), file no. 680, pp. 1–3.

10 See Irena Kowalska, “Kartoteka TOZ z lat 1946–1947 (Żydowskie dzieci uratowane z Holokaustu),” *BŻIH*, no. 3 (1995) and no. 2 (1996), p. 100. The author derived her data from the files of the Society for the Protection of Jewish Health in Poland (TOZ), which include 800 children saved in Poland and the USSR. However, it is not known how these files were compiled, and, therefore, is impossible to determine, even approximately, how representative these data are. From Kowalska’s study, it also follows that there were slightly more boys than girls among children who survived in the USSR, which is difficult to explain.

there is no better source as yet. As comparison of the age structures of two groups of survivors clearly demonstrates, during the German occupation, the slaughter of children was atrocious: In post-war Łódź, three percent of the children were under six years of age, compared with 11 percent among repatriates, and four percent of children were aged between 7 and 14, compared with nine percent among Jews returning from the USSR. Further research is required to clarify the demographic consequences of those who were in the USSR. It might be assumed that, in this case, biological factors, which play a decisive role under extreme conditions, also had a negative impact on the chances of survival among the youngest and the oldest, who were physically the weakest. Among approximately 140,000 Jews repatriated to Poland in 1946, about 20 percent, or approximately 28,000, were children under 14. To this, children who returned to Poland in 1945 should be added, but since this repatriation involved mostly Jews from the eastern provinces of pre-war Poland, which had been occupied by the Germans in June 1941, there must have been very few. Moreover, children who left the USSR with General Anders’s Army and stayed there should also be added. Thus, a cautious estimate of the number of Jewish children who survived — 30,000–40,000 — is noteworthy and important for the future of the community.

The fact that the Jewish population grew faster than the Polish population means that the youngest age group increased rapidly. As data from

12 Zarys działalności Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce za okres od 1 stycznia do 30 czerwca 1946 (Warsaw: Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce [CKŻP], 1947), p. 7. The Department of Records and Statistics of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland explained the lack of a more detailed study on the Jewish population registered in 1945 to the fact that “a large part [of that population] no longer [lived] in Poland.” Ibid., pp. 7–8.

13 Ibid., table 4, p. 26. The age structure of the Jewish population is brought into even sharper relief by comparing it to the structure of Poland’s population at that time. Almost 37 percent of Poles were under 18; among Jewish repatriates, this age group constituted 25 percent; and among the Jews of Łódź only 14 percent, Zarys działalności Centralnego Komitetu, p. 8.

14 Among the repatriates, there were more men than women, but this was probably due to the composition of the refugee population (mostly Jews who had fled from the Germans to the areas occupied by the Soviets) rather than factors in the USSR.

15 These are probably the lowest figures.

16 Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska, A Social Analysis of Post-War Polish Jewry (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 1986), p. 35. The author quotes comparisons of the age structure of the Jewish population in early 1947 and before the war: Children born between 1946 and 1947 constituted almost five percent of the total Jewish population, as
the Department of Records and Statistics of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, quoted by Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska, indicate, the huge demographic losses among children and youth were compensated by the growing number of the youngest children, the offspring of the largest group of survivors aged 25–40.

**Health Consequences and the Psychological and Moral Condition of Child Survivors**

Children who survived the German occupation usually required extensive medical attention in the early post-war years. Almost immediately after the end of the fighting, Jewish organizations established clinics in the mountains at Rabka, Zakopane, and Szczyrk (the latter was open only during the summer), a sanatorium for tubercular children in Otwock near Warsaw, as well as summer camps organized by the Society for the Protection of Jewish Health in Poland (Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia Ludności Żydowskiej w Polsce — TOZ) for children in need of medical care. The condition of children who survived the camps or had been hiding in difficult circumstances was dramatic. Owing to the ubiquitous poverty of the early post-war period, the necessary help was neither immediate, nor adequate. Some of the children’s guardians felt that “the world...had not come to the (children’s) aid.” Perhaps it would have been more appropriate to say that the world compared with the average of 2.6 percent before the war; the population growth was faster than in both the contemporary Christian population and the pre-war Jewish population. Among the Christians, the population growth after the war remained the same as before the war. The data from DP camps also support the claim of a very high number of births among the Jewish population. See Erik Somers, ed., *Jewish Displaced Persons in Camp Bergen-Belsen 1945–1950: The Unique Photo Album of Zippy Orlin (Samuel and Althea Stroum Book)* (Seattle: University of Washington Press and Netherlands Institute for War Documentation, 2004), p. 73.

17 See Helena Datner-Śpiewak, “Instytucje opieki nad dzieckiem i szkoły powszechnie CKŻP w latach 1945–46. Zakres działania i założenia wychowawcze,” *BŻIH*, no. 3 (1981), p. 39. The sanatorium in Zakopane was closed down in March 1946 and the one in Rabka before, in August 1945, after it had been shot at by the underground.

18 “During the occupation, I met children and mothers living in hiding. While listening to the accounts of those mothers and looking at those children, I often thought...about the moment when, rescued and liberated, they would emerge from their hiding places into the free, bright, good world.... The world — a broad and vague concept — did not come to their aid. In this initial period, children slept on the floor, wore rags, and ate...”
did not rush to provide aid. According to the TOZ reports, the condition of children returning from the USSR was also poor: In May 1946, the Society reported, in addition to many somatic diseases, serious psychological disorders, including mental retardation, complexes, and traumas, which were more common among boys (25 percent of the repatriated children), whose mental condition was almost certainly better than that of those who survived in Poland.  

The war certainly had an impact on the perception and observance of ethical norms. There are reports of shocking sacrifices made by children for their families in ghettos. However, the death of all relatives utterly transformed the child’s world and, consequently, the prevailing norms. On a more superficial level, a child confronted with situations requiring constant lying, for instance, when hiding with Aryan papers, probably could not have remained unaffected in moral terms. With reference to children, it would have been difficult to conceive of the idea (which appeared in post-war literature and popular thinking) that the strongest and, therefore, the morally inferior, survived because this frequently came at other people’s expense. On the contrary, children, especially those who survived on their own, were inevitably regarded with profound admiration. However, admiration of their spirit and courage is one thing, while their mode of life is another. The post-war situation may have encouraged different behavior than wartime conditions. At an academic conference of the Central Jewish Historical Commission (Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna — CŽKH) in October 1945, Noe Grüss presented a paper entitled “The Psychology of Jewish Youth in Light of Archival Materials” (Psychologia młodzieży żydowskiej w świetle materialów archiwalnych), in which he expressed a very high opinion of the moral and psychological qualities of Jewish child survivors. A number of participants, however, including Filip Friedman, Head of the Commission at the time, argued with Grüss, pointing out that such children were often devoid of moral restraints. Counselling young people on career choice and advising tutors at schools and children’s homes on how to deal with young people, who were “often demoralized, was among the objectives of the Psychological and Educational Counselling Service run by Noe Grüss and Hochberg-Mariańska, Dzieci oskarżają, p. 28. A feeling of the inadequacy of the world’s reaction to survivors is a recurring theme.

19 AZIH, TOZ, file no. 9.

by the Central Committee of Jews in Poland’s Department for the Care of Children.” Tutors saw the condition of the children very clearly:

After the liberation from Fascism, these weak children found themselves at the brink of disaster.... The pre-war world no longer exists, and the new one is still alien, unfamiliar.... Now relaxation has set in, and at such times it is very easy to become demoralized. To act immediately was essential. The questionable ethics picked up during the war had to be discarded, while laying down new foundations for the...human being to grow on.

“We were told how to be human beings and how to behave; we were taught all those things we had scarcely anything to do with during the war, during all that turmoil,” recalls a man who was brought up in a children’s home in Kraków, fondly remembering his former tutors, whom he esteems for having shaped the moral character of the children, among other things.

In 1945, the State Institute of Mental Hygiene conducted a survey on the psychological and moral consequences of war on a large sample of children and young people. In the researcher’s opinion, the picture of “moral aspirations” that emerged from the survey was positive, but, as she also made clear, further research was needed to ensure that the reason for this was not that the respondents were mainly high-school students, who,

21 See, for example, AŻIH, WO (undated), Sprawozdanie z działalności Wydziału Opieki nad Dzieckiem (Report on the Activities of the Department for the Care of Children), file no. 9, p. 43.
24 Maria Kaczyńska, “Psychiczne skutki wojny wśród dzieci i młodzieży w Polsce,” Zdrowie Psychiczne. Kwartalnik Poświęcony Higienie Psychicznej, vol. 1 (1946). According to the author, the first stage of the survey involved over 5,000 children and young people aged 15–23 years at secondary schools, vocational schools, and colleges and universities in Kraków, Łódź, Warsaw, and Lublin. The questionnaire included 29 questions on wartime experiences, psychological conditions, and moral norms (e.g., “Did you practice theft and deception in relations with Germans?” “Hasn’t it undermined your respect for other people’s property or got you into the habit of lying and cheating?”). The questionnaire did not have questions relating to Jews. Further studies on this survey in subsequent issues of the journal, which continued until 1949, were not found.
in a sense, were a “select” group with higher ambitions in life. The same questionnaire was used to survey approximately 100 children from eight Jewish children’s homes. In the Psychological Counselling Service reports on this, the small number of responses to the questionnaires was put down to the fact that the majority of young people in children’s institutions were repatriates from the USSR, whereas the questions were about experiences in Poland. Moreover, “...young people [were] unwilling to write about their wartime experiences, which they wished to forget, and not relive them too often.” The author of this article has not been able to establish whether any studies on the results of the survey are available.

The psychological impact of war appears to have been researched most extensively, although, perhaps, still insufficiently. As scholars point out, the consequences of the war depended on, among other things, the age at which children experienced the Holocaust trauma, where they lived at the time, and their emotional situation immediately after the war. The consequences can be divided into the following three interrelated areas: identity, emotions (conscious and subconscious fear, and trauma and related disorders), and self-esteem. In statutory documents and educational programs of political groups, the latter psychological category is referred to as human dignity (which has been trampled on). Human dignity, in turn, is associated with another existential and psychological condition: the feeling of life’s pointlessness and the lack of reason to go on living. This condition did not afflict small children, but the older ones appear to have suffered from it quite frequently.

25 Ibid., p.70. Doubts about whether questions formulated in such a way could produce meaningful results are also justified.

26 Psychological Counselling Service reports mention their cooperation with the Institute of Mental Hygiene. Moreover, the questionnaires in the Department of Education archives are the same as those distributed in Polish schools. Unfortunately, only a dozen or so completed copies have been found. As part of the questionnaire, Jewish children also wrote on this subject in other formats, for example, essays on “My Most Powerful Experience during the Occupation.” For more information on the cooperation with the institute, see Sprawozdanie, p. 42. For an example of a completed questionnaire, see AŽIH, WO, vol. 153, pp. 27–29. The children’s homes involved and the number of questionnaires collected in each are also listed in Sprawozdanie, AŽIH, CKŻP, WO, file no. 9, p. 51.

27 Ibid.

Immediately after the war, teachers faced the question of whether they should even attempt to collect children’s testimonies on their unusually traumatic experiences or avoid doing this so as not to reopen psychological wounds. They pondered over arguments for collecting such testimonies. Some teachers thought that they should not talk to the children about their experiences. Some believed it preferable to collect testimonies on children’s pre-war life, as a “return” to happier days. Even though relating wartime experiences could reopen psychological wounds, others claimed that such testimonies were too important as a source of knowledge to be neglected. Finally, there were those who regarded them primarily as a means of catharsis, believing such reports should be collected for the sake of the children themselves.29 The author of this article does not know of any such deliberations that took place in Poland, but as the Central Commission’s guidelines on collecting children’s testimonies suggests, one of the objectives was to acquire knowledge about the young people’s psychological and physical condition.30

According to memoirs written by child survivors many years later, they did not want to relive the past soon after the war. Apart from specially trained tutors who collected testimonies, adults usually did not encourage children to talk about their past experiences.31 In addition to psychological

29 Cohen, “The Children’s Voice,” pp. 85–86. Cohen derived the above attitudes towards children’s testimonies from the experiences of teachers at DP camps. Early collections of children’s testimonies were compiled in Poland by Beniamin Tenenbaum and, above all, by the CŻKH, as well as the Central Historical Commission in Munich in DP camps in Germany. Ibid., pp. 74–79. The Jewish Historical Institute’s archive includes 427 testimonies of children.

30 Ada Eban, ed., Instrukcje dla badania przeżyć dzieci żydowskich w okresie okupacji niemieckiej (Guidelines for Researching the Experiences of Jewish Children during the German Occupation) (Lodz: CŻKH, 1945), p. 4. Noe Grüss, author of the methodical guidelines; Genia Silkes, author of the questionnaire. This set of guidelines, one of four issued by the commission for the purpose of collecting Holocaust testimonies, is surprisingly modern in methodology.

31 Recalling the time he spent in a children’s home in Helenów, Henryk Grynberg mentions how uncommon it was for their caregivers to make any references to the war. Only once, one of the tutors, on an outing with her class, “suddenly said something about those who had not lived to see that beautiful spring day.” Joanna B. Michlic, “Bearing Witness: Henryk Grynberg’s Path from Child Survivor to Artist,” Polin. A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies, vol. 20 (2008), p. 327. Keeping silent about wartime experiences, behind which various attitudes and emotions may have been concealed, is a frequent theme in memoirs and autobiographical literature. “I did not trouble my head with those times when there was war in the world. I did not talk to other children
arguments, such as not reopening painful wounds, there were also ideological objections. The general atmosphere favored focusing on the ghetto fighters’ heroism rather than on the victims’ suffering. This approach, which dominated among the two leading ideological camps of the day, the Communists and the Zionists, was manifested in the character of celebrations in children’s institutions. It is uncertain whether and how this situation affected the children’s psyche. Neither does science unequivocally resolve the question of whether giving an early testimony, or verbalizing the trauma, would have led to psychologically better prospects for the future. At the same time, in their memoirs (collected many years after the war), former child survivors emphasized how they rapidly regained mental equilibrium and even joy of life in the favorable atmosphere of the children’s homes.

However, the consequences of the Holocaust may persist. Almost 50 years later, in the early 1990s, organizations of child survivors were set up, following the example of the Hidden Children Association in the USA, and soon began to provide psychological assistance to members as a permanent part of their activities. Professional achievements of children of the Holocaust were very often accompanied by problems in their personal lives. Moreover, it turned out that consequences of the Holocaust are “passed on”

who had survived, either. That was not interesting. I was sick of avoiding conversations of the adults.” Alona Frenkel, Dziewczynka (Warsaw: Nisza, 2007), p. 210. However, immediately after the liberation from a camp or leaving the forest, children did talk. The silence came later. In a radio broadcast on April 15, 1946, Ida Merżan stated: “Children who came to us woke up at night screaming and crying. During the daytime, they could not stop talking about their experiences.” AZIH, WO, file no. 593, p. 8. Some children remained silent all their lives. See, for instance, reminiscences on the children who were brought up at a children’s home in Zatrzebie. Maria Thau (Weczer), Powroty (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Słowaków w Polsce, 2003), p. 53. Children also lived parallel lives: “By day, they studied, played, and laughed, while at night, they returned to the past, reliving the horror, separation, and fear. In the daytime everything went back to normal. No one mentioned or discussed what they had heard or seen at night.” Ibid., p. 13.

34 For more on the creation, goals, and problems of Polish “Holocaust children,” see Joanna Sobolewska, “Dzieci Holocaustu,” in Elżbieta Traba and Robert Traba, eds., Tematy żydowskie (Olsztyn: Borussia, 1999), pp. 173–190. The author also quotes Professors Julian Aleksandrowicz and Maria Orwid’s view that “The further, the worse,” i.e., the passage of time reopens the wounds rather than heals them.

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to the so-called second generation. Many years after the war, the term Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was introduced in psychiatry to cover the consequences of extreme traumatic experiences, and the Holocaust undeniably came under this category.

Joanna Michlic listed the factors contributing to children’s post-war identity problems. Her analysis applied primarily to children who survived on the Aryan side. Aside from the war and murder of Jews in the atmosphere of violent anti-Jewish propaganda, important factors included lack of a biological family as a natural transmitter of identity, “anti-Jewish prejudice of a part of Polish society,” and the need to pretend to be someone else. The recovery of identity (or its stabilization, since this was frequently ambivalent) depended on such factors as finding the child’s biological family, activities of Jewish organizations, and the attitude of the rescuers and/or the child’s relationship with them. The post-war escape by Jewish children from their Jewishness, and even from the very word “Jew,” was a psychologically and existentially dramatic phenomenon.

35 Orwid notes that the first report came in the 1960s from American psychoanalysts who were unable to understand some of their patients “since the type of depression found in survivors [differed] from those they [had] dealt with until then…. For it [was] difficult indeed to understand that a person who [had] graduated, [had] a satisfying job, family, and friends [carried] a hell inside him at the same time. Moreover, classical psychiatry, which describes deviations from the norm against the background of regular, normal life, could not cope, at first, with what had happened during the Holocaust.” Maria Orwid, Przeżyć i co dalej? Rozmawiają Katarzyna Zimmerer i Krzysztof Szwajca (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006), p. 266. The research findings were published in Maria Orwid, Ewa Domagalska-Kurdziel, et al., “Psychosocial Effects of the Holocaust on Survivors and the Second Generation in Poland: Preliminary Report,” in Lemberger, A Global Perspective, pp. 205–242. The research involved 21 survivors who were children during the war. The results confirm the pattern observed by the American psychiatrists: perfect occupational adaptation of most Holocaust victims and their considerably poorer emotional and family-related adaptation.

36 In Poland, research on the psychological impact of the Holocaust was conducted by Orwid’s team (psychiatric studies of the second generation: Krzysztof Szwajca and Łukasz Bietka; pioneering research on PTSD: Maja Lis-Turlejska). Many members of the Association of “Holocaust Children” did not reveal their Jewishness for years, and some carefully concealed their origins. It is a factor which should not be ignored in the analysis of the psychological consequences of the Holocaust.


38 Based on testimonies from the archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, Michlic provides numerous examples of escape from Jewishness during and after the
An important aspect of the identity problems during that period was the children's attitude to Catholicism. Some of them, sheltered during the war on the Aryan side and aware of their Jewishness, clung to Catholicism, the religion, and/or the site, such as churches, which offered them refuge and repose.\textsuperscript{39} At least some of the caregivers of Jewish children after the war realized what a sensitive issue the children's faith was.\textsuperscript{40} The nature of the bond between children and their wartime caregivers ranged from a missing or negative bond to such a strong relationship that returning the child after the war was a trying experience for both parties.\textsuperscript{41}

Immediately after the war, Jewish organizations attached great importance to exposing children to “Jewish influences.” Of course, especially at the beginning, they also aimed at providing children with appropriate care. At the beginning of 1944, early in the development of the post-war Zionist movement in Poland, Zionist activists assembled in the town of Równe shortly after its liberation from the Nazis. They listed the following among their most important current objectives: to search for surviving Jewish war, as well as trauma related to being a Jew. These might be supplemented with examples of linguistic operations on the word “Jew” itself: “‘Dobrzyckis’ is what Dad called Jews when he told me Bible stories in the hiding place during the war. Mom and Dad did their best so that I would not know the word ‘Jew’ or the word ‘death.’” Frankel, Dziewczynka, p. 63. A psychologist’s description of a child, M. B., aged 6: “[The child] shuns the word ‘Jew.’ Whenever there is talk of Jews at home, the child, who normally interrupts every conversation, never joins in.” CKŻP, AŻIH, WO, file no. 183.

\textsuperscript{39} Michlic, “Bearing Witness,” p. 111. Many years after the war, Michał Głowiński recalled the chapel in the Eastern Orthodox convent in Turkowice: “I used to visit it frequently, there was something that set it apart from all other places where I could stay at the time. It was light, peaceful, and orderly. It had a sense which was missing elsewhere.” Michał Głowinski, Czarne sezony (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1998), p. 110.

\textsuperscript{40} Dwojra Zielona, from the emergency shelter for children in Targowa Street in Warsaw, gave a clever example of how to deal with children who returned as Catholics. She said that crosses and medallions should not be removed from the children’s necks: “There were some (children) who knelt by their beds in the evening and said ‘Our Father.’” She stressed that they must not be reprimanded for this. “One must not destroy their faith by force; it helped them through the most difficult times,” she used to say gently but firmly. Thau, Powroty, p. 7. At the children’s home in Zatrzebie, children’s prayers were passed over in silence. Ibid., p. 13.

\textsuperscript{41} Here is an example of close ties: A woman, whose neighbors claimed she was a prostitute, was brought to the emergency shelter for children in Targowa Street, along with a seven-year-old boy. Attempts were made to persuade the woman to give up the child. “Over my dead body,” she said firmly. “I found him starving to death in a camp, I saved him, he is mine, mine, mine.” The child remained with the woman. Thau, Powroty, p. 8.
children; to restore badly damaged Jewish graves; and to organize a soup kitchen.\textsuperscript{42} In August 1945, at the first post-war Zionist conference in London, Emil Sommerstein, Chairman of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, spoke of the situation of Jewish children still in convents or with non-Jewish families because of insufficient staff and resources.\textsuperscript{43} In early 1946, on the initiative of a Palestinian emissary, the many competing Zionist organizations established a joint commission to save Jewish children and youth. This would consist of searching for and recovering (as the source put it) children and youth who had stayed on with non-Jewish families and in non-Jewish institutions, and establishing \textit{kibbutzim} for them.\textsuperscript{44} In April 1945, the committee established a commission to take moral care of the children who were still with Poles.\textsuperscript{45}

According to Central Committee records, 147 children were found with their Polish guardians from 1945 to 1950. Some of them were returned to their relatives (the vast majority of the children were full orphans, so relatives other than their parents were involved); some were placed in children’s homes; and there is no information about what happened to some of them.\textsuperscript{46}

The above-mentioned Zionist organization for saving Jewish children (Co-

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 145.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 160.
\textsuperscript{45} AŻIH, file no. 301/1, Prezydium, Posiedzenie plenum CKŻP z 28 IV 1945 (Presidium, Plenary Session of the CKŻP on April 28, 1945). The author has not managed to obtain any information on the subsequent history of the commission.
\textsuperscript{46} AŻIH, WO, file no. 656, Wykaz dzieci żydowskich uratowanych przez opiekunów-Polaków i skierowanych do CKŻP w latach 1945–1950 (List of Jewish Children Rescued from Polish Guardians and Sent to the CKŻP from 1945 to 1950). In 1946, five children were removed from convents; 25 children were recovered from Christians (the term used in the source), including 20 who were bought out; the cases of ten children were being worked on; and 203 children had not been found. AŻIH, WO, file no. 9, p. 33, Sprawozdanie Wydziału Opieki nad Dzieckiem za rok 1946 (Annual Report of the Department for the Care of Children for 1946). In the following year, 12 children were removed from convents and children’s institutions, and 27 from Aryan families. “There were 353 cases of children claimed from guardians who demanded exorbitant sums to return them and, in many cases, they did not allow any communication between the children and their closest family.” AŻIH, WO, file no. 9, p. 47, Sprawozdanie (Wydziału Oświaty) za 1 I–31 XII 1947 (Department of Education’s Annual Report for 1947). Elsewhere, the report states, “One must emphasize the generosity and dedication demonstrated by many Aryan families.” Ibid., p. 48. Some children from children’s homes tried to get financial assistance for their former guardians. Thau, \textit{Powroty}, p. 14.
ordination for Saving Jewish Children) and “individuals acting on their own initiative” reportedly paid out for “no more than 600 children;”47 and a certain number were also paid for by the Aguda.48 In accordance with the Central Committee of Jews in Poland’s general philosophy, they endeavored to recover children legally, whereas Zionist groups did so by all available means.49 Recovering children by legal means (through an amicable settlement or court action) was often extremely difficult, painstaking, and costly.50

It is not surprising that the end of war was often accompanied by the feeling of the pointlessness of life, as mentioned in memoirs written at that time or many years later. The end of war brought relief, but often also boundless sadness, sometimes even downright depression, to those who survived.51 This phenomenon also applied to children.

47 Quoted in Bażanowska, “To był mój dom,” p. 27. The author quotes Nachum Bogner’s study B’khasdey zarim. Khatsalat yeladim b’zehut sheula b’Polin (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2000). The author of this article had no way of assessing the reliability of this figure.

48 The Aguda includes the efforts of the Religious Congregation and the rabbis supporting it abroad: the Chief Rabbi of England, Salomon Schonfeld, and the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Dr. Isaac Herzog. See Ewa Kurek, Dzieci żydowskie w klasztorach (Lublin: CLIO, 2001), pp. 103–104.

49 The Zionist movement in Poland operated on two levels: the general Jewish level, as part of the CKŻP, and the specifically Zionist level. The latter sphere included illegal activities related to emigration and the recovery of children, among other things. See Aleksiun, Dokąd dalej?, p. 121.

50 Reports from business trips by Department of Education representatives include the following accounts: “Citizen Nowak is corresponding with relatives of the child (a seven-year-old girl) in the USA in order to return the child. He has received three letters from them and has sent them two photographs of the child at their request. In his last letter of April 17, 1947, Nowak demanded 5,500 dollars for returning the child and the correspondence stopped after that.... At present, Nowak demands the non-negotiable sum of three million złotys. He said that if this sum is not paid, he will go through with adoption and no one will have any rights to the child anymore.... Nowak’s wife is attached to the child, and the child is brought up in good conditions.” A report from another trip on the attitude of another Jewish child: “I informed Maniek that he was a Jew and that I had come from the Central Committee to talk with him. On hearing this, Borchowicz immediately ran away from me.... In the meantime, Maniek’s guardian came (to me) and also said that Maniek did not want to return to being Jewish. In the meantime, Maniek gathered around him about 30 boys, who were supposed to protect him from “potential kidnapping”; AZIH, WO, file no. 16, pp. 12–13.

51 “I have lived to see my wartime dreams come true at last. I am free again, I breathe in the air of freedom, but I am not happy. My life makes no sense.” That is what a young member of the Lohamei ha-Getaot kibbutz said in October 1945 in Gdańsk. See...
After the war, Jews in Poland could “choose” three ideologies to cope intellectually and spiritually with the situation after the Holocaust: assimilation; Zionism, which involved the option of emigration; and Communism. Another very important option was to leave Poland for a place as remote as possible from the cemetery of one’s family and the Jewish people. Communism and Zionism could be interpreted as options offering a sense of life and helping survivors cope with their recent experiences. Both Zionism and Communism offered a vision of the world with a promise of a better future: either through emigration to a place where Jews would be free from persecution; or through a political system in which not only would all people be equal, allowing Jews to recover their dignity, but also implying a deeper transformation of human nature for the better.

Emigration of Children

The early post-war emigration of Jews was one of the principal factors shaping the Jewish community, as well as the main bone of contention between Jewish Communists and Zionists. Apart from the ideological war, practical differences manifested themselves, above all, in the attitude to orphaned children, whose future depended on their adult caregivers. In this area, there was intense competition between these parties from the very beginning. In addition, the various Zionist groups waged an all-out battle for

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52 The quotation marks indicate that it was not always a matter of genuine reflection or choice.

53 This is how Gustaw Kerszman, 13 years old at the end of the war, explains his choice of a left-wing path: “I had a very bleak picture of the world and humanity, and suddenly there was someone who said that the world was black but could improve. This was very important to a 13-year-old. And it was about the world, and not only about Jews, as with the Zionists.” This is a quote from a conversation with the author of this study on July 20, 2008. It does not seem that this kind of motivation was exceptional at the time. Hanna Krall explains, but also justifies, her choice in the following words: “I did not have a real family. I lived in a children’s home. When you have a real world and a real home, you also have knowledge about what came before, what there is now, and what it all means. I was deprived of such a background.... I had emotional ties to the world that I had been promised. Adult, wise people promised me a sensible, just, and wise world, there were no reasons to disbelieve them.” Jacek Antczak, ed., *Reporterka. Rozmowy z Hanną Krall* (Warsaw: Rosner i Wspólnicy, 2007), p. 15.
souls among themselves. Jewish Communists, who were initially absolutely opposed to the emigration of children, consented to their legal emigration in the spring of 1946. The children left in large groups for Sweden, France, England, and Mexico at the invitation of Jewish organizations and thanks to their assistance. The cost of the journey was financed by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint). Illegal emigration led a greater number of children to British Mandate Palestine via camps for displaced persons (DPs), mostly in the American Occupation Zone in Germany or in Italy. Polish historical literature and memoirs include few records relating to DP camps.

Emigration was a phenomenon with two clear sides: On the one hand, there were people's needs and individual choices, as well as ideological motives of organizations; on the other hand, there were countries which admitted Jews. Until the creation of the State of Israel, the post-war world was fairly tightly closed to Jews. As a result of factors such as pre-war immigration quotas, minutely defined categories of people who were allowed to enter particular countries, and long-drawn-out visa procedures (even in cases of reuniting families), there were as many as 100,000 Polish Jews, including children, in DP camps in 1947.

54 For more information on the debates on the emigration of children that took place in the CKŻP in 1945 and 1946, see August Grabski and Grzegorz Berendt, Między emigracją a trwaniem. Syjonisci i komuniści żydowscy w Polsce po Holocauście (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny [ŻIH], 2003), pp. 67–72. On the competition between Zionists: "In the spring of 1946 a Hashomer Hatsair activist warned the headquarters of her organization to prevent a group of children from Otwock from leaving Poland with Dror tutors, since 'they (were) very valuable children, which they could not afford to lose.'" Aleksiuin, Dokąd dalej?, p. 151.
55 Ibid., p. 71.
56 For instance, in early 1947, "341 children from various Zionist factions [left] by a Polish Red Cross train for France, where they [studied] and [prepared] to immigrate to their homeland, Palestine." I. Herzberg, "Nasze dzieci we Francji," Opinia, no. 15 (1947).
57 See Tamar Levinsky's article, "Polish-Jewish Displaced Persons in Occupied Germany," in this volume. In her biographical prose, Irit Amiel described the journey of a 14-year-old girl from Częstochowa to a kibbutz in Gdańsk, and from there through a DP camp in Germany to Israel. It was Yitzkhak Zuckerman who told young people in Częstochowa about the existence of kibbutzim. Irit Amiel, Podwójny krajobraz (Warsaw: Prószyński i S-ka, 2008).
58 Chaim Finkelstein's collection, held in the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, includes materials which make it possible to retrace the emigration route of his daughter Aviva, the only surviving member of his family. Finkelstein lived in the USA and his efforts to bring Aviva to the USA were supported in very high places both in the
The questions of child emigration, assistance from foreign organizations, and Polish children in DP camps constitute a broad and, as yet, poorly explored research area.

Secularity and Assimilation As Direct Consequences of the Second World War and the Holocaust

“The revolutionary consequences of the war and occupation, which in a sense prepared the ground for People’s Poland by destroying the foundations of the former order [social order], are notoriously underestimated in Poland,” wrote Jerzy Szacki.59 With regard to the Jewish community, this meant, among other things, rapidly progressing secularization, which was caused by breaking up old bonds and social arrangements, a shift of authorities, and a dramatic reduction in the size of the community. Even the new political system in Poland reinforced the secular option, although it should not be regarded, initially, as the most significant factor.60 Except for the religious Mizrachi, most of the Zionist groups also embraced secularity.

The relative social power of secularity and religiousness can be evaluated based on the extent to which they reached children’s institutions: According to reports of the Jewish Religious Congregations’ organizing committee, in 1948, approximately 1,000 out of 6,000 Jewish school-aged children attended various types of religious schools. However, this figure may be overstated.61 Several generations of Jewish social activists, including non-Communists, demanded the secularization of children’s institutions,

USA and in Poland. Similar information can be found in files of the CKŻP’s and the Joint’s emigration departments.

60 Obviously, this analysis reflects the perspective in 1945. The most religious Jews were the least likely to survive. Besides, in the early post-war period, a kind of filtration process took place. It may be assumed that deeply religious Jews who had managed to survive attempted to leave as soon as possible. Moreover, secularity was not tantamount to lack of religion for Jews in post-war Poland. Irena Nowakowska pointed out social differences between a small town, such as Dzierżoniów, and a large city, like Warsaw or Łódź. The latter occupy an intermediate position in terms of departure from tradition.
61 See Helena Datner, “Szkoły Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce 1944–1949,” BŻIH, no. 1–3 (1994), p. 115. A year earlier, among 2,000 children sent to a summer camp by the Society for Safeguarding the Health of the Jewish Population, there were 100 children from religious families (the camp had a kosher kitchen).
and schools, in particular. The call for school secularity was associated with the Yiddishist trend of pre-war Jewish life. Children’s institutions influenced by this trend were definitely a minority, but a very distinct one, clearly present in society.

The secularity of the Central Committee of Jews in Polish children’s institutions in the 1940s consisted in passing over or disregarding Jewish religious requirements, a non-religious interpretation of the world in accordance with modern needs, and a selective approach to religious holidays, as well as their historical interpretation combined with emphasis on their emotional and educational value to Jews. Until 1947, educational materials for the celebration of the Shavuot holiday, which is known as the holiday of farmers and the day on which Jews received the Torah, were provided to children’s homes. A special educational role (at least until 1948) was played by Hanukkah and Purim (minor Jewish festivals), which were well-suited for historical interpretation, demonstrating the love of Jews for their nation, their readiness for sacrifice, perseverance in fighting for freedom (Hanukkah), and punishment which had befallen the enemies of Jews (Haman’s fate). Jewish feast days were used as an opportunity to interpret

62 Szlomo Mendelson, co-founder of the TSYSHO (Tsentrale Yidishe Shul Organizatsye) schools, wrote that the point was not merely to remove religion from the school: “The attitude to people and society should be genuinely humane. That is why arts are accorded a prominent place in our schools. We do not wish to conceal the profound mystery that shrouds the universe from children…. However, this should be the most sacred, deepest feeling, which cannot and dares not be subject to any regulations, as is sometimes the case in religious instruction. We do not force or persuade [children] to abandon religion. We give children complete freedom as to their customs, but they have to be open and honest.” Szlomo Mendelson, Nowa szkoła żydowska. Czym jest i do czego dąży (Warsaw: Szkoła i Życie, 1924), p. 20.

63 In the 1930s, approximately 25,000 children attended secular Jewish schools of the TSYSHO and Shulkult organizations, as compared to about 90,000 children attending religious schools run by the Khorev and Yavneh organizations. Arje Tartakower, “Problemy szkolnictwa żydowskiego w Polsce,” in Almanach szkolnictwa żydowskiego w Polsce. Trzeci zeszyt okazowy (Warsaw: Renesans, 1937).

64 See Bażanowska, “To był mój dom,” pp. 87–89. For instance, the guidelines on celebrating Purim include the following passage: “One should indicate analogies between the Pharaoh, Haman, and Hitler. One should draw children’s attention to the figure of Esther and emphasize the element of sacrifice. The recent occupation provided us with numerous examples of self-sacrifice on the part of Jewish women.” AZIH, WO, file no. 620, p. 5.

events of the very recent past, to accentuate Jewish activism and heroism. Each celebration ended with singing the Jewish partisan hymn, although, at least in some institutions, children also participated in celebrations commemorating “civilian” victims. Up to a point, children who wished to go to the synagogue were allowed to do so, but this was not very common. Memoirs of former wards of children’s homes suggest that, in most cases, the secularity in those institutions did not constitute a problem for them.

Irrespective of differences between particular Zionist groups, all Zionist education in Poland seemed to have a halutzic (pioneering) character, as it combined Zionist and scouting values. Hebrew schools operated under the aegis of the Hechalutz-Pioneer organization. Reports of various Zionist organizations mention both children’s homes and kibbutzim for children. Kibbutzim established in Poland at the time were probably loosely organized structures aimed at survival and emigration, rather than systematic activities. They were a good solution to young people’s emotional problems and a way of providing them with the necessities of life.

It is impossible here to deal with the question of post-war assimilation and various definitions of the phenomenon itself. Suffice it to mention two categories of assimilation: assimilation as a social process, and “deliberate” assimilation, which manifested itself in keeping Aryan papers, failing to register with a Jewish committee, and changing the family name (or preserving the wartime Aryan name). Some Jewish children born after the war were subject to the “processes of social assimilation”: Their Polishness was a natural condition resulting from assimilation choices made by their parents. Moreover, in post-war Poland, Jewishness evolved from the parents’ relatively strong national identification as opposed to the children’s weaker identification. After 1950, Jewish schools increasingly became “a place where Jewish children met,” and to a much lesser degree a place for transmitting Jewishness, i.e., a

66 Bażanowska, “To był mój dom,” p. 89.
67 Ibid., p. 86. Children took part in a march to the Płaszów camp, where there was a rabbi.
68 Years later, a former ward of the children’s home in Kraków fondly recalls that the home kept its own pigs: “What I liked the most was when those pigs were slaughtered and sausages were made in the shower room. The smell of pepper and garlic pervaded the whole place and I kept going back there.” Bażanowska, “To był mój dom,” p. 52.
place where the contents of Jewish culture were conveyed. After 1958, the latter role was largely taken over by the Jewish summer camps. One possible measure of assimilation on the social, global level was attendance of Jewish schools, and another one was the children’s problems with Yiddish.

In December 1946, after a huge emigration wave following the Kielce Pogrom, according to Central Committee reports, there were 30 Jewish schools with 3,000 students in 29 cities and towns. The largest schools existed in Łódź, Szczecin, and Wrocław. Schools with attendees of more than 100 students operated in Kraków, Dzierżoniów, Bielawa, Wałbrzych, and Legnica. Despite subsequent waves of emigration and domestic migration, these cities remained major Jewish education centers until the dissolution of Jewish schools in 1968, except for Kraków, which lost its school and significance as a center of Jewish life after 1950. The other schools not only suffered from the shrinking number of students, but frequently did not have all the grades or combined grades. Łódź invariably preserved its position as the strongest center of Jewish education and one of the foremost centers of Jewish life until 1968.

The schools of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland was the largest and best organized segment of Jewish education. The education department of the Hechalutz-Pioneer organization established Hebrew schools, whose curriculum was to be modelled on the pre-war Tarbut schools. In the spring of 1946 there were at least nine such schools, attended by 1,000 students. The largest of them operated in Łódź: It was only slightly smaller than the school run by the Central Committee. Apart from the Tarbut and the Central Committee schools, there was also a network of religious schools until 1949. According to data from mid-1948, approximately 1,100 children attended 36 such schools and study groups. They operated in almost all Jewish centers, providing education to children aged 6–10. Some of them were evening schools for pupils of other schools; and some were Chederim covering the curriculum of the first three grades of elementary schools.

70 The school inspector Ludwik Łozowski believed that Jewish schools attracted parents primarily as an environment where their children would not be exposed to antisemitic behavior. AŻIH, TSKŻ, file no. 44, Sytuacja w szkolnictwie żydowskim w świetle wizytacji i badań przeprowadzonych w roku szkolnym 1955/56.
72 AŻIH, AJDC, Wydział Kontroli, no. 543, Memorandum organizacji He-Chaluc-Pionier z 2 V 1946 (Memorandum of the Hechalutz–Pioneer Organization, May 2, 1946).
73 For more information on the condition of Hebrew and religious Jewish schools, see
It is interesting to note that, despite massive emigration from Poland from 1946 to 1947, the number of children in Jewish schools, after a temporary drop, not only did not decrease but actually grew a little, to approximately 3,000 at the beginning of the 1947/1948 school year. The number of students in Hebrew schools did not change drastically, either. A similar phenomenon was observed after 1950 at the Central Committee’s schools, which had already been nationalized. The years 1949–1951 were a period of emigration and a substantial contraction of the Jewish community so, initially, the number of schoolchildren decreased rapidly: At the beginning of the 1950 school year, there were approximately 1,300 students. However, later, the number increased and by 1955/1956, there were approximately 2,300 students. In the meantime, the number of Jews in Poland was decreasing substantially, but there are reasons to believe that the proportion of children attending Jewish schools did not change considerably. The repatriation and emigration waves that followed from 1956 to 1961 seriously rocked the Jewish community in Poland. Not only did it shrink by 50 percent, but the Jewish education system was also undermined, which seems to symptomize a deeper erosive process. Since the early 1960s, the number of children in Jewish schools has systematically and rapidly decreased.

If it is assumed that in the years 1947–1948 approximately 10,000 school-aged Jewish children (7–14 year-olds), of whom 3,000 studied in Central Committee schools, 1,000 in Hebrew schools, and a similar number in religious schools (children usually attended them in addition to the regular schools), approximately 40 percent of “openly” Jewish children attended a Jewish school of some type, and ten percent received religious education.

AAN, WO, file no. 43/3, p. 175. Jewish religious schools are discussed by Ewa Pogorzała in her study “Działalność oświatowo-wychowawcza żydowskich kongregacji wyznaniowych w Polsce w drugiej połowie lat 40. XX wieku — zarys problematyki” (forthcoming).
74 Owing to policies of the state authorities, the number of Hebrew schools began to decrease rapidly in 1948. See Pogorzała, “Szkolnictwo hebrajskie,” p. 142.
76 The emptying of schools proceeded so rapidly, and should probably be ascribed to the continuing emigration.
77 Obviously, this calculation is merely an estimate, based on the assumption that in the period under discussion the Jewish population in Poland did not exceed 100,000 (although this figure seems overstated) and school-aged children constituted ten percent of the total, i.e., 10,000. Estimated by the author on the basis of the data contained in
Throughout the period under discussion, the majority of Jewish children attended Polish schools. In a sense, the converse “Jewish education” is the history of Jewish children in Polish schools. This is more interesting as Polish elementary schools became fully secular only in 1961, whereas religious studies was an obligatory subject in all schools until 1948. Some Jewish children attended schools run by the Workers’ Society of the Friends of Children (Robotnicze Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci)\(^78\) and later, the Society of the Friends of Children (Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci), which were established in 1949. In some localities, Jewish children constituted a large percentage of students in these schools. A fairly rapid decrease in the prevalence of Yiddish and its changing status from a vernacular to a language that had to be learnt systematically can be illustrated in various ways. Only a relatively small proportion of children’s testimonies collected in Poland after the war were written in Yiddish.\(^79\) This is hardly surprising since testimonies for the Historical Commission were given by children who survived in Poland and, therefore, had been raised outside a Jewish environment. However, apart from this particular effect of the Holocaust, a factor of far greater significance for the future of Yiddish was the rapid shrinking of the Jewish community. Schools and homes where Yiddish was spoken were islands in the ocean of Polish culture.

Inspectors of schools and other children’s institutions pointed out that attempts to turn Yiddish into a vernacular encountered considerable obstacles.\(^80\) Children did not feel the need to learn Yiddish. Despite tutors’ efforts, the knowledge of that language was sometimes perceived as a kind of disgrace.\(^81\) By contrast, post-war politics and ideology were favorable to Yiddish: No one questioned its importance. At the time, when guidelines for the Central Committee schools were being developed, Communists, the CKŻP report for the year 1946. See Sprawozdanie CKŻP za rok 1946 (Warsaw: CKŻP, 1946), p. 4.

\(^78\) There was no religious instruction in these schools; they were secular by definition.

\(^79\) Specifically, 89 out of 429 testimonies were recorded in Yiddish. The author is indebted for this information to Edyta Kurek who prepared, in cooperation with Elizabeth Kohlhaas, a statistical study of the testimonies as part of a Polish-German project.


\(^81\) Years later, former wards of the children’s home in Kraków recalled: “We were even taught in Yiddish, but we did not know a word.” Bażanowska, “To był mój dom,” p. 144; “No one wanted to have a Jewish accent.” Ibid., p. 81; “Yiddish as a language... Oh, I preferred to read a Polish book under the desk.” Ibid., p. 83.
whose ideological influence in the committee was very strong from the very beginning, perceived Yiddish as an important means of transmitting various elements of tradition, and even though Yiddish increasingly became a “national form” hiding socialist content, in the 1940s some vigorous and sincere activists tried to “revitalize” it among children.\textsuperscript{82} Thus, the older generation mostly knew Yiddish, although its role as an everyday language was smaller and its use decreased even further. The prevalence of Yiddish was demonstrated by the existence of Yiddish newspapers and books (which were not published for propaganda reasons alone), and correspondence preserved in the archives of post-war Jewish institutions as well as questionnaires completed by teachers, most of whom were fluent in Yiddish. As late as the 1950s, Jews who did not speak Polish attended courses held by the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów — TSKŻ). The problem with Yiddish was that it was difficult to pass on to the next generation.

The war shattered the status of Yiddish as the national language. Despite genuine efforts on the part of some Jewish activists, Yiddish remained an increasingly serious educational problem until the end of the period covered.

\textbf{Forms, Organization, and Scope of Post-War Assistance and Care for Children}

The provision of assistance to children required money or an allotment of materials and products, organizational structures, and a plan of assistance. In 1944 and early 1945, money and materials put at the disposal of the Central Committee came from long-term government loans and allotments. The Joint was able to deliver effectively the first transport of clothes and food in May 1945.\textsuperscript{83} From then until the end of 1949, the Joint supported all Jewish institutions in accordance with their needs, presumably as measured by the number of members. Whereas the Joint financed the vast majority

\textsuperscript{82} For more information on the attitude of Jewish Communists to Yiddish, see August Grabski and Martyna Rusiniak, “Żydowscy komuniści po Holocauście wobec języków polskiego żydostwa,” in Ruta, ed., Nusech Pojn, pp. 51–66.

of committee expenditures, Zionists also received resources from the Jewish Agency. At the beginning of 1946, i.e., before the huge influx of repatriates, sums allotted by the Joint for the care of children and youth constituted a considerable part of its expenditures on programs in Poland. An important but poorly studied part of the assistance to children were efforts of other foreign organizations and, above all, the fraternal associations (landsmanshaftn), which volunteered to support people originating from their native areas. In January 1946, the World Jewish Congress wrote to the Central Committee that it had already created children’s homes in France, Belgium, Italy, and the Netherlands, and wished to do the same in Poland. The Union of Orthodox Rabbis took an interest in children in religious children’s homes and with Christians. Particularly active was the OSE Union (Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants), which, in the autumn of 1945, informed the Central Committee of the American offers to take care of orphans. An American-Jewish association of foster parents was also created, whose members wished to support the expenses of keeping particular children in children’s homes. It is now difficult to assess the extent of foreign assistance, except from the Joint, but it must have been

84 See Aleksiun, Dokąd dalej?, p. 160.
85 Ibid., table, p. 283, budget for January 1946.
86 For instance, in December 1946, the United Sochaczew Relief Committee in New York contacted the Department of Education, after learning that children from Sochaczew were living in the children’s home in Otwock. AŻIH, WO, file no. 935, pp. 26–28, and in May 1947 Di Kobjriner Froyen Gezelshaft (Kobryn Women’s Society) asked for photographs and short descriptions of children from Kobryń and the vicinity, “since members of the Society heard that such children were (staying) in Poland.” Ibid., p. 29. The renovation of the children’s home in Kraków would not have been possible without assistance from the United Galician Jews of America. Bażanowska, “To był mój dom,” p. 53. At the end of 1947, it was reported that there were 150 registered fraternal organizations in Poland, 50 of which were “active.” AŻIH, AJDC, file no. 1283, p. 65.
87 AŻIH, CKŻP, WO, file no. 935, p. 6.
88 OSE, originally the Obshtsheshtvo Zdravokhraneniya Yevreyev, was founded in Saint Petersburg in 1912. In the twentieth century, it established branches in Western Europe and in 1933, the Berlin branch relocated to France, where the organization was active in rescuing Jewish children during the war.
89 The association in question was probably the Foster Parents Plan for War Children; correspondence with that organization. AŻIH, TOZ, file no. 252. The files of the Society for the Protection of Jewish Health include lists of children who received assistance through the OSE (AŻIH, TOZ, file no. 202) as well as detailed questionnaires (and photographs) of children for whom such assistance was requested. AŻIH, TOZ, file no. 157–197.
90 It is known, for instance, that contributions from American benefactors other than the
substantial. Assistance from the Joint had a systemic character: The organization operated through existing institutions in Poland without directly intervening in their activities. Assistance from other organizations was provided for specific purposes, to particular institutions or individual children. Following the initial period of genuine poverty, the situation of children in institutions providing board and lodging, such as children’s homes and the so-called semi-boarding schools and kindergartens, improved with the arrival of aid from foreign Jewish organizations (primarily the Joint) and actually became better than in non-Jewish Polish institutions of that kind. Years later, former wards of children’s homes still recall their privileged situation, which, at least in some cases, was due to the institutions’ budgets.91

Communist and Zionist Educational Policies

Despite the initial political compromises by the Central Committee — the organization that was supposed to build Jewish life in Poland — its pedagogical guidelines for working with children were influenced by the Communist ideology. Two out of the five educational guidelines formulated in July 1945 spoke directly of the need to inculcate children with a positive attitude towards “Democratic Poland” (Communist Poland) and the Soviet Union, but they should not be interpreted as a merely political declaration, as they also included important points aimed at instilling a sense of human and national dignity and rebuilding the children’s self-esteem. Considering the time when the guidelines were formulated, they sound powerful and authentic. Educators believed that Democratic Poland offered Jewish

Joint Distribution Committee constituted less than five percent of the CKŻP’s budget for the first quarter of 1948. AŻIH, AJDC, file no. 539, p. 42. Presumably, a large part of the aid was intended for the children. It should be borne in mind that the CKŻP was not the only organization supported by foreign donors.

91 Children from the home in Otwock would attend meetings with Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz, where they encountered Polish orphans. “You know, it was not pleasant to see that we wore American clothes, and those children were ragged and poor,” Bażanowska, “To był mój dom,” p. 142. An allowance per child at the Jewish children’s home in Otwock was four times greater than at a home maintained by nuns in the same town. Bartosz Zawada, “Żydowski dom dziecka w Otwocku 1945–1948,” KHŻ, no. 1 (2005), p. 70. Of course, funding was not necessarily equally generous in all institutions of that kind: The children’s home in Otwock was a showpiece institution of sorts. Still, the situation of Jewish children in the board-and-lodging type institutions seems to have been better.
children many benefits, the most important of which was perhaps the therapeutic effect of both real and ideological equality.

Since each citizen has regained freedom and equality before the law..., Jewish children may consider themselves as equal in rights and opportunities to all other children. Their sense of inferiority, caused by Fascist thugs constantly trampling on their dignity, should disappear. At every opportunity, one must instill the following idea into them: The triumph of democracy has restored your humanity to you; now you are aware of your rights, it is up to you to take full advantage of them and, mindful of your equality, never to cringe before anyone.92

The ultimate measure of a person’s value was work.93 The greatest pedagogical weakness, which, over time, led to the erosion of that authentic and powerful idea, was the polemical context permeated with a growing hatred for “enemies of democracy.” Another pedagogical element was the demand to develop the children’s responsibility, altruism, and ability to cooperate, which were “Korczak’s values.” People’s recollections of the role of children’s self-government, one of Janusz Korczak’s fundamental concepts, indicate that it was effective and had good educational results.94

The Central Committee’s well-ordered, rich records, which are available in Poland, make it tempting to concentrate on its institutions. However, there is little doubt that during the early post-war years, the ideological and practical, albeit not political, influence of the Zionists was stronger. However, until 1948, it waned as a result of massive emigration, and any assessment of the later period is distorted by the administrative constraints imposed on their activities.

Aid to children was organized immediately after liberation by groups of all shades of the political spectrum. In Lublin, the Zionists organized an orphanage,95 and the Central Committee established a children’s home.
In 1946, considerably more children were in the Zionist organizations’ children’s homes and *kibbutzim* than in the committee’s children’s homes.\(^96\) According to the Joint report of summer 1946, practically the whole country was covered with a network of *kibbutzim* for adults and children.\(^97\) Just as the *kibbutzim* for adults, the Zionist institutions for children were, by definition, transitory structures. For young people, the communal character of life was frequently a refuge from literal as well as psychological and existential homelessness. As a young girl, former inmate of the Majdanek concentration camp, who joined a *kibbutz* of Hashomer Hatsair recalled:

> I am surrounded with a long forgotten warmth: the warmth of home. In my loneliness, how much I wished to stay here and find a family and fill the emptiness of my life with a clear goal!\(^98\)

Children often arrived at *kibbutzim* by chance, after suddenly learning about this possibility from friends or a *shaliah* (a Jewish emissary who would travel around the country).\(^99\) By 1947, most of the *kibbutzim* were no longer in Poland. Work patterns had changed, but Zionist influence was still substantial. All organizations devoted considerable attention to children’s summer holidays. Apart from other considerations, this period offered a good opportunity to extend their educational influence over children who...

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\(^{96}\) For instance, in late June 1946, 400 children were reported to be living in Borokhov Jugend *kibbutzim*; Hashomer Hatsair established its first children’s home in Sosnowiec in 1945. In the autumn of 1946, after a great wave of Jewish emigration from Poland, Mizrachi established a religious children’s home in Zabrze. Ihud Hanoar Hatzioni continued to run seven children’s homes with 400 children. Aleksiuń, *Dokąd dalej?*, pp. 159–161; Grzegorz Berendt, “Zjednoczenie Syjonistów-Demokratów ‘Ichud’ – z biało-niebieskimi sztandarami w morzu czerwonych sztandarów,” in Grabski and Berendt, eds., *Między emigracją a trwaniem*, p. 165. At the same time, over 800 children lived in 11 CKŻP children’s homes. Datner-Śpiewak, “Instytucje opieki,” table, p. 40.

\(^{97}\) The report mentions 173 *kibbutzim* and children’s homes. Most of the *kibbutzim* must have been ephemeral institutions. At the time, the Zionist organizations reportedly had a total of approximately 13,000 children in their care. Aleksiuń, *Dokąd dalej?*, p. 171. According to CKŻP sources, in mid-1946, the organization was taking care of over 20,000 children. *Zarys działalności Centralnego Komitetu*, p. 10. No doubt, “Zionist” children were among those receiving material assistance from the CKŻP.

\(^{98}\) Aleksiuń, *Dokąd dalej?*, p. 136.

did not take part in the organizations’ activities during the rest of the year.\textsuperscript{100} The summer camp in 1947 was a mass undertaking. According to the Joint’s sources, which can be considered objectively as the provider of funding for the activity, 7,000 out of 12,000 Jewish children in Poland (excluding those in children’s homes) went to summer camps. Summer camps run by various Zionist organizations had almost as many participants as those run by the Central Committee.\textsuperscript{101} These data are likely to be underestimated in the case of Zionist organizations.

It can be assumed that Zionist children’s institutions were predominantly left-wing organizations. The educational objective, as we read in an article written for the anniversary of the founding of a Hebrew school in Kraków, was to liberate children’s “tortured souls” of “various taboos and complexes” and to restore their faith in their own nation and thereby also in humanity.\textsuperscript{102} This required special, “delicate and subtle” methods of education. The Hebrew school curriculum would be designed in such a manner that “teaching and upbringing would be rooted in Hebrew culture and tradition” while, at the same time, developing “the new Hebrew culture, which was being built in Palestine.” This is because it is impossible to speak of education unless it is firmly rooted in national culture, and unless it has “a grand and imminent goal.” This should combine nationalistic tradition and “universal ideas of progress and development.”\textsuperscript{103}

Representatives of left-wing Zionism, who believed in the creation of a “democratic, progressive” Jewish state, endeavored to combine specific national elements with values shared by people all over the world. In their opinion, the latter were the ideas of development and progress. It was a therapeutic program, which bore a certain resemblance to the Communist-Jewish concept of restoring human dignity but emphasizing different elements.

\textsuperscript{100} It was particularly evident in the 1960s, when summer camps became the most important institution for Jewish youth in Poland.

\textsuperscript{101} A total of 2,160 children attended CKŻP summer camps; 1,950 children went to camps organized by Zionist organizations; and 2,520 to those run by the TOZ. Although Zionist activities related to children were coordinated by the Hechalutz organization, each Zionist group had its own summer camps. The largest, Hashomer Hatzair, had 1,000 children; the smallest, Gordonia, had 150. AŻIH, AJDC, file no. 541, pp. 3–4.


\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
II. The 1950–1956 Period

Regulation of the Jewish institutions’ legal status in Poland took several years;\textsuperscript{104} intense negotiations on the nationalization of the Central Committee schools continued until early 1948. State responsibility for Jewish schools or at least state contribution to their funding was the dream of pre-war Jewish activists and politicians.\textsuperscript{105} Obviously, they imagined that, although the state funded the schools, it would not intervene in their curriculum or functioning provided they met certain general conditions. They argued that the state has the right to make certain requirements of its minorities, including minority educational institutions. However, the nationalization of Jewish institutions for children in People’s Poland took place under the conditions of the gradual Stalinization of the country and was understood as making them increasingly subordinate to the State. Nationalization was a factor in eliminating pluralism on the social level as well, and this was obviously not limited to Jewish organizations.

Apart from formal and legal issues, including the problem of property rights, there was the question of which schools would be nationalized. The Central Committee generally opposed the purely mechanical, quantitative criterion, whereby only large schools were to be taken over by the state, as the Ministry of Education proposed. The difference of opinions was particularly evident in the case of high schools. Minorities usually find it difficult to motivate students to attend minority post-elementary schools. In the 1947/1948 school year, there were middle school\textsuperscript{106} classes with Yiddish as a language of instruction only in Kraków, Łódź, and Wrocław, and despite this


\textsuperscript{105} “Among the painful and tangled issues of Jewish life in Poland, one of the most important questions, or even the most important question, is Jewish schools,” wrote Arie Tartakower in 1937 in “Problemy szkolnictwa żydowskiego w Polsce.” The primary problem of the education system was the lack of state-owned schools. Jews who could not afford private Jewish schools (and the number of so-called szabasówki — between the wars, these were elementary schools for Jews in which Saturday was a day of rest while instruction took place on Sundays — kept on decreasing) attended Polish schools, which, in the Jewish activists’ opinion, caused children to lose touch with their own religion and national culture.

\textsuperscript{106} A four-year junior high school attended by children aged 12–16.
small number, the committee rejected the idea of creating one high school in Wrocław, in place of all others. The order of the minister of education of April 1949 on the nationalization of 18 Jewish schools, which was greeted by Jewish Communists as a decision of historical significance, did not take into account the wave of emigration which started towards the end of that year. Apart from emigration, which decimated Jewish communities in Poland, there was also internal Jewish migration from small towns to large cities. In this case, the main reason was to search for work and a favorable living environment. The mechanism of closing down schools which were losing students usually consisted of merging them with schools of the Society of the Friends of Children (because of their secular character). Some Polish children were admitted, at least initially, into Jewish children's homes in numbers that guaranteed the predominance of Jewish children and with permission from the TSKŻ. By moving children from some of the smaller institutions to the larger ones, “spatial distribution was also reorganized.”

The fate of the children's home in Kraków is known from Bażanowska’s research. In autumn 1956, during a reunion organized by the home, most of the former wards opted for emigrating. Their recollections of this event shed light on the children’s motivations: the wish to alter their situation, leaving the gray world for a colored one, and to join “their own folks” and escape antisemitism in Poland. In November of that year, in a letter to the head of the children’s home, a high-ranking official of the Ministry of Education suggested that:

Difficulties should not be caused to young people, if they (applied) to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for permission to leave for Israel, and with regard to additional provisions for children, arrangements should be made with the Union of Polish Jews in Kraków.

In March 1957, the children left in four groups for Italy and then proceeded to kibbutzim in Israel. The children's home in Kraków was closed.

The aim of the curriculum of nationalized Jewish schools was to integrate the Jews into Polish society. This demand was not unreasonable

107 Berendt, Życie żydowskie, pp. 96–97.
110 Ibid., pp. 127–128.
111 AŻIH, TSKŻ, p. 64.
112 The Polish-Jewish integration was supposed to take concrete forms, for instance in
in itself, although, under the prevailing circumstances, it meant, primarily, integration with state ideology, represented by the Communist Party. Nevertheless, in early 1949, at a conference of representatives of the Jewish school system, Ludwik Łozowski presented a relatively non-ideological paper, devoting a great deal of attention to very concrete questions: At which point in the child’s development and in which language should particular subjects be taught in order to promote a harmonious formation of the personality of an individual who would function in both Polish and Jewish culture? As Łozowski strongly emphasized, the Polish language should be taught only from the second grade on (as it had been until then, at least theoretically, in the Central Committee schools), whereas all other subjects should be taught in Yiddish until the fifth grade. The teaching of Hebrew and Hebrew literature was discussed at length, and a lecture was given on the State of Israel. However, civic integration involved being subjected to the influence of socialist ideas, which were the same for all citizens, albeit expressed in a national form, i.e., in Yiddish.

Some influential Jewish Communists also objected to the “cult of form.” In August 1948, at a Polish Workers’ Party meeting, Szymon Zachariasz, activist on “the Jewish sphere,” stated:

An insignificant number of our comrades think that all Jewish children, without exception, should attend Jewish schools. Do they...realize that, in fact, this belief of theirs is a mere result of the pressure exerted on us by Jewish petty bourgeoisie? This kind of approach to the problem of Jewish education is an expression of the cult of form, and not content.

the area of cooperation between Polish and Yiddish writers; however, only a few of those plans succeeded. See Berendt, Życie żydowskie, p. 43.


114 Browsing through the annual volumes of Ilustrirte Folks-Shtime, a supplement to Folks-Shtime, from the years 1951–1955, is a very enlightening experience. Most of the photographs and topics are related to general Polish issues, or in fact general socialist ones.

115 Protokół z narady działaczy PPR, pracujących na odcinku żydowskim, odbytej w dniu 5 i 6 sierpnia 1948. AŽIH, Kolekcja Mirskiego (Minutes from a Meeting of Polish Workers’ Party Activists Working in the Jewish Sphere Held on August 5 and 6, 1948). AŽIH, Mirski’s Collection, 1948, p. 8.
In Jewish circles, Stalinization consisted, among other things, of a fierce offensive against “Jewish nationalism” (Zionism), which reached its climax in 1953; even children were dragged into the anti-Israeli campaign.\textsuperscript{116} The fight against nationalism resulted, among other things, in “cutting out” Jewish subjects in schools. Documents do not suggest that this had an immediate impact on school curricula, but there is no escaping the above conclusion. Hebrew classes were stopped at the beginning of the school year 1951/52, with adoption of the principle that there must always be more hours of Polish than Yiddish; in 1952/53, Jewish history was cancelled as a separate subject; and, in 1954/55, Yiddish ceased to be a language of instruction, but was taught as a subject. It is interesting that, at the same time, a 1952 directive on the Yiddish curriculum by the minister of education ordered that, for instance, in the fifth grade, “ancient fighters for justice and freedom,” such as “Yeshayahu, Amos, Bar Kokhba, Akiba, and others,” should be discussed.\textsuperscript{117} While there can be no doubt that Jewish history and Hebrew were cut out for ideological reasons, the question of Yiddish may have been more complex. In late 1956, in the atmosphere that had already been altered by Polish October (post-Stalinist thaw), Łozowski wrote that the parents continued “to strongly defend Polish as the language of instruction,”\textsuperscript{118} against the resistance of some teachers, especially in Szczecin and Łódź. According to him, the insufficient Jewishness of Jewish schools could have been remedied by reintroducing the subject of primary importance for their national character, namely, Jewish history. Indeed, the history of the people, taught in fact in Polish, was to become the bastion of national education.

The Society of the Friends of Children’s schools for Jewish children also seemed to be a good solution from the ideological point of view. Characteristic is the following caption under a photograph in \textit{Folks-Shtime’s} color supplement published in 1955: “In a number of state-owned schools attended

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\item[116] Rezolucja uchwalona przez szkołę w Bielawie (Resolution Adopted by a School in Bielawa); Bożena Szaynok, \textit{Z historią i Moskwą w tle. Polska i Izrael 1944–1968} (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [IPN], 2007), p. 239.
\item[117] AAN, Ministerstwo Oświaty, 1752, p. 136, Zarządzenie z 16 IX 1952. However, only nine hours per school year were to be devoted to this subject, whereas 35 hours were reserved for “scenes from the life of children and youth in the Soviet Union” and “the brotherhood of youth during the recent war.”
\item[118] AŻIH, TSKŻ, file no. 34, p. 144, Sytuacja w szkolnictwie żydowskim w świetle wizytacji i badań przeprowadzonych w roku szkolnym 1955/56 (The Situation in Jewish Schools in Light of Inspections and Research Conducted in the School Year 1955/56).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
by both Polish and Jewish children, Yiddish instruction has been introduced for the Jewish students at their parents’ request.” (The caption also explained that the photograph showed one of the society’s schools in Ziębice. This time, in 1955, signalled the beginning of the end of Stalinism, Folks-Shtime started a children’s supplement, Folks-Shtime far Undzere Kinder, which was intended to serve as a teaching aid for studying Yiddish. It contained, among other things, information for Yiddish lessons for children in TSKŻ clubs. The lessons were another way of teaching Yiddish, designed as supplementary classes for Jewish children attending Polish schools, in practice, schools of the Society of the Friends of Children. Reports from a slightly later period indicate that parents preferred Yiddish courses offered by the TSKŻ to Yiddish classes in schools. The overwhelming impression is that this attitude was related to fear, or at least to some considerable inconvenience. As numerous memoirs and documents suggest, the antisemitism that accompanied the political thaw was frequently harmful to children.

In cities with Jewish schools, parents often chose the Society of the Friends of Children’s schools because they were “superior.” However, sometimes parents were divided on this issue: One of them preferred the Jewish school, and the other the society’s school. It depended on the degree of integration the parents wanted in Polish society. Jewish schools were secular, or actually atheistic: Students did not have holidays on Jewish feast days. While this feature persisted until they ceased operation in 1968, there were sporadic cases of celebrations on Hanukkah and Purim. However, the schools marked the anniversaries of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The historical interpretation of the uprising had little to do with actual events, but the message was clear: Jews did not die alone; they died along with others for a common cause.

119 For a reproduction of the photograph, see Berendt, Życie żydowskie, p. 393.
120 The clubs were in Bytom and Sosnowiec in Upper Silesia; Folks-Shtime far Undzere Kinder (1956), p. 1319, 1327.
121 The Society’s schools, however, were not only a good ideological but also a practical solution. In those “bubbles of socialism,” as Wilhelm Dichter called them, children were safe from antisemitism. See Wilhelm Dichter, Szkoła bezbożników (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1999).
122 This is from a conversation with Szymon Fisz about a school in Legnica, in March 2008. While Dora from Wałbrzych recalled, “I had just turned seven, and my mom wanted to send me to the Jewish school. But Dad was very indignant: ‘She doesn’t need any Jewish, any Yiddish! She’s in Poland, let her learn Polish!’” Joanna Wiszniewicz, Życie przecięte. Opowieści pokolenia Marca (Wolowiec: Czarne, 2008), p. 195, 199. The children of some Jewish activists did not attend Jewish schools on account of their “separatism.”
if “the others” were socially and politically narrow-minded, internationalism was considered to give a valuable sense of community.

Łozowski pointed out in the above-mentioned report for the 1955/56 school year, that the increase in the number of students attending Jewish schools “in recent years [means] that these schools [have] a reliable enrolment base, unless some unpredictable circumstances, such as emigration of the Jewish population, [shatter] those prospects.” The mass emigration, which began in 1957, radically altered the prospects in Jewish schools.

III. The 1956–1968 Period

The “grassroots” antisemitism accompanying the political thaw also hurt Jewish children. They were accustomed to being taunted and called names, but antisemitism now openly reemerged, which was particularly painful for the parents. The introduction of religious instruction in schools certainly did not improve the situation for Jewish children. The contemporary press reported on antisemitic incidents among children. It is difficult to assess the extent of that phenomenon, but the fact that such cases were “not infrequent” and that educators did not react decisively enough sufficed to generate a sense of terror among the parents.123

However, the return of overt antisemitism was not the only factor behind the emigration at that time. In 1966, a short book entitled Nasze życie. Zbiór opowiadania młodzieży uratowanej z zagłady hitlerowskiej (Our Lives. A Collection of Accounts by Young Survivors of the Holocaust) was published in Israel.124 It included over 20 short accounts by young people brought up in children’s homes in Poland, most of whom left the country in early 1957. Miriam (Maria) Mariańska wrote the introduction. The young people, who came to Israel with Aliyat Hanoar (Youth Aliyah), described their wartime experiences living in children’s homes after the war, and their reunion in December 1956, which was held at the children’s home in Kraków, the only remaining Jewish institution of its kind. After some debate, most of those present at that reunion opted to move to Israel. Already in March of the following year, the children in four groups immigrated via Italy to Israel.

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123 For more information on cases of antisemitism among children and teachers, as well as on the related press reports, see Berendt, Życie żydowskie, pp. 308–309. This issue was also frequently mentioned in the Joint’s reports from that period.
where they were placed in *kibbutzim* by Aliyat Hanoar representatives.\(^{125}\) No doubt, the emigration of children was prearranged (some authors of these memoirs use the expression “the *aliyah* was announced”), and the Polish authorities did not object. These memoirs, written three years after arrival in Israel, cast a new light on the motives for emigration among these young people under 25. For some, especially those who had already experienced adult life, the immediate reason for leaving Poland were antisemitic incidents; while others did not experience antisemitism, but claimed they left because they wanted to live in their homeland or to join their friends in a new life and kind of adventure. The decision to emigrate was sometimes difficult: “When the *aliyah* was announced, I decided to leave, but I did so with regret as I wanted to finish my education in the naval academy and become a sailor. I expected that I would not be able to study in Israel, but I wanted to go abroad and shed the lie [about my origin].”\(^{126}\) Janusz recalls:

> We did not leave because we had to, no one banished us, no one said: ‘We do not want you!’ We were left with a terrible fear and an inferiority complex about our Jewish origin. It was enough to hear a Pole saying ‘He is a Jew, I thought he was Polish’ to make us indignant because we regarded ourselves as equal Polish citizens. We were afraid of the future, and that is why we left Poland.\(^{127}\)

As a result of the wave of repatriation from the USSR in the late 1950s, the number of students did not decrease, despite emigration and, at the beginning of the 1958/59 school year, the number of schoolchildren registered was actually somewhat greater (over 2,300) than two years earlier.\(^{128}\) However, the composition of classes sometimes almost completely changed: The local Jews left and children of repatriates from the USSR arrived in their place. Little is known of the social make-up and education of Jews who came from the USSR. It can be presumed, however, that while repatriated children had poor knowledge of Jewish culture on account of the lack of Jewish education in the USSR, among the adults, there were those with an

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126 Memoir of Józef Z. in *Nasze życie*, p. 119.
127 Ibid., p. 118.
excellent education in this field. In October 1958, the Ministry of Education held a conference on the development of education for national minorities (not only for Jews), at which, among other things, “deeply rooted national complexes and traumas from the period of the last war...concerning Germans, Ukrainians, and Jews (in particular)” were discussed. These feelings prevented the administrative staff and teachers from adopting the appropriate attitude to issues relating to minority education. Several weeks after the conference, the TSKŻ sent a memorandum on school issues to the ministry, mentioning, among other things, the alarming shortage of teaching staff because of emigration, and difficulties with textbooks, the most serious being the lack of one on Jewish history (the subject had been restored into Jewish school curricula two years earlier, in June 1956). The memorandum also emphasized the need to restore Hebrew instruction and create a Department of Yiddish Philology at the University of Warsaw so as to improve the teaching standard of Yiddish language and literature. Such a department was not created, nor was the textbook for Jewish history written. In the 1940s until the early 1960s, the single-volume Historia Żydów (History of the Jews) by Shimon Dubnov was used for that purpose, as well as some works by Majer Bałaban. In 1964, Ber Mark’s long series of articles entitled “Tysiącletnie dzieje Żydów na ziemiach polskich” (A Thousand Years of Jewish History in Poland) was launched in Nasz Głos (a Polish-language supplement to Folks-Shtime started in 1957), and they were also used by teachers of Jewish history.

An analysis of the content of textbooks for Yiddish literature and the changes in them would be a valuable contribution to the study of the changing atmosphere around education. In this connection, a few short observations follow. In textbooks for upper grades published between 1957 and 1959, as well as during the entire period under discussion, there is a clear predominance of excerpts from the classics of Yiddish literature (this time

129 It is known that holders of academic titles, outstanding experts in Judaic subjects and Yiddish, taught in some Jewish schools, usually for short periods. A conversation with the author and Malka and Szymon Fisz about schools in Legnica and Wroclaw, March 2008. Repatriates also joined Folks-Shtime’s editorial team.
130 AAN, MO, 1751, p. 4.
131 AZIH, TSKŻ, file no. 64, Pismo ZG TSKŻ do MO z 8 VI 1956, 956 (Letter, June 8, 1956, from the TSKŻ General Executive to the Ministry of Education).
133 Information based on a conversation in November 2007 with Marek Web, who was a teacher at the school in Wroclaw in the 1960s.
including Sholem Asch), but they also contain texts by Yiddish writers who were already “publicly” known to have perished in the USSR (Fefer, Markish, and Bergelson). The textbook for lower grades includes excerpts from the classics, but also several short works by contemporary Yiddish writers living in Poland and the USSR, as well as some translations from Russian (mostly of Leo Tolstoy), Czech, Ukrainian, and Polish (such as Julian Tuwim and Stefania Grodzieńska).

After 1960, the number of schoolchildren, which, until some point, had been supplemented by repatriates, began to decrease rapidly and systematically. For instance, 147 students attended the school in Szczecin in December 1962, but by the end of the 1964/65 school year, the number had dropped to 78. In Dzierżoniów, there were 105 students in 1960, and 48 by the end of the 1963/64 school year. The Board of Education suggested that the schools in Dzierżoniów and Wałbrzych be turned into Polish schools by admitting Polish children, while Jewish students could study Jewish history and Yiddish as optional subjects. The TSKŻ rejected this offer, arguing that Jewish children would emigrate if deprived of their own schools, while “the press of the opposing camp [would] exploit that step to portray the attitude of the State to minority issues in a distorted light.” Issues of that kind were resolved by commissions consisting of representatives of the Voivodeship Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza — PZPR), the Office of Internal Affairs, the TSKŻ, and the Board of Education. It was decided that the schools would continue to operate in the following year, but without the first grade.

In 1966, which marked the beginning of the reform introducing the eight-year elementary school and the four-year high school, other school issues were also sorted out. There were four Jewish schools at the time: in

139 Ibid., p. 83.
Szczecin, Łódź, Legnica, and Wrocław, the latter three of which had high school classes. A letter from the TSKŻ to the Departmental Commission for Education in Non-Polish Languages of Instruction sounds dramatic:

The TSKŻ General Executive requests that Jewish schools be allowed to operate as previously. In other words, it requests the ministry to accept very small classes, since the alternative is to merge them, which, in the TSKŻ’s opinion, would result in the liquidation of these schools, because they would become completely unattractive.140

The Board of Education concurred with the TSKŻ’s view, claiming that:

[In] Wrocław a considerable number of Jewish children [attended] schools in their own school districts, and it [was] only the school transport and relatively good school meals that [persuaded] some parents to send their children to school with additional Yiddish instruction.141

The ministry accepted the Board of Education’s request, and considered the TSKŻ “as an exception.”

Thus, Jewish education in Poland after 1960 was a declining institution. Was its demise caused primarily by emigration or also by the transfer of children to Polish schools? Interestingly, there is no mention of the causes of this in either the ministry or TSKŻ sources. In view of the rapid changes, the emigration of several hundred people a year during the 1962–1967 period seems to have been the decisive factor.142

The TSKŻ realized the seriousness of the situation. The question of school education was discussed at their fourth convention in 1961. Issues raised there included the small number of students and difficulties in educating teachers of Yiddish. The Jewish press published appeals to alumni of Jewish schools to go to teachers’ training colleges, where, apart from general subjects, they would also study Jewish history and Yiddish for two years. The TSKŻ would provide scholarships and boarding house accom-

142 It appears that the emigration of March 1968 overshadowed the continual stream before 1967. For more on emigration to Israel from 1962 to 1967, see, for example, Szynok, Z historią i Moskwą w tle, p. 384.
In late 1961, branches of the TSKŻ began to actively organize discussion of their program among children and youth clubs. An attractive program for young people was essential, so, in keeping with the spirit of the times, bands, not necessarily playing Jewish music, became the main feature. Various reports suggest that the idea proved, at least partly, successful: For young people, the clubs became important and congenial places, mainly for social reasons. Efforts were made to prepare successors to teaching and summer camp staff to address a more serious emerging problem, as articles in the Jewish press indicated at the time: the continuity and future of the Jewish community. According to these, the involvement of “older youth, college students...and intelligentsia” was important for continuity. The Jewish milieu suffered from a shortage in these groups, and TSKŻ activists endeavored to attract them since, without them, there would not be any staff to work with young people.

In parallel to the school crisis, from 1958, considerable effort, which paid off in this case, was put into organizing summer camps. This was made possible by subsidies from the Joint. There was a great need for these summer camps as a way of involving the children of repatriates. They turned into an important instrument in their upbringing and, to some extent, their schooling. They were a significant experience in their participants’ lives, and a

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143 See a characteristic article: “Czekają na Was nasze szkoły” (Our Schools Are Waiting for You), Nasz Głos, vol. 2 (1962).

144 The seriousness of the staff shortage for working with young people is demonstrated by a letter from the TSKŻ General Executive to the head of the human resources department at the Ministry of National Defense requesting an early release for Samuel Tenenblat from an officer’s training course “because he [was] the only youth activist of the General Executive.” AŻIH, TSKŻ, file no. 34, letter, May 31, 1962. Tenenblat was also perceived as a charismatic figure by a number of participants in scout and other summer camps. See Wiszniewicz, Życie przecięte.


massive phenomenon on the scale of the Jewish community at the time. Every year, the camps had approximately 3,000 participants: students from Jewish schools as well as other young people.147 Thus, on the one hand, there was a decline of Jewish schools and on the other hand, a boom in summer camps, which were a loose form of Jewish socialization. Some of the children, like their parents, did not belong to the TSKŻ.148 Joanna Wiszniewicz describes this situation as follows: “The sense of group identity, maintained by Jewish institutions, had a decreasingly cultural and ethnic character and an increasingly social and psychological one.”149 There are many indications that Jewish schools were, above all, “Jewish places” and only secondarily, institutions for transmitting concrete content of Jewish culture.

What kind of people were Jewish children of the 1960s? As a result of the progressive assimilation and a “filtration process” through emigration (assuming that Jews who left Poland with successive waves of emigration were those more conscious of their Jewishness), many of the young people who remained in Poland were completely assimilated. The others fell within the spectrum, with young people from downtown schools in Warsaw at one end, and children of artisans in Szczecin or Lower Silesia at the other.150 Which models of Jewish life were presented to Jewish children? The TSKŻ was the main institution that “created models.” The social reach of religious congregations and their influence on young people, in particular, seemed incomparably smaller. However, it would be a mistake to ignore it altogether, especially in small towns of Lower Silesia, where religious Jews were still “visible” at the time.151 Aspects passed on in the family included the memories of the Holocaust and, in some families, elements of tradition, usually adjusted to the realities of life in Poland.

147 AŻIH, TSKŻ, file no. 34, Sprawozdanie ZG TSKŻ z przebiegu akcji kolonijnej w 1962 (Report of the TSKŻ General Executive on the Summer Camp Activities in 1962).
148 “Parents did not belong to the TSKŻ because any Jewish institution was out of the question or they did not approve of its profile.” For more information on various attitudes to this question, see, for instance, the account by Dora from Wałbrzych in Wiszniewicz, Życie przecięte, p. 195.
149 Wiszniewicz, “Dzieci i młodzież,” p. 269. Summer camps are mentioned as places where young people felt good and at ease in several accounts presented in Wiszniewicz, Życie przecięte.
150 Students of downtown schools in Warsaw were frequently children of the Communist Party elite. Wiszniewicz, “Dzieci i młodzież pochodzenia żydowskiego,” in Bergman and Zienkiewicz, eds., Żydzi Warszawy. Accounts in Wiszniewicz’s book Życie przecięte show the geographical and social diversification of the Jewish community.
151 Ibid., p. 201.
Wiszniewicz reconstructed the model worldview promoted by the TSKŻ among young people. It included such elements as anti-Israeli and anti-emigration attitudes, the conviction that “Jews were like all other nations,” integration into Polish society, non-religiousness (anti-religiousness), and socialism. Based on interviews with the Jewish youth of 1968, she also reconstructed their actual worldview. Unquestionably, two key elements were secularity and a pro-Israel attitude, even if the latter was a contrary reaction to official propaganda above all.

The Holocaust continued to occupy a high position on the school curriculum, although, as in earlier periods, it was primarily presented as marking the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and Janusz Korczak’s heroism. Anniversary events of the uprising (solemn and stately, especially in 1958 and 1963), the 1963 drawing competition for children on the subject of the Holocaust, the participation of schoolchildren in ceremonies at the death camps in Treblinka and Bełżec as well as in school and national commemorations of ghettos, the creation of the Dawidek Rubinowicz scout pack in Łódź, and literary works published in Nasz Glos are only a few examples of the Holocaust theme in forms available to children.

The antisemitic campaign of 1968 put an end to a certain form of Jewish life in Poland. The decline of Jewish schools demonstrated that, in any case, new forms were required for Jewish life to continue. This fact does not alter the role of the government and the Communist Party in 1968. The idea of cracking down on the Jewish community was not born just before March 1968, but long before the Six-Day War. This is evidenced by the rapidity with which the dismantling of Jewish institutions proceeded in the summer of 1967. Today more is known about the social and political atmosphere that prepared the ground for the March events. A school reform, which was to go into effect in the 1966/67 school year, removed Jewish history as a separate subject from the curriculum, along “with additional Yiddish

153 Ibid.
In 1967, the Ministry of Internal Affairs struck another well-aimed blow, demanding the liquidation of youth and children’s clubs. This demand was initially motivated by the fact that the education of children was under the Ministry of Education and, therefore, independent TSKŻ activities were incompatible with “the law on associations.” When some TSKŻ activists protested against the decisions preventing “children and youth from growing up in Jewish culture,” they were told by the ministry that “it [was] pointless to further maintain separate rules for the TSKŻ in this area, since past experiences [indicated] that children and youth involved in the activities of youth and children’s clubs [had] frequently [been] brought up in a Zionist spirit (e.g., repeated Zionist excesses at summer camps).” Thus, the demand to close down the youth clubs was proof of a genuine desire to suppress Jewish life in Poland.

How were the decisions to close down Jewish schools made? We have some knowledge of the situation in Szczecin and Lower Silesia. The school in Szczecin probably survived the longest: until the end of 1969. However, in 1968/69, it did become a branch of a Polish school, and lower-grade students were simply placed in Polish classes, but separate upper-grade classes were continued in spite of the small number of students (there were only 35 children in grades 5–8). However, by May 1969, only 20 students remained, and the classes were dissolved. The TSKŻ Wrocław branch solicited the support of public administration and the Communist Party authorities for the idea of creating the Lower Silesian center of Jewish schools in Wrocław, which would be formed by merging the schools in Legnica and Wrocław, but the proposal was rejected.

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The Polish authorities dissolved the Jewish institutions between 1967 and 1968, and these actions preceded the post-March wave of Jewish emigration from Poland. In Lower Silesia, the closing down of the Organization for the Development of Manufacturing and Agriculture among the Jewish Population in Poland (Organizacja Rozwoju Twórczości Przemysłowej Rolniczej wśród Ludności Żydowskiej w Polsce) and the welfare commissions,

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155 The author is greatly obliged to Adam Rok, who carried out archival research at the IPN for this information.
156 Ibid.
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financed by the Joint, began as early as mid-1967. As mentioned above, Jewish youth clubs were also due to be closed, which directly undermined the ability of the Jewish community to exert educational influence on their youth and children. The March 1968 antisemitic campaign drove the Jews out of Poland, enabling the completion of this project. The last to go were the schools as the most important institutions for spreading national culture. Jewish life went into hibernation for many years. The remaining “representative” Jewish institutions had negligible social reach and corresponding prestige. There were no young people or children among their members. As late as the 1980s, the book Remnants by Małgorzata Niezabitowska and Tomasz Tomaszewski, which contained photographs and brief texts on “the last Polish Jews,” seemed to be a very apt depiction of Jewish life in Poland.

The events of March 1968, leading to the near elimination of the Jewish community in Poland, were a tremendous shock, which initiated processes resulting in the community’s revival after 1989. The emergence and involvement of young people was a precondition for this revival. The shape of the new community is considered in another article in this volume.

Postscript

In 1994, a Lauder-Morasha private elementary school was founded in Warsaw. It is open to all students who accept the curriculum there, although priority is given to Jewish children. In 2000, a secondary branch of the school was started. In 1998, also on the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation’s initiative, a Lauder-Etz Chaim school was created in Wroclaw, and in the 2007/2008 school year, the first grade of secondary school was added. The schools’ curriculum includes one hour of Jewish culture, one hour of Jewish history, and two hours of Hebrew per week. Jewish curricula at both schools have been developed independently. The Lauder-Etz Chaim school announced that they would collect 1.5 million buttons to commemorate 1.5 million children who perished in the Holocaust.

158 Ibid.
160 See Helena Datner’s article, “The Contemporary Jewish Community in Poland and the Holocaust,” in this volume.
Before 1939, Poland was the largest center of Yiddish culture in the world. Out of 3,400,000 Jews who lived in Poland, around 3,000,000 either used Yiddish on a daily basis or could at least speak it. There were many theaters, including four professional troupes of actors in Warsaw alone, and Jewish cinema was developing. In its heyday, the Association of Yiddish Writers and Journalists had nearly 400 members, according to one of its secretaries; and from 1924, there was also a Yiddish section of the PEN Club in Warsaw — the only one of its kind in the world. The publishing sector was expanding rapidly: In the 1920s, in Warsaw alone, there were seven publishing houses for books in Yiddish (although, by the eve of World War II, only four remained). Shortly before the war, about 481 books were published in Yiddish in 1935 and 443 in 1937. The press was also blossoming. In the 1935–1937 period, a total of 230 periodicals came out in Yiddish. There were numerous secular and religious schools at all levels. From 1925, the Jewish Scientific Institute (YIVO) operated in Wilno (Vilnius), conducting wide-ranging research into the history and culture of Polish Jews, publishing many scholarly books and papers and, like the Institute of Judaic Studies in Warsaw, training Jewish teachers.

The Holocaust brought vast changes in Yiddish culture, in both quantity and quality. Both producers and consumers of Yiddish culture perished, and

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1 Varshaver Yidisher Kunst-Teater (VIKT), founded by Zygmunt Turkov and Ida Kamińska in 1924; Varshaver Nayer Yidisher Teater (VNIT), established by Yonas Turkov in 1929; Yung Teater, set up by Michał Weichert in 1932; and Vilner Trupe, a company founded in Vilna in 1916, and relocated to Warsaw in 1917.

2 This figure, which also includes Hebrew-language writers and journalists, is given by Ber I. Rozen in his memoirs Tlomatske 13, Mark Turkov, ed. (Buenos Aires: Tsentral-Farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1950), pp. 104–108.


4 Ibid.
entire institutions disappeared from the face of the earth. Out of the more than three million Polish Jews before the war, by July 1946, only 216,000 or so were registered with Jewish institutions, and the number declined successively thereafter.5 Although there was something of a revival in the early post-war years, due to lack of manpower, premises, and financial support, only one theater survived, performing occasionally to small audiences. The situation in publishing was similar — in the long term, only one publishing house kept on going, continuing until 1968, along with two periodicals, only one of which survived the antisemitic campaign in the late 1960s. From 1945 to 1949, the most dynamic and fruitful period for Yiddish culture in post-war Poland, the Association of Yiddish Writers and Journalists never reached 50 members and after 1949, altogether ceased functioning as an autonomous institution. Jewish cinema was irrevocably devastated. The number of schools dwindled steadily. The Jews who survived the war had to rebuild their culture from scratch.

A Salvaged Culture from 1944 to 1949

The 1944–1949 period witnessed an intense revival in Jewish cultural life. Among the most important institutions operating at that time (some of which reported to the Department of Culture and Propaganda at the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce — CKŻP) were the Association of Yiddish Writers, Journalists, and Artists in Poland (1944), which was subsequently subdivided into the Association of Yiddish Writers and Journalists, and the Union of Yiddish Stage Artists (1946); the Kinor Film Cooperative (1945); the Jewish Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts (1946); the Yidish Buch publishing house (1947); the Central Jewish Library (1945); and the Jewish Art and Cultural Society (Żydowskie Towarzystwo Kultury — ŻTK, 1947).

The Association of Yiddish Writers, Journalists, and Artists, headed by actor and theater director Yonas Turkov, was established in the autumn of 1944 in liberated Lublin. The first cultural event he organized was a concert of Jewish songs, performed by Diana Blumenfeld, which took place on

December 3, 1944. Turkov recalls that the audience consisted not only of Polish Jews, notably Dr. Emil Sommerstein, but also Polish and Soviet military and civilian personnel, who had not previously identified with Jewish culture:

It was interesting to observe the audience gathered there: senior officers and regular soldiers, ministers and government officials, partisan fighters, and camp victims — all of them wiping tears from their eyes when Diana sang her songs, which reminded them of their destroyed world. They were all full of joy at the great miracle of the survival of Yiddish songs and words, which had outlived their enemies.

During this period, the association’s name was connected with Yiddish programs broadcast on Lublin radio. On Zukh-Vinkl (Search Spot), the most important of these programs, details of survivors seeking relatives and friends in Poland and abroad were broadcast. As Yonas Turkov, the program’s initiator, explained:

I shared my job at the radio with Diana [Blumenfeld], who was the regular “broadcaster.” I collected and edited the materials, and also spoke [on the program] from time to time. Dr. E. Sommerstein broadcast his first appeal to the world on our program.... I also gave a brief round-up of Jewish news in Poland and, later, when I was given a third 15-minute slot (on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays), I broadcast information about the extermination — names of German perpetrators and, wherever they could be established, [names of the] towns the Nazi thugs came from.

In May 1946, the association split into two separate organizations, one for...
all kinds of writers (which drew on its pre-war traditions) and the other for people connected with the theater.

In mid-1946, the Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists’ headquarters, which had about 40 members, was at 32 Narutowicza Street, in Łódź. Membership was in constant flux as some writers emigrated and others returned from the Soviet Union. In addition to young and obscure writers, there were also members who had had some success before the war: Rachel Auerbach, Rachel Korn, Reyzl Zhikhliniski, Yisrael Ashendorf, Yuda Elberg, Khayim Leyb Fuks, Khayim Grade, Moyshe Grosman, Yitzhak Yanasovitsch, Efraim Kaganowski, Leyb Olitski, Yeshaye Shpigel, Avrom Sutzkever, and Avrom Zak. From the outset, the best-known and most talented survivors wanted to leave Poland.9 Those who stayed supported the political changes under way, although few of them were true creative personalities. Most of the active writers survived the war by escaping to the USSR, while barely a handful of the association’s members survived the war in Poland.

The association was headed by a board including Yonas Turkov, Yuda Elberg, Michał Mirski, and Ber (Bernard) Mark as successive chairmen; Moyshe Grosman and Aron TsOfnas as secretaries; and other members Maksymilian Tauchner, Yekhiel Hofer, and Rachel Auerbach.10 From autumn 1946, the Writers’ Association published a monthly literary journal, Yidishe Shriftn11 (with Binem Heller, Leyb Olitski, and David Sfard, as successive editors, assisted by an editorial team including David Sfard, Moyshe Shklar, and Ber Mark). The association was also the co-publisher of Dos Naye Lebn, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland’s official newspaper, which first came out in April 1945 in Łódź. The editorial team reflected the political forces in the committee: Michał Mirski from the Jewish Faction of the Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza — PPR) was the Editor-in-Chief, and he was succeeded by his fellow party member Bernard Mark.12

12 See Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska and Magdalena Ruta’s article, “Responses to the Holocaust in Polish and Yiddish Literature,” in this volume.
The Union of Jewish Stage Artists had 53 members. Although the first dramatic performances were staged in liberated Lublin in autumn 1944, the post-war rebirth of Jewish theater really began in Lower Silesia, where the first theater companies were established in Dzierżoniów/Rychbach and Wrocław as early as the fall of 1945. In the summer of 1946, all the theater groups merged into two permanent professional troupes: the Lower Silesia Jewish Theater, based in Wrocław, and the Jewish Theater in Łódź. Moyshe Lipman became Chairman of the artists’ union.

Alongside the “Film Polski” State Enterprise, established in mid-1945 in Łódź, the producers Saul and Izaak Goskind set up a cooperative, “Kinor” (an amalgamated abbreviation for the Polish “Kino-Organizacja,” “Cinema Organization”), which made films on Jewish subjects in Yiddish, with the Joint’s support. With the collaboration of the cameramen Adolf and Władysław Forbert, the composer Saul (Seweryn) Berezowski, and the Director Natan Gross, the cooperative made a series of documentary films (among them, one about Jewish settlements in Lower Silesia, and another about the fifth-anniversary commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), as well as two feature-length movies: Mir, Lebngeblibene (We Survivors) in 1948, a documentary about the revival of a Jewish community in Poland; and Undzere Kinder (Our Children) in 1949, a drama starring Shimen Dzhigan and Yisrael Shumakher, well-known comedy actors before the war. Owing to the lack of interest on the part of Jewish cultural organizations and state institutions, the completed films never came out for general release. This is what Natan Gross had to say about the “Kinor” cooperative’s strange situation:

The Jewish “Kinor” cooperative operates without support, advertising, and the minimum satisfaction filmmakers [usually] have on seeing

16 Ibid., pp. 98–99.
17 Natan Gross, Film żydowski w Polsce (Krakow: Rabid, 2002), pp. 117–133.
their finished work on the screen. The Jewish film establishment is ignored by all of society’s cultural institutions, and even by the Jewish press. It is not represented at any official congresses or meetings, and we even see such absurdities as Film Polski representatives invited to official gatherings at Jewish cultural institutions, while the Jewish film people are passed over.\footnote{Natan Gross, “Dlaczego taka obojętność? (Jeszcze o filmie żydowskim w Polsce),” \textit{Nasze Słowo}, vol. 9–10 (1949), p. 12. Quoted from Gross, \textit{Film żydowski}, p. 132.}

The cooperative suspended its operations in 1949, and its founders emigrated from Poland to Israel.

YIDDISH CULTURE IN POLAND AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

Grundig (July 1–12, 1949, Warsaw). The society also collected works by Jewish artists. After the society was disbanded, its collection of some 250 works became part of the Jewish Historical Institute’s (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny — ŻIH) collections. In addition, the society popularized art, commemorated artists murdered in the Holocaust by dedicating lectures to them and publishing articles about them in the Jewish press, and took an active part in saving and preserving historical relics. In the autumn of 1948, the society was incorporated into the ŻTK as the “art section.”

The publishing house Yidish Bukh, founded in Łódź in 1947 by David Sfard, was not the only one operating in Poland at that time. There was also the Nidershlezye publishing house in Lower Silesia, under the patronage of the Dos Naye Lebn newspaper and the Central Jewish Historical Commission. The Yidish Bukh was, however, the only one that remained active throughout the entire period, i.e., until 1969. For Sfard and his circle — members of the Jewish Faction of the Polish Workers’ Party who were involved with Jewish cultural life even before the war — Yidish Bukh was empirical proof of the vitality of the revived yishuv (Jewish settlement) in Poland. Sfard was constantly lobbying to increase the budget of the publishing house and improve the technical standard of the publications, claiming it was “a question of the publishing house’s and society’s honor.”

The Central Jewish Library, headed by Basia Berman, was charged with collecting books from institutional and private libraries salvaged during the war. These collections, too, were taken over by the Jewish Historical Institute in 1949.

The ŻTK was founded in the autumn of 1947, inspired by the Jewish Communists, primarily Hersh Smolar, Chairman of the CKZP’s Department of Culture and Propaganda. The association’s establishment, with David Sfard appointed as Head, was among the measures of the Jewish Faction

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22 Piątkowska, “Jewish Society,” p. 78.
23 Ibid., p. 81. For more information on the ŻIH museum’s painting collections, see Muzeum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego, introduction by Magdalena Siermanska and Renata Piątkowska (Warsaw: Auriga Wydawnictwo Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1995).
25 Ibid., p. 93, note 72.
of the Polish Workers’ Party aimed at centralizing the “Jewish street’s” cultural and other initiatives. An efficient recruitment drive resulted in a great increase in the ŻTK branches and members within a year: from 33 branches and 6,687 members in 1948 to 50 branches and 13,870 members in 1949. The association ran social clubs, cultural centers, drama groups, orchestras, choirs, libraries, and night classes. Over the first two years of operation, the association organized around 2,000 events in which approximately 400,000 people participated. Significantly, there was debate over the language in which these activities should be run. In his report on the first 14 months of the association’s work, Sfard pointed out that many young people could not speak Yiddish, and mentioned linguistic problems when Jews and Poles cooperated on cultural projects. At the time, Adolf Berman, Chairman of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, essentially believed that cultural work should be in Yiddish, in order to combat the increasing trend toward assimilation.

Although the early post-war years saw a major revival in the market for the trilingual Jewish press in Poland, lack of a mass-circulation daily newspaper in Yiddish with a similar role to the Haynt or Der Moment before 1939 was a fundamental difference, as compared to the pre-war period. On the occasion of the hundredth edition of Dos Naye Lebn in 1947, many voices were in favor of relaunching it as a daily (with a planned circulation of 10,000 copies), but this never happened.

The newspaper columns were a forum for the competing visions of yetsiyes Poyln (Exodus from Poland — the Zionists’ slogan) and nusekh Poyln (The Polish Alternative), calling for a progressive Jewish culture within a democratic Poland voiced by the Jewish Communists. This, of course, reflected the debates waging within the Central Committee and, more broadly, the “Jewish street.” But, as before the war, the Zionists aired their

29 AŽIH, CKŻP Prezydium 15, report 4a, pp. 27–34.
31 According to information given by Ber Mark at the CKŻP Presidium session, the censor refused permission. AŽIH, CKŻP Prezydium 11, report no. 54, page 13.
views chiefly via the Polish-language press, *Opinia* and *Mosty*. By contrast, the *Nusekh Poyln* vision, present from the outset in *Folks-Shtime*, the official paper of the Jewish Faction of the Polish Workers’ Party, also became increasingly dominant in *Dos Naye Lebn*. From mid-1948, *Dos Naye Lebn*, which touted staying in Poland as the only option, gradually became less and less Jewish in nature and interests.  

The cultural monthly *Yidishe Shriftn* was open to those still in Poland, even if they were not connected with Communism (such as Khayim Grade and Rachel Auerbach). The Holocaust was the dominant subject until the end of 1948. In spite of *Yidishe Shriftn*’s pluralist appearance, the influence of the Communist ideology on its profile increased. In the last few issues of 1949, over 50 percent of the articles published were propaganda. The first period of this monthly came to a close with lengthy texts on Socialist Realism in culture, printed in the summer and autumn of 1949, in preparation for the ŻTK’s congress.

The activities of both the newly founded and reactivated cultural institutions and journals share a number of characteristic features of this period. The first is the dominance of the Holocaust theme. This began by commemorating artists who perished in the Holocaust and reviving their work. In 1946, the Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists brought out a literary almanac, *Yidishe Shriftn: Literarish Zamlbuch* (not to be confused with the monthly journal of the same title), dubbed by one critic as the “Book of Lamentations.” In the foreword, the editorial team emphasized the extremely difficult technical conditions under which the anthology had been published. Writers who had returned “to the graves of their loved ones,” i.e., to Poland, where so many people had been murdered in the Holocaust, also found themselves in a difficult position. But they felt a sense of mission, hoping their own work would be a continuation of pre-war cultural life, and a contribution to a revival of the Yiddish word in Poland. At the same time, they stressed their spiritual bond with Yiddish artists all over the world. The almanac opened with a list of 262 names of writers who

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had perished during the war *al kidush haShem* (in sanctification of God’s name). This was accompanied by 13 photographs spread throughout the publication and commemorative articles about these writers, including Shloyme Gilbert, Shimen Horontschik, and Yekhiel Lerer. The almanac contained reviews and political propaganda, but, above all, literary texts about the Holocaust by various authors, including Rachel Korn, Khayim Grade, Avrom Sutzkever, Reyzl Zhikhlinski, and Rachel Auerbach, mostly written in the Soviet Union. This subject also dominated the first Yidish Bukh publications: *Oyf di khurves* (In the Ruins) by Khayim Grade, *Malkhes geto* (The Kingdom of the Ghetto) by Yeshaye Shpigl, *Mit ash oyfn kop* (With Ashes on My Head) by Avrom Zak, *Durkh shotn un sheyn* (Through the Shadow and the Glare) by Binem Heller, and *Megilas Yid* (The Book of the Jews) by Moyshe Knapheys, among others.

In 1948, to mark the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the Jewish Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts announced a competition for an anniversary poster “symbolizing the Jewish people’s heroic battle with the Nazi occupiers”:

> The response was considerable.... Sixty-one works were sent in.... Most artists opted for realism, though not naturalistic, but rather monumental. They avoided excessive expression, but their works were dominated by pathos. Although the doctrine of Socialist Realism was not yet enforced in Poland, it was nevertheless known and recommended, which was certainly why so many competition entries fully employed its principles.... [The artists made reference] to the image of the mighty hero, which was widespread in nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture, and particularly in Polish culture.... In order to honor and pay tribute to the memory [of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising] the image of the hero, not the victim, was needed. Hence, the propagandist tone of many of the posters, which showed the fighters’ heroism as opposed to the “passive ones” who went “submissively” to their deaths.34

On the anniversaries of the uprising, all kinds of commemorative texts appeared in the press — journalistic, memoirs, poetry, and fiction.

One characteristic feature of the revived institutions was their dual role:

serving as a place where people could attend lectures or concerts, watch plays, or meet writers; as well as providing support for Jewish artists, and general welfare for members — accommodation, clothing, food, and medical treatment when necessary. In the ŻIH Archive section on the CKŻP’s Department of Culture and Propaganda, there is a list kept by the Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists of the benefits given to writers in 1946.

It is also worth mentioning changes in the geography of Yiddish cultural life in Poland, as compared to the pre-1939 period. As successive areas of the country were liberated, the Jews slowly began to leave Lublin, mainly for Warsaw and Łódź. Existing Jewish institutions were relocated to Łódź, and new ones started, since it was easier to find suitable premises there. This westward shift in Poland’s borders meant that Wilno (Vilnius), which was a major pre-war Yiddish cultural center, disappeared from the map of Jewish cultural life in Poland, while a new center was created in Lower Silesia — mainly in Wrocław and also in Szczecin. The Lower Silesian Jewish Theater was an indication of the significance of this new cultural center. On many occasions, not only in the early years, some voices called for transferring the coordination of cultural work from Warsaw to Lower Silesia, which had the largest and least assimilated Jewish population.35

The ŻTK’s National Congress on September 14–16, 1949, was held in Wrocław. The “ideological foundations for cultural creativity”36 were laid out, and its objectives were outlined.37 The poet Binem Heller, in a paper on literature, spoke about the beginnings of progressive Yiddish poetry and prose between the wars, citing works by Jewish writers from Poland “born during the war on Soviet soil”:

In their ideological and artistic quality, [they] outclassed anything created in the past [i.e., up to 1949 — J.N.-K., M.R.] in the field of Yiddish

35 For instance, in 1956, Herman Brecher, Director of the Wrocław branch of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ), said: “Many things in our propaganda are done solely for representative purposes. The relocation of the Jewish Theater’s seat to Warsaw, even though the Jewish population is concentrated in Lower Silesia, serves as one example of this. Jewish writers should not be living in Warsaw, but in Lower Silesia.” AŻIH, TSKŻ, file no. 74, report from the extended TSKŻ plenary meeting in Wrocław on May 6–7, 1956.


literature in Poland. This was the result of Yiddish writers from Poland coming into contact with the immense flair of creativity in the USSR. It was...the fertilizing effect of the great Soviet literature.... When we read works from this period, we see that the Yiddish writers did not allow themselves to be blinded by pain, and, thanks to the Soviet nation’s great optimism, were also overwhelmed by faith that [they]...would survive the nightmare of fascist rule.38

Heller called for the following image of People’s Poland in the new literature:

At this point we should emphasize that in drawing writers’ attention to the problems of the present, we do not consider the ban...on subjects from the recent or even the more distant past. Of course, writers may touch on the entire spectrum of issues from the past, as long as they examine the historical material in the light of our own days... — socialist realism.39

In the ideologists’ view, literature was not keeping abreast of the political changes five years after the war, because:

Artistically, the Yiddish writer has not yet completely come to terms with the horror of the very recent past [the Holocaust — J.N.-K., M.R.]. On the whole, it should be noted, that the life and work of the Jewish writers in Poland are distant from the popular masses. One often has the feeling that, sitting alone in their rooms, they feel a sense of self-satisfaction, arising from the certainty that past years have given them plenty of images, moods, material, and experiences. Yet, this is a false suggestion. If writers do not absorb today’s atmosphere, everything they create about yesterday will...be dead fruit.40

The resolution passed at the end of the congress enumerated the key aims for Jewish theater, scholarship, education, art, and the association’s other

39 Ibid., p. 129.
40 Ibid., pp. 129–130.
areas of activity. Thus, Jewish culture embarked on the “wide road of socialist realism.”

**Culture in the Service of Ideology from 1950 to 1955**

In the first half of the 1950s, Yiddish culture underwent great schematization in a bid to harness it in the service of socialism. Also during this time, the number of cultural institutions was sharply reduced. After the Wroclaw congress, the Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists decided to forego its autonomy, and was incorporated into the Polish Writers’ Union (Związek Literatów Polskich — ZLP) as the Yiddish Writers’ Club, with Ber Mark as their representative on the union’s executive. The Central Committee merged with the ŻTK to create the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów — TSKŻ), a body to monitor and coordinate all cultural activities in Yiddish. *Dos Naye Lebn* was merged with the existing newspaper of the Jewish Faction of the Polish United Workers’ Party, *Folks-Shitme*, under the latter name. Both the literary monthly *Yidishe Shriftn* and the Yidish Bukh publishing house remained. All these cultural initiatives came under the TSKŻ activists’ management.

The situation of Yiddish culture in Poland in the first half of the 1950s was unique. On the one hand, Poland was the only country in the Eastern Bloc (except Romania) at that time, where the state accepted and subsidized Jewish cultural activity. It should be noted that the USSR practically had denied all cultural life in Yiddish to the large Jewish minority there since the late 1940s, when the newspaper *Eynikayt* and the Der Emes publishing house were closed down. The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was dissolved, and the committee’s foremost Jewish activists, as well as the leading lights in Yiddish-language culture in the USSR, were killed on August 12, 1952. The number of Jews in the People’s Republic of Poland in 1954 is estimated at around 75,000, as compared to the Jewish community of nearly

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41 "Rezolucja w sprawie literatury,” Zjazd Żydowskiego Towarzystwa Kultury, p. 213.
43 Berendt, *Życie żydowskie*, p. 44. Albert Stankowski cites the figure of 69,000 Jews in 1955. Stankowski, "Nowe spojrzenie," p. 120.
250,000 in mid-1946, 11,640 of whom were TSKŻ members.\textsuperscript{44} According to Grzegorz Berendt, only 40–50 percent of Poland’s Jews were involved in TSKŻ activities.\textsuperscript{45} Thus, at most, 50 percent of the Jewish community in Poland participated in the association’s cultural activities. This was undoubtedly due to both the post-war wave of emigration and rapidly progressing acculturation and linguistic assimilation. Even the families of the leading TSKŻ representatives were not immune to this — the children of Hersh Smolar, David Sfard, Ber Mark, and Michał Mirski spoke only, or mainly, Polish.\textsuperscript{46}

Cultural activity in Yiddish was also kept within extremely narrow limits during this period — in accordance with the Socialist Realist principles that held sway, art and literature had to be national in form and socialist in content. This is most clearly illustrated by Yidish Bukh’s publishing profile for 1950–1955 — a time of mass production, with up to 30 titles published a year. For the most part, however, quantity did not equal quality. The exceptions were classical Yiddish works — several volumes of selected works of all the major authors and Binem Heller’s poetry — which had been published by 1956. Although at the time Heller fully deserved to be considered “politically involved,” he was unquestionably the most talented Jewish poet in the People’s Republic of Poland. (Only published after he immigrated to Israel in 1957, Heller’s book, \textit{Baym rand}, remains the best known poetic examination of conscience on the rejection of the Communist idea written in Yiddish).\textsuperscript{47} Aside from poetry, a great deal of ideological literature was published, including translations of some of Lenin’s and Stalin’s works. Several comments in \textit{Yidishe Shriftn} expressed regret that writers were not addressing contemporary topics and the present-day life of Jewish workers.\textsuperscript{48} Hence, Yidish Bukh came up with the idea of publishing a series called “Biblioteczka Przodowników Pracy i Racjonalizatorów” (Library of


\textsuperscript{45} Berendt, \textit{Życie żydowskie}, p. 256.

\textsuperscript{46} Leon Sfard, personal communication, September 2004.


Champions of Labor and Rationalizers), which profiled model champions of labor and rationalizers — the ideals of Socialist Realist literature. Significant emphasis was placed not only on producing, but also distributing, books. Toward this end, members of the book and press committees in the local TSKŻ branches worked hard to encourage people to take out annual subscriptions to all Yidish Bukh publications. Of course, the number of subscribers was not necessarily equal to the actual readers of Yiddish books in Poland. Indeed, the activists themselves certainly recognized this, as David Sfard’s telling call at the third TSKŻ Congress in 1956 shows: “Vifl abonentn fun yidishn bukh, azoyfil leyener” ([There should be] as many readers of Yiddish books as subscribers).

Emigration decimated not only the audience for Yiddish culture but also its creators. In 1954, eight out of a total of 312 members of the ZLP’s Warsaw branch were writing in Yiddish. They were: Binem Heller, Shloyme Łastik, Ber Mark, Michał Mirski, Leyb Olitski, Hadasa Rubin, David Sfard, and Hersh Smolar. Another five were candidate members: Shmuel Fishman, Volf Hersh Ivan, Leyb Kupershmidt, Moyshe Shklarek, and Moyshe Zaltsman. In addition, there were a few other writers who lived outside Warsaw, such as Kalman Segal in Katowice and Eliahu Rayzman in Szczecin. Overall, at most, there were probably 20 active writers in Yiddish in Poland during that period. The statistics for the theater are slightly better — the State Jewish Theater in the 1954/1955 season included 41 actors. The TSKŻ members holding responsibility for culture saw advantages in that situation. David Sfard wrote about this in his memoirs:

The beginning really did inspire hope. The government not only permitted but also supported all Jewish cultural initiatives. This captivated many sober-minded writers who had not initially even thought about making a future for themselves in Poland. They treated [this situation] as a temporary thing, as a trial. However, at the time, Poland was the only country where writers not only did not have to pay to have their

51 AAN, KC PZPR, Department of Culture, file no. 237/XVIII-131, pp. 34–54.
52 Gąssowski, Państwowy Teatr Żydowski, p. 276.
books published, but they even received a decent fee. Actors could find work in a Jewish theater; and historians in the Jewish Historical Institute. Even social activists could have rewarding lives in the Jewish community.\(^{53}\)

Those writers who nevertheless did decide to leave the country, mainly due to increasing political pressure and the tangible antisemitic mood, and also for financial reasons, disagreed with this view. Nathan Cohen, who researched the reasons why Yiddish authors decided to emigrate from Poland, noted about the poet Khayim Leyb Fuks:

> [He] linked his colleagues’ emigration less to the political situation than to the lack of possibilities of making a living in such conditions. A writer receives next to nothing for his publications, there are hardly any new books being published, and after more than six or eight performances of a play, there is no audience left.\(^{54}\)

As mentioned above, of the Yiddish press, \textit{Folks-Shtime} and \textit{Yidishe Shriftn} survived.\(^{55}\) In the first half of the 1950s, these were both propaganda tools, above all. \textit{Folks-Shtime} was a more modest Yiddish variant of \textit{Trybuna Ludu}, the Polish Communist Party’s main organ.\(^{56}\) It included translations of the full texts of speeches by state and party officials and also, for instance, a complete translation of the People’s Republic of Poland’s Constitution.\(^{57}\) The political drift of \textit{Yidishe Shriftn} was similar.\(^{58}\) They mainly published and reviewed Yiddish and Soviet Socialist Realist literature, along with selected Yiddish classics, and “specially selected” items, such as works by Stalin on


\(^{55}\) \textit{Bleter far Geshikhte}, published by ŻIH, is not included, since it was a specialist periodical.

\(^{56}\) Berendt, \textit{Życie żydowskie}, p. 241.

\(^{57}\) Grzegorz Berendt, “Cele, treść i metody oddziaływania prasy żydowskiej w Polsce w latach 1949–1956,” in Piotr Semków, ed., \textit{Propaganda PRL: wybrane problemy} (Gdansk: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2004), p. 85. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that during this period \textit{Folks-Shtime} was the only Jewish newspaper in the whole Eastern Bloc, except for Birobidzhaner Shtern.

Leninist thought, or the Rosenberg letters. Most space, however, was taken up by political propaganda related to current affairs, drawing attention to significant events for the history of the Communist movement (e.g., the October Revolution), discussing various congresses of the Polish United Workers’ Party and the Soviet Union’s Communist Party, attacking Zionism and imperialism, and explicating the genius of revolutionary leaders.

There was a similar situation in the theater world. In November 1949, in accordance with Ida Kamińska’s wishes, both Jewish theaters were nationalized and merged into a single company under the name of the State Jewish Theater, under Marian Melman and Ida Kamińska. Jakub Rotbaum, who returned from America in the autumn of 1949, delighted that the state had taken Jewish theater under its wing for the first time in Polish history, was appointed Chief Director. The Jewish Theater’s seat, initially in Wrocław, was moved to Łódź in May 1950. It moved into new premises, built with Jewish community funds, in February 1951. The Jewish Theater was not immune to the universal Stalinization of cultural life. The plays promoted the communist state’s ideology and politics. To fulfill this objective, “progressive themes were drawn out and heightened” in the traditional repertoire, and new plays with contemporary relevance were staged, e.g., Juliusz i Ethel (Julius and Ethel) by Leon Kruczkowski. Kamińska fell in line with these ideological demands out of concern for the theater’s survival. Personal reasons undoubtedly also came into play — both she and Rotbaum were attempting to obtain permission for close family members in the USSR to return to Poland. A few plays by Polish dramatists also found their way into the repertoire, but these were of minor importance in the theater’s history. According to critics’ reviews, the traditional Jewish repertoire was the theater’s greatest artistic asset, making it unique. A serious conflict flared up between the members of the two former companies: The Wrocław faction

59 Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, an American Jewish Communist couple, were sentenced to death for spying for the Soviet Union. The entire Communist world protested against the sentence, which was carried out at Sing-Sing prison in June 1953.
60 See the Jewish Theater’s repertoire from 1950 to 1955, in Gaśowski, Państwowy Teatr Żydowski, pp. 169–171.
61 Mirosława M. Bulat explains that, as a rule, press reviews would include an ideologically correct class interpretation, which was often at odds with the actual meaning of the play. Mirosława M. Bulat, “Polish Press and the Yiddish Theater in Poland (1947–1956) — Screens of Dialog. Part 1: Excerpts from the World of Appearance,” in Grözinger and Ruta, eds., Under the Red Banner, p. 63.
approached the authorities, through TSKŻ’s mediation, with a request to move the theater’s seat back to Wrocław. Indeed, in 1953, this took place. At the same time, Marian Melman, Kamińska’s husband, was removed as administrative director. To reconcile the two factions, Kamińska worked toward moving the theater to Warsaw, which she achieved two years later.64

After 1950, Yiddish culture in the People’s Republic of Poland was administered from above by a select group of people — TSKŻ activists, pre-war members of the Polish Communist Party who survived in the Soviet Union during the war. The leading lights included Hersh (Grzegorz) Smolar, TSKŻ Chairman, a journalist and Editor-in-Chief of Folks-Shtime; David Sfard, Secretary-General of the State Jewish Theater, an editor at Yidish Bukh and for Yidishe Shriftn, and the theater’s Literary Director; and Ber Mark, Director of the Jewish Historical Institute from 1949 until his death in 1966, remembered as a Holocaust historian, above all, but also a consummate expert on Yiddish literature, a subject on which he wrote widely.65 They promoted and sustained Yiddish culture, which undoubtedly had been a central feature of their upbringing, in the People’s Republic of Poland, in the only way possible, in their view, although today it would seem instrumental. Their belief may have been confirmed by both the top-down denigration of Yiddish culture in Israel and persecution of this culture in the USSR.

A Fading Culture from 1956 to 1968

It would be no exaggeration to say that the year 1956 rocked the foundations of Jewish cultural life in Poland. The possibility of emigration that presented itself at this point, which came as a blessing to many Polish Jews, was a curse for cultural activities. Those emigrating were readers of the Yiddish press, subscribers to Yidish Bukh (fast dwindling — from over 5,000 to just a few hundred),66 and audiences for the Jewish Theater. Creators of culture were emigrating too — among the writers, Leyb Olitski, Binem Heller, and Hadasa Rubin; among the actors, Yitzhak Turkov-Grudberg; and among the artists, Izaak Celnikier and Marek Oberlander. However, there were also changes for the better. Although only a small minority of those

65 Michał Mirski and Shmuel (Seweryn) Gurwicz could be added to this list, although they probably had slightly less influence on cultural matters.
66 AŻIH, Kolekcja Leopolda Treppera (The Leopold Trepper Collection), file no. 3, p. 25.

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who came from the USSR in the 1956 wave of repatriation stayed in Poland, they nevertheless swelled the ranks of the Yiddish culture community (unlike the assimilated intelligentsia of Jewish descent, for example). Some of them took an active part in cultural work, among them Leyb Domb (Leopold Trepper), who became Director of Yidish Bukh. Names that began to appear in the press included: Shloyme Belis-Legis, Mark Rakowski, Yisrael Emiot, Yankel Gutkovitsch, and Mendel Tempel. Moyshe Broderson was undoubtedly the most brilliant of the repatriated artists, but, exhausted and worn down by his years in the Soviet camps, he died suddenly just one month after he arrived in Warsaw. Others who returned to Poland included the actors Avrom Morevski and Ruth Kamińska (Ida Kamińska’s daughter). Morevski, who embarked on his acting career long before the war, directed a production of An-sky’s *The Dybbuk* at the State Jewish Theater in 1957, playing the part of the Miropol Rebbe — the same role he had played in the world premiere of *The Dybbuk* in 1920.67 This was his last theater role and he devoted the last years of his life (he died in 1964) to writing his ultimately unfinished memoirs, *Ahin un tsurik: Zikhroynes un rayones fun a Yidn — an aktyor* (There and Back Again: A Jewish Actor’s Reminiscences and Thoughts), four volumes of which were published by Yidish Bukh.

The political thaw in the USSR made it possible to reforge both personal and institutional contacts between the two Jewish communities. Admittedly, Kamińska’s theater never received a permit to tour the Soviet Union, but Soviet Jews lobbied hard to win the right to read books published by Yidish Bukh and the Polish Yiddish press. Jewish writers from the USSR regularly sent dispatches and articles for publication in *Yidishe Shriftn* and *Folks-Shtime*. It is noteworthy that the latter (which ceased to be an “organ of the Polish United Workers’ Party Central Committee” in 1956, to become simply the TSKŻ’s organ) was the first in the Eastern Bloc to report on the murder, on Stalin’s orders, of a group of outstanding Jewish writers and poets in the USSR (Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee activists), in 1952.68

As a result, the Yiddish press and books from Poland were considered non-conformist in the USSR, and subscriptions to them were banned.\textsuperscript{69} Many years later, Hersh Smolar, Editor-in-Chief of \textit{Folks-Shtime}, wrote:

In time, “\textit{nusekh Poyln}” took on an attraction for many Jews in various, even the most distant, parts of the Soviet Union. We received letters from Belarus and Ukraine, Siberia and the Urals, Central Asia, and Birobidzhan every day — virtually all with the same message: Do us a favor, send us copies of your newspapers, journals, and books! So we did, although we had limited means. They were not allowed to subscribe to our publications in the Soviet Union. The post offices there had a list of Polish publications that people could subscribe to and pay for in Russian currency. That list did not feature a single Jewish publication, but if Jewish newspapers or books were sent [in letters] from Poland, then they would be accepted. In response to our request for reprints, \textit{Folks-Shtime}’s publisher demanded that we cover the increased cost of postage. So we started with ourselves, members of the editorial board — each of us took out a subscription for people we knew, for Jewish writers and cultural activists in the USSR, above all. But this was just a drop in the ocean. So we sent out a directive to all the boards in our Association requesting they make sure as many Jews as possible take out subscriptions to the newspaper, the monthly, and Jewish books for our brethren in the Soviet Union. Circulation soon increased sharply, but it was still not enough. To confirm this, boxes started arriving at the editorial offices from the Soviet Jews...dried fruit, parcels of dried sausage, and once even several small packages of caviar — all to cover the cost of the newspaper subscriptions.\textsuperscript{70}

Among the Soviet contributors to the Polish Yiddish press, a few names are worth mentioning: Yosef Burg, Meir Kharats, Shira Gorshman, Motl Grubian, Shmuel Halkin, Yosef Kerler, Yitzhak Kipnis, Yosl Lerner, Mark Razumni, Efraim Roytman, Moshe Tayf, Yankev Shternberg, Ziame Telesin, and Zalman Wendroff. This collaboration did not cease even when Moscow granted permission for a literary monthly, \textit{Sovietish Heymland}, in 1961 — although its editorial board did not approve of its authors publishing articles

\textsuperscript{70} Hersh Smolar, \textit{Oyf der letster pozitsye, mit der letster hofenung} (Tel Aviv: I.L. Peretz Farlag, 1982), pp. 255–256.
Polish Jews also helped writers from the Soviet Union to have their books printed by Yidish Bukh, which was stable again after the difficult 1956–1958 period.

The events of October 1956 (the appointment of the reformer Władysław Gomułka as Secretary of the Polish Communist Party and the concessions toward greater autonomy and certain reforms he negotiated) also facilitated renewal of contacts with Jewish institutions and artists in the West. Although the majority of contacts pursued were with “progressive” circles (left-wing or their sympathizers), some artists and writers formerly stigmatized in Folks-Shtime as reactionaries were “rehabilitated” (for example, Sholem Asch, whose Short Stories were published by Yidish Bukh in 1958). Yidishe Shriftn also began to print articles by literary critics from abroad, such as Benyamin Nadel, Nakhman Mayzil, and Avrom Bick from the USA, and Moyshe Belenki and Hersh Remenik from the USSR. There was also a certain opening up to non-Jewish literature (both historical and more recent Polish literature, represented by such authors as Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Cyprian Kamil Norwid, Stanisław Wyspiański, Leopold Staff, Maria Dąbrowska, Anna Kamieńska, Tymoteusz Karpowicz, and Urszula Koziol; and foreign writers, including William Shakespeare, Paul Verlaine, Stefan Zweig, and John Steinbeck). However, in the 1960s, the journal also increased the volume of political propaganda printed, including texts about the history of the Jewish labor movement (e.g., articles by Yankev Vasershtrum). Yidish Bukh made contacts with Jewish publishers abroad, not only in the Eastern Bloc (Bucharest and Moscow), but also in the West (YKUF), and published co-editions of works, including a translation into Yiddish of The Diary of Anne Frank. Yet, it was still dogged by the old problems, such as lack of literature suitable for children and young people (the rapid progress of assimilation certainly did nothing to alleviate this problem) and the predominance of the Holocaust over other, more contemporary subjects. At a meeting of Jewish writers in 1962, Leyb Domb complained about a pile of manuscripts waiting at the publishing house, but there was not a single piece of original prose on contemporary subjects.

72 Among Soviet Yiddish writers whose books were printed in the Yidish Bukh publishing house were Peretz Markish, David Bergelson, Shira Gorshman, Itsik Kipnis, Masha Rolnik, Dora Taytboym, and others. Nalewajko-Kulikov, “The Last Yiddish Books Printed in Poland,” pp. 129–134.
73 Yidisher Kultur Farband (YKUF) was a Communist-oriented society founded in 1937 in the USA to protect and support the development of Yiddish-language culture.
that readers were calling for. Nevertheless, the number of subscribers rose towards the end of the 1950s, stabilizing at just over 2,000.

The effect of the opening up of the borders had a particularly noticeable effect on the State Jewish Theater, which went on 19 tours abroad between 1956 and 1968 (to various countries including Belgium, France, Germany, the UK, and Israel), each time to great acclaim. Ida Kamińska wrote about this period as follows:

My theater began to be a world theater. When I was asked in interviews why I performed for the small community of post-war Jews in Poland, my answer was that [it was] our base and we were supported by the government. However, I added, we were a theater for world Jewry...

The enthusiasm with which Kamińska’s company was received abroad was a kind of moral recompense for the problems besetting it in Poland, which included grappling with state officials for subsidies, attempting to attract rapidly dwindling audiences, and efforts to move to a bigger, more modern building (which only succeeded in 1970, when a new building was erected for the company on Grzybowski Square in Warsaw). One characteristic aspect of the first half of the 1960s seems to have been the growing awareness among Yiddish artists of the inevitability of acculturation and linguistic assimilation among the younger generation. As mentioned above, Polish was the first, and often the only, language even among the children of leading TSKŻ activists. This situation was not altered by the Yiddish-language courses organized in TSKŻ clubs. In June 1957, Folks-Shtime rolled out a youth supplement, Nasz Głos, headed by Shmul Tenenblat, which was in Polish, of course. It consisted mostly of reprints of articles in Folks-Shtime, translations of classics of Yiddish literature, and classical and contemporary Yiddish poetry. As one of the editors, Joseph Sobelman, remembers:

For all intents and purposes, we were an autonomous editorial unit, an independent part of the Folks-Shtime.... Hersh (Grzegorz) Smolar... exercised full and complete ideological and political control of the

75 AŻIH, Kolekcja Leopolda Treppera (The Leopold Trepper Collection), file no. 3, p. 25.
77 See the theater’s history at: www.teatr-zydowski.art.pl/index_gb.php?p=theater.
78 Leon Sfard, personal communication, September 2004.

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Supplement. He read and scrutinized every article, headline, illustration, drawing, and caption. He was more inquisitive than the government censors were. Smolar and the TSKŻ Central Committee would not allow discussion of two subjects, although the censors did not care about them: assimilation and mixed marriage. Our magazine did not write about Jewish religious holidays or activities of religious organizations or congregations, which was a complete taboo with the censors as well.79

In 1960, Ida Kamińska decided to have headphones installed in the theater so that the actors’ dialog could be transmitted in Polish. This move was designed to open up the Jewish Theater to a Polish-speaking audience. However, this did not change the fact that the circle of Yiddish culture was inevitably shrinking for purely biological reasons — the artists were older, many of the potential audience members had emigrated or died, and the younger generation was not replacing them.

The fatal blow, however, was dealt not by “biology,” but by events in 1967–1968. Hardest hit by the Six-Day War in the Middle East were Folks-Shtime’s editorial offices (from which official condemnation of the “Israeli aggression” was demanded),80 and the Yidish Bukh publishing house. As a punishment, an order was instituted whereby the censor had to be shown translations of all texts in Yiddish. As David Sfard recalls:

Shortly after the celebrations [the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the publishing house — authors’ note] came the sentence, which effectively precluded continuation of the Yiddish printed word in Poland. This was the order to supply the censor with a translation of everything written in Yiddish. Even the most reactionary Polish regimes never imposed such a sentence. This was not merely a prestige issue. It was simply not possible to do this either physically or financially. It was a cunning variation on an official ban.81

In practical terms, this spelt the end of the publishing house. Most of the leading cultural activists were dealt a “vote of no confidence,” among them, Hersh Smolar and David Sfard, were both expelled from the party in 1968.

The events of March 1968 were essentially just the nail in the coffin of yidishkayt (a Jewish way of life in Yiddish) in Poland. In the autumn of 1968, the TSKŻ decided to stop publishing Yidishe Shriftn. Activists such as Sfard, Mirski, and Gurwicz emigrated, and were joined a few years later by Smolar and Domb. Most writers, actors, and artists also left the country. Kamińska returned to Poland after her last tour in the United States in the autumn of 1967, although she had been urged to stay abroad. But three months later she too took the dramatic decision to leave, abandoning her life’s work.82 This is how Adolf Rudnicki remembers her departure:

The actress bade her farewell to the country in the ugly interiors of the shack where she acted till the end. For years, she had been preparing for the move to Grzybów [Grzybowski Square — J.N.-K., M.R.], but she was never to enter the “Promised Land.” She ended her days in the shack on Królewska [Street], in a long room with the poor acoustics, which maybe she did not even remember had once been the bane of her father’s auditorium on Oboźna [Street]. From Królewska, she went forth into the world.83

Epilogue

The State Jewish Theater continued operating in Poland even after the 1967–1968 “cultural pogrom” and Kamińska’s emigration. It was directed by Juliusz Berger, Chewel Buzgan, and Szymon Szurmiej, respectively. Under Szurmiej, who is still the director, the theater moved into a new phase: Only five actors remained from the original company, and new, non-Jewish actors were brought in. The State Jewish Theater runs its own acting school to train them. Over this period, the main thrust of the theater increasingly moved in the direction of popular shows — alongside the spoken word the

set, lighting, music, singing, and dancing play bigger roles. At present, the theater, known as the Ester Rachel Kamińska and Ida Kamińska State Jewish Theater since the 1990s, stages mainly plays in Polish (owing to the lack of audiences who understand Yiddish), and its repertoire, alongside the best-known Jewish classics (by Sholem Aleichem, Yitzhak Leib Peretz, and An-sky), also includes children’s fairytales, cabaret performances, and even classical Polish plays (e.g., by Gabriela Zapolska).

Another institution that survived after 1968 was a bilingual, weekly version of *Folks-Shtime* (which came out three times a week), edited first by Shmul Tenenblatt, and subsequently by Avrom (Adam) Kwaterko. In 1992, the weekly edition became a bi-weekly publication called *Ślowo Żydowskie/ Dos Yidishe Vort*, with Editor-in-Chief Adam Rok, succeeded by Zbigniew Safian, Michał Sobelman, and Jacob Weitzner, respectively. Artur Hofman is the present Editor-in-Chief. Together with appearing less frequently, the size of the weekly’s Yiddish section has become much smaller and is now barely a few pages, mainly consisting of reprints from foreign newspapers, such as *Forverts*.

The TSKŻ also continues its attempts to popularize Yiddish culture to some extent by organizing lectures, newspapers, and performances by actors from the State Jewish Theater in Yiddish, etc.

Despite all these activities, after 1968, Yiddish cultural life lost its impetus. The last remaining Yiddish poet, Eliahu Rayzman, continued to write until his death in 1975, but his later works were in Polish. The last original book in Yiddish published in Poland in the twentieth century, a bilingual edition of *Fun ash aroysgerufn/Cienie z popiołów* (Shadows from the Ashes) by Daniel Kac, dedicated to the Jews of Volhynia, came out in 1983. Likewise, all Kac’s later books were only published in Polish.

After the stagnation of the 1970s, a certain revival did take place, and “culture about Jews” in Polish gradually came to occupy the space previously filled by Jewish culture in Yiddish.

85 See the theater’s current repertoire at: www.teatr-zydowski.art.pl.
86 See Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska and Magdalena Ruta’s article, “From Jewish Culture to Culture about Jews,” in this volume.
Responses to the Holocaust in Polish and Yiddish Literature

MONIKA ADAMCZYK-GARBOWSKA AND MAGDALENA RUTA

Introduction

The development of literature in Polish and Yiddish was drastically impaired by the Second World War, which brought about the destruction of numerous cultural institutions and the deaths of many writers and readers. From the outset, noting the first and most important difference between the fates of literature and writers in these two languages is vital. Polish literature certainly suffered vast losses with the deaths of outstanding writers, such as Józef Czechowicz, who was killed in the early days of the war during a bombing in Lublin; Ignacy Fik, who was shot by the Germans in Kraków in 1942; Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, Tadeusz Gajcy, Karol Irzykowski, and Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, who were either killed in combat or died from their wounds in the Warsaw Uprising of August 1944; and Janusz Korczak, Bruno Schulz, Stefan Napierski, Ostap Ortwin, Mieczysław Braun, and Bruno Winawer, who perished as Jews. Some Polish-Jewish authors, however, managed to survive. Among them were: Adolf Rudnicki, Kazimierz Baczyński, who had "Jewish roots," became a symbol of the insurgent poet in Polish literature. In recent years, there has been a great deal of discussion surrounding his poetry, which, for many years, circulated in the mainstream in the context of the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944. According to some critics, the reaction of a poet hiding on the Aryan side to the inexorable extermination in the Warsaw Ghetto is the key to understanding his work. See, for example, Józef Lewandowski, “Wokół biografii Krzysztofa Kamila Baczyńskiego,” Aneks, no. 22 (1979), pp. 115–142; Natan Gross, Poeć i Szoa. Obraż Zagłady Żydów w poezji polskiej (Sosnowiec: Offmax, 1993), pp. 120–124; and Jerzy Święch, “Baczyński i Holocaust,” in Janusz Detko, ed., Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński — twórczość, legenda, recepcja (Kielce: Kieleckie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 2002), pp. 7–39.
Brandys with Aryan papers; Julian Stryjkowski in the USSR; Stanisław Wygodzki in German concentration camps; and Julian Tuwim and Antoni Słonimski, who spent most of the war years in New York and London, respectively. By contrast, the majority of Yiddish writers lost their lives in the Holocaust. Among those in the ghettos across Poland who died or were murdered were: Mordekhay Gebirtig, Shimen Horontshik, Ber Horowitz, Shmuel Yankev Imber, Yitzhak Katsenelson, Alter Katsizne, Menakhem Kipnis, Yosef Kirman, Yehoshua Perle, Leyb Rashkin, Simkhe Bunim Shayevitsh, Israel Shtern, Moyshe (Maurycy) Szymel, Miriam Ulinower, Yakir Varshavski, and Hillel Zeitlin. It is estimated that over 260 writers were murdered. To put this in context, in 1929, the Association of Yiddish Writers and Journalists had 269 registered members. Among the principal tasks the Jewish cultural institutions in post-war Poland took upon themselves were to document Nazi crimes committed against Jews and to commemorate those who perished. Some of the first publications by the Jewish Historical Commission were posthumous editions of works by Gebirtig and Shayevitsh, as well as Michał Maksymilian Borwicz’s articles on the literature created during the Holocaust. Four major volumes were devoted to the fate of writers who were murdered, and their works were later released by Yidish Bukh: the anthologies Dos lid iz geblibn (The Song Remained); Tsvishn lebn un toyt (Between Life and Death); and Dos lid fun geto (The Ghetto Song); and a study by Ber (Bernard) Mark, Di umgekumene shrayber fun di getos un lagern un zeyere verk (Writers Murdered in the Ghettos and Camps and Their Works).

In this article, Polish Holocaust literature (or Holocaust literature

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3 Publications by the CŻKH include: Mordekhay Gebirtig, S’Brent (Krakow: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna [CŻKH], 1946); and Simkhe Bunim Shayevitshz, Lekh lekho (Lodz: CŻKH, 1946). See Jacob M. Kelman, ed., Bibliography of Hebrew and Yiddish Publications in Poland since 1944 (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1987).

4 Michał Maksymilian Borwicz, Literatura w obozie (Krakow: CŻKH, 1946); idem, Pieśni ginących: z dziejów twórczości Żydów pod hitlerowską okupacją (Krakow: CŻKH, 1947).

5 Binem Heller, ed., Dos lid iz geblibn: Lider fun yidishe diikhter in Poyln, umgekumene beys der hitlerisher okupatsye (Warsaw: Idisz Buch, 1951); Ber Mark, Di umgekumene shrayber fun di getos un lagern un zeyere verk (Warsaw: Idisz Buch, 1954); idem, ed.,
RESPONSES TO THE HOLOCAUST IN POLISH AND YIDDISH LITERATURE

written in Polish)\(^6\) is based on the criterion of language rather than territory, as many of those who wrote in Polish emigrated shortly after the war and spent much or most of their lives abroad, in Israel, the USA, and Western Europe, among other places, although their work, in some way, still revolved around their native country. For Yiddish literature, however, both linguistic and territorial criteria are used, restricting the texts to those written in post-war Poland, even though the Holocaust left its mark on all the literature in this language. Why were these different criteria used? On the one hand, it is important to remember that Polish literature is connected to a specific country, which occupies a certain geographic space. Even if its practitioners live elsewhere, their work always relates to Poland as a center of some sort. Yiddish literature, on the other hand, has always been created by authors living in almost every corner of the globe and since it is not organically connected to any geographically defined center, the material for analysis is narrowed down. The overarching subject of this volume provided a natural defining factor. More than one work has been written about émigré Polish Jews in America and Israel, writing in Yiddish, but, to date, there have not been any studies about Yiddish literature written in Poland.

A General Profile

In spite of the many similarities between post-war Polish and Yiddish literature, as far as the composition of the writers’ community is concerned, the main developments and themes contain a number of differences. What sets each of these categories of literature apart is first examined. In terms of subject matter, the Holocaust dominated the literature in Yiddish. It was created in the main by writers who had survived the war in the East, i.e.,

\[\text{Tsvishn lebn un toyt} \ (Warsaw: Idisz Buch, 1955); \text{and Ruta Pups, ed.,} \text{Dos lid fun geto: Zamlung} \ (Warsaw: Idisz Buch, 1962).\]

\(^6\) There are many studies on this literature. See, for instance, the entry by Irena Maciejewksa, “Getta doświadczac w literaturze,” in Alina Brodzka et al., eds., \textit{Słownik literatury polskiej XX wieku} (Wroclaw: Ossolineum, 1992); as well as Maciejewska’s anthology entitled \textit{Męczeństwo i zagłada Żydów w zapisach literatury polskiej} (Warsaw: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza [KAW], 1988). Recent works featuring an extensive bibliography of studies and a list of works of Polish literature devoted to the Holocaust are Sławomir Buryła, \textit{Opisać Zagładę. Holocaust w twórczości Henryka Grynberga} (Wrocław: Uniwersytet Wrocławski, 2006), and Sławomir Buryła, Dorota Krawczyńska, and Jacek Leociak, eds., \textit{Literatura polska wobec Zagłady} (Warsaw: Fundacja Akademia Humanistyczna and Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2012).
people with victim status, but without direct experience of the Holocaust, in other words, those who were indirect or vicarious victims and witnesses at the same time. Few Yiddish writers survived the war in Poland as direct victims and witnesses. Yeshaye Shpigl, a survivor of the Łódź Ghetto, was one exception. The two groups were characterized by significant differences in their worldviews. They both typically demonstrate the victim stance, but it is important to note that vicarious witnesses see the world differently from direct witnesses. After all, their writing is not a testimony to the Holocaust, but rather an imagined empathetic assumption of the role of Holocaust victim. It is accompanied not only by the pain of loss and the sense of guilt typical of survivors, but also by hope for a reversal of fortunes and belief in the possibility of a renewal. As early as 1947, Shpigl noted this in his epic poem “Gezegenung” (Farewell). On the whole, lyrical poetry was the dominant genre throughout the post-war period.

The post-war community of authors writing in Yiddish was very volatile. In the 1945–1949 period, two distinct sub-groups could be discerned — those who were inclined toward emigration (yetsiyes Poyln) from the outset, and those who saw their future in Communist Poland (nusekh Poyln). On the one hand, the political thaw of 1956 brought about a revelation of the Stalinist crimes, which also affected the Jewish intelligentsia in the USSR, on the other hand, it saw a revival of antisemitism in Poland. As a two-fold consequence, some Communist writers decided to emigrate, while others who came with the second wave of repatriates from the USSR in 1957 effectively took their place.

Also characteristic is the fact that Yiddish literature was written in the main by a single generation, known as the first “adult” generation. Having debuted as writers before the war, they could react to the Holocaust while it was in progress or shortly after it ended. There were seven notable newcomers after the war: Lili Berger (1916–1996), David Hofnung (1908–1952), Kalman Segal (1917–1980), Moyshe Shklar (b. 1920), Shloyme Strauss-Marko (1912 [1914]–1992, Mendel Tempel (b. 1907), and Paltiel Tsibulski (1903–1967). Most of them were mature individuals. Tsibulski, for instance, was around 60 years old when his first volume was published, as was Tempel.8

8 Current research suggests this number of new writers. In several cases, press debuts came several years before first book publications, which is the criterion used here (for
Their cultural identity was sharply defined by the linguistic criterion: They represented Yiddish, and not Polish literature. Segal, a Polish-Jewish writer who wrote in both Polish and Yiddish, was the only exception. Moreover, due to the abnormal circumstances, as well as the extreme conditions (destruction of their people, antisemitism, change of political system, and emigration), the younger generation did not get involved, resulting in the constant shrinkage and aging of the writing community. But these were not the only reasons why literature in Yiddish in Poland only survived until 1968.

There are no outstanding texts in the post-war work by this community, because writers such as Chaim Grade, Avrom Sutzkever, Rachela Korn, Reyzl Zhikinski, and Shpigl emigrated even before the intensive Stalinization of Poland began. On the whole, the writing tended to be typical of its period, and representative of the community’s experiences. For this reason, different assessment criteria, such as moral, documentary or didactic, are required.

While literature in Yiddish speaks in a uniform voice in spite of certain ideological differences, and almost always adopts the stance of victim or survivor, from the outset, literature in Polish featured a clear divide between victims and survivors, i.e., Polish-Jewish writers, on the one hand, and witnesses, non-Jewish writers, on the other. Of course, this division is simplistic, since there are also authors who speak as both survivors and witnesses: Assimilated Jews who identify with their “Polish side,” but do not reject their roots, as well as those who prefer to conceal their Jewish identity or marginalize their origins for whatever reasons. This fundamental division into survivors and witnesses runs through successive generations, extending to those who were born toward the end of the war or even a long time after it. Such writers may be termed potential victims and witnesses. While in other historical or cultural contexts, such a division might provoke doubt, it is justified in this case, since the experiences and perspectives of these two main groups are diametrically opposed. The division into victims and witnesses is also present in other Holocaust literatures, but not to such an extent as among Polish writers. This division became apparent even before the end of the war, in Z otchłani (From the Abyss), the first collection instance, for Berger). It is immensely difficult to cross-check existing information, owing to the lack of available sources and access to source material.

Krystyna Żywulska is the most striking example of such a stance. In 1949, she published her memoir Przeżyłam Oświęcim (I Survived Auschwitz, Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza), written from the point of view of a Polish Catholic; and, 14 years later, in 1963, she revealed her Jewish background in a divergent version of her own autobiography Pusta woda (Empty Water, Warsaw: Iskry).
to contain works by both Jewish and non-Jewish writers, which was clandestinely published in the spring of 1944 (including Borwicz, Mieczysław Jastrun, Jan Kott, and Czesław Miłosz).

In each of the main groups, there are distinct generational sub-groups on either side of the “wall.” In American literature, the commonly accepted division is of the first generation who survived the Holocaust, and those who came afterward (the second generation — survivors’ children, and the third generation — their grandchildren). In Polish literature, within the group of authors born before the war, it is legitimate to distinguish two generations in terms of debut time and the adopted perspective: adults and children. The best-known writers and poets in the first (“adult”) generation are Rudnicki, Wygodażki, and Artur Sandauer on the Jewish side, and Tadeusz Borowski, Czesław Miłosz, and Zofia Nałkowska on the non-Jewish side. The second generation includes those writers who were children during the war and recalled their memories of that period after some time. From the beginning of their careers, or subsequently, they came to see the Holocaust as a significant or even a fundamental axis in their own formation as both individuals and artists. Sometimes the subject of the Holocaust is present in their writing virtually from the beginning, as with Henryk Grynberg, while, in other instances, it is introduced at a later stage, as with Hanna Krall, after her encounter with Marek Edelman (1919–2009, one of the surviving leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the only one who remained in Poland after the war), which was the decisive factor for her future writing. This group also includes Jewish authors who only began to speak about their childhood experiences after several decades, such as Michał Glowiński and Wilhelm Dichter. Their counterparts on the non-Jewish side include Andrzej Szczypski and Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz. The third generation of writers, in turn, are those who never experienced the Holocaust directly, but nevertheless resolved to speak out on the matter. Among these are Piotr Matywiecki, conceived in the Warsaw Ghetto, and Agata Tuszyńska and Anna Bikont, who were born in the 1950s and only discovered their Jewish roots as adults. Within this group, there are also the “late” witnesses, who were born into non-Jewish families after the war, such as Piotr Szewc and Paweł Huelle.

Victims and survivors have different perspectives from witnesses. It is not surprising, therefore, that Jewish authors or those with Jewish roots put the emphasis on the destruction itself, and various physical, religious, and cultural aspects of the tragedy; while non-Jewish writers are preoccupied with the question of whether Christians are responsible for what happened, and to what extent they passed the humanitarian test. The first viewpoint,
then, comes from inside the destroyed community, while the second comes from the outside, from the observer's angle. Both perspectives are present in the post-war generation of Jewish writers.

As before the war, Yiddish literature in the People's Republic of Poland was isolated from Polish literature, without polemic or other connections, although Yiddish writers did read in Polish and presumably were up-to-date with Polish literature. This is visible in the reviews of selected works of Polish literature, mainly about the Holocaust, in the Yiddish-language press, as well as autonomous publications with commentaries, e.g., Ber Mark's *Di yidishe tragedie in der poylisher literatur* (The Jewish Tragedy in Polish Literature) of 1950; and translations of selected Polish works into Yiddish, for example, *Almanakh fun der poylisher literatur vegn der trag-edye fun di Yidn beys der Hitler-okupatsye* (Almanac of Polish Literature about the Tragedy of the Jews during the Nazi Occupation) of 1950; *Dos togbukh fun David Rubinovitsh* (The Diary of Dawid Rubinowicz) of 1960; two collections of short stories by Wygodzki, *Der vintsh-kontsert* (Listener's Choice) of 1960; and *Vuhin di oygn trogn* (Wherever Your Eyes Roam) of 1963, and Rudnicki's *Der veg tsum himl* (The Road to Heaven) of 1962. Other evidence of this is the translations of contemporary and classic Yiddish literature into Polish, although such works are characteristically presented to the Polish reader from the perspective of the Holocaust.

In spite of these differences, there are nevertheless many similarities between Yiddish and Polish literature. Most writers in Yiddish, like those in Polish, had connections with Communism, or — at least for some time — supported the new authorities. Those who held other views either never returned to Poland, or left again in the early years after the war. Being aware of the system in which they lived, and with the benefit of personal experience from the time they spent in the USSR, Yiddish writers imposed a form of self-censorship on themselves. Moreover, Yiddish literature, like Polish

10 Translations included Polish works on the Holocaust, but also iconic products of Socialist Realism, such as *Pamiątka z Celulozy* (A Souvenir from the Cellulose Factory), and other propaganda works. See Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikov, “The Last Yiddish Books Printed in Poland. Outline of the Activities of Yidish Bukh Publishing House,” in Grözinger and Ruta, eds., *Under the Red Banner*, pp. 121–132.


12 One interesting example might be the evolution of the *shtetl* image in the post-war prose of Leyb Olitski — from attempts, which his critics considered unsuccessful, to
literature, was subject to state censorship.\textsuperscript{13} In effect, as in Polish literature, the works produced were largely subordinated to the prevailing ideology, in particular from the late 1940s until the mid-1950s. They were characterized by didacticism, schematism, and simplification, etc. A clear change in this respect is evident in the “retribution literature” (\textit{literatura rozrachunkowa}) and in works written after 1956.

The Holocaust became the most, or, at least, a very important subject for Jewish writers in both languages, who gave relatively little space to the Polish people’s suffering. Yiddish literature, in spite of protests by literary critics, who repeatedly called for internationalism, developed a Judeo-centric canon, just as Polish literature was Polono-centric, at least until the “thaw.” As the American scholar Madeline Levine, translator of many works of Polish literature on the Holocaust into English, states, “Little attention is paid in Polish-Jewish literature on the Holocaust to the sufferings of the Polish population, the assumption being that the Poles were infinitely better off than the Jews because they were allowed the freedom to choose between resistance and compliance (an attitude which ignores the thousands of Poles who also died at the hands of the Nazis for no ‘good’ reason.)”\textsuperscript{14} But the Israeli scholar Sidra Ezrahi is also correct in pointing out that in Polish literature (by which she means that written by non-Jews) on the Holocaust, “the prevailing concern is with the implications of the Holocaust for the Pole and for Poland, rather than for the victim, who often appears more

align himself with the Socialist Realist mainstream, which features a strongly nostalgic tone, to his return in the “thaw” period to his pre-war work in which idealization of the \textit{shtetl} in the vein of Sholem Asch’s \textit{A Shtetl} (published in English as \textit{The Little Town}) is evident. For more information on the image of the \textit{shtetl} in post-war Yiddish prose, see Magdalena Ruta, “A Tale of the Murdered Shtetl: The Image of the Shtetl in Yiddish Literature in Post-war Poland,” \textit{European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe}, vol. 42, no. 2 (2009), pp. 129–144.

13 See the reverberations of the debate between the censor, the critics, and the writers that reached the monthly periodical \textit{Yidishe Shriftn} towards the end of the 1940s. This was the fate of Leyb Kupershmidt’s volume of poetry \textit{Flemlekh in der nakht} (Flames at Night, 1949), which was roundly criticized according to the Socialist Realist doctrine by Sh. Vilner (“Tsvey retsenzyes,” \textit{Yidishe Shriftn}, no. 27 [1949]) for mourning observant Jews murdered during the war. Only the last vestiges of freedom of expression in the late 1940s allowed the author to publish his bitter response in the subsequent issue of the periodical (Leyb Kupershmidt, “A Briv in Redaktsye,” \textit{Yidishe Shriftn}, no. 28/29 [1949]).

as a mythical echo of the past than as a real suffering Jew. Although our value judgments of these attitudes may vary, they are nevertheless largely understandable. A full, genuine assumption of the role of the “other” would require superhuman empathy.

The Holocaust affected not only the subject matter but also the type and manner of writing of many authors, both Yiddish and Polish. It was the Holocaust that moved Segal, in spite of his ambition to be a Polish writer, to continue writing in Yiddish until his death. Binem Heller, a Communist Yiddish poet who distanced himself from the traditional Jewish community before the war, criticizing its mentality and bonds with religion, during the war began to perceive it differently. Hadasa Rubin, in whose pre-war poems there is barely a trace of Jewishness, clearly finds her identity the direct result of the Holocaust and the Poles’ post-war antisemitism.

Rudnicki, a writer of Jewish origin, who had been so keen to enter the Polish mainstream that he avoided Jewish themes before the war, expressed his regret several times at not having written much about the Jews shortly after the war. His literary piece about the towns of Kazimierz on the Vistula River (Kazimierz Dolny, Yid. Kuzmir) and Góra Kalwaria (Yid. Ger) was compensation for this. Hence, his commentary appended to the post-war edition of Lato (Summer):

It is rare that a writer comes face to face with such a phenomenon — the complete end of the world of his youth. For years I was dogged by regret because I never captured that life, the end of which I have described here and there, in any other form. Rereading Lato comforted me... [like] a small memorial candle may provide comfort.

Tuwim was analyzing his own identity when he wrote his poetic manifesto My, Żydzi polscy (We Polish Jews) in April 1944, on the first anniversary

of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In this work, he addresses the issue of his own complex identity, emphasizing his fraternity with the Jews, of which he became fully aware as a consequence of the Holocaust.

In the first generation of both Polish- and Yiddish-language survivors, the *shtetl* is an important theme (see the work of authors such as Stryjkowski, Arnold Slucki, Segal, Rudnicki, Zofia Grzesiak, Olitski, Berger, Strauss-Marko, Tempel, and Stanislaw Benski). Particularly for those who were not in Poland during the Holocaust, it is a form of surrogate testimony to an annihilated world.\(^\text{18}\)

The Holocaust changed the face of Polish-Jewish literature, like that of Yiddish literature. It divided post-war Polish-Jewish writers into two groups: Those who resolved to devote most or many of their works to Jewish themes, based on their wartime experiences, and those who were driven to take up writing by the tragedy of the Jewish people. Rudnicki is the foremost representative of the former group, and Stryjkowski of the latter. There were also writers who became more conscious of and attached to their Jewish roots during the war, such as Tuwim. Apart from *My, Żydzi polscy*, “Pomnik i mogila” (The Monument and the Grave) is another of his noteworthy later works, although most of the others remained within the orbit of his earlier subject matter. Conversely, other writers responded to the Holocaust and the political situation in Poland after the war by keeping silent about their background, at least for a time, including Jastrun and Brandys in the 1950s and 1960s.

Undoubtedly, most Jewish authors who debuted after the war would have become writers even without the Holocaust experience, but as it was, the Holocaust often dictated the themes of their work, out of the need to give testimony. The guilt motif, so clearly present in Rudnicki’s work, also arises in various ways in the work of many authors of Jewish descent, distinguishing them from other writers. The authors of this article do not know of any non-Jewish writers in whose development the Holocaust played a decisive role. However, the extermination of the Jews prompted many of them to address Jewish themes, which is unprecedented in the pre-war period, when they were rarely a topic of interest to non-Jews, and if so, then usually on a superficial or tendentious level. The attitude of Jewish authors writing in both languages often takes the form of a sense of guilt at having

survived at all when all the Jews were condemned to extermination. This alone is indicative of the exceptional nature of this experience. Leo Lipski, for instance, who writes, above all, about the Soviet Gulag, out of direct experience, pays tribute to the Holocaust victims in a short story entitled “Sarni braciszek” (Roe Deer’s Brother), in which he states that “with this story [he wishes] to ease [his] sense of guilt about not also being on the other side [of the ghetto wall].”

On an indirect level, the subject of the Holocaust is present throughout Polish literature, in addition to those writers already mentioned, in the works of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Kornel Filipowicz, Wacław Iwaniuk, Andrzej Kuśniewicz, Maria Kuncewiczowa, Tadeusz Konwicki, Włodzimierz Odojewski, and Jan Józef Szczepański, among others. Attention has been drawn many times to the conspicuous lack of reference to the Holocaust in certain other canonical works, such as Jerzy Andrzejewski’s Popiół i diament (Ashes and Diamonds).

However, the picture is incomplete, since several works by authors in both Yiddish and Polish were destroyed during the war (e.g., some of Władysław Szlengel’s work). It is worth adding that many works of Polish literature on the Holocaust have been adapted for film, including Samson, Wielki tydzień (Holy Week), Przy torze kolejowym (By the Railroad Track), and Pianista (The Pianist).

Main Themes from 1945 to 1949

Until 1949, there was relative freedom of expression in Poland. Ideological constraints only increased toward the end of 1948, and an administrative order in 1949 stipulated that all writing had to be in accordance with the Socialist Realist method.

Collections of poetry published shortly after the war included: Jastrun’s Rzecz ludzka (A Human Thing) of 1946 and Godzina strzeżenia (Hour of Protection), which had come out in 1944; Stanisław Jerzy Lec’s Notatnik polowy (A Field Notebook) of 1946; Wygodzki’s Pamiętnik miłości (Love Diary) of 1946; Brandys’s Samson of 1947; Sandauer’s Śmierć liberała (Death

of a Liberal) of 1947; Rudnicki’s Wielkanoc (Easter) of 1946; and Jerzy Andrzejewski’s Wielki tydzień (Holy Week) of 1945. The most important literary works of this period are: Borowski’s short stories Byliśmy w Oświęcimiu (We Were in Auschwitz) of 1946, Kamienny świat (World of Stone) and Pożegnanie z Marią (Farewell to Maria) (the latter published in English as This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen), both published in 1948; and Nałkowska’s Medaliony of 1946 (published in English as Medallions). These works initiated a new type of literature about the war, which was continued by other writers, including Grynberg. Borowski’s short stories became world classics.

The only collection published after the war in which Polish, Polish-Jewish, and Yiddish literature (translated into Polish) feature side by side is the volume Pieśń ujdzie cało. Antologia wierszy o Żydach pod okupacją niemiecką (The Song Will Survive Intact: An Anthology of Poems about Jews under the German Occupation) of 1947, edited by Borwicz. It contains poems by Polish and Polish-Jewish poets from the 1944 underground volume Z otchłani; works by poets who spent the war years outside Poland (Władysław Broniewski, Józef Wittlin, Słonimski, and Tuwim); poems by Polish-Jewish poets who perished in the Holocaust (Izabela Gelbard, Zuzanna Ginczanka, Henryka Łazowertówna, and Szlengel); works by survivors (Stefania Ney-Grodzieńska); and Yiddish works in Polish translation, including some by poets who were murdered (Gebirtig) and others by those who survived (Grade, Itsik Manger, Nakhum Bomze, Heller, Shmerke Katsherginski, and Sutzkever).

Among the older generation, Rudnicki and Wygodzki addressed the Holocaust theme most systematically. Rudnicki was even subjected to a rather unfair critique, dubbing him a “martyrological prima donna,” by Sandauer, who was undoubtedly a better critic than writer, and was probably motivated by professional jealousy.20 In several of his best works, Wygodzki, less well known and certainly less talented than Rudnicki, expresses the survivor’s sense of guilt. One example is a poem from the Pożegnanie (Farewell) cycle, in which he asks why he did not share the fate of his loved ones.21 This work makes reference to the tragic episode in his life when he

took cyanide to Auschwitz, which he also gave to his wife and daughter. They both died, and his parents also perished under different circumstances, but Wygodzki himself survived. The awareness that he had indirectly caused the death of those most dear to him intensified his sense of guilt and was reflected in many of his works.

Among survivor authors writing in Yiddish, there were some writers and pre-war cultural activists who identified to various degrees with Communist ideology. After repatriation, many of them emigrated, while those remaining had pro-Communist sympathies. For many, Poland was merely one stop on the route to the West or to Israel, as confirmed by the registers of the Association of Yiddish Writers and Journalists, initiated in autumn 1944. In the early post-war years, the association had a stable membership level of around 40, but the names on that list were constantly changing.\(^2\) Toward the end of 1946, the association began publishing its own monthly, *Yidishe Shriftn*, dealing with literature, culture, and art. Independently of this, it also published two literary almanacs under the same title (*Yidishe Shriftn. Literarish Zamlbukh*), in 1946 and 1948.\(^23\) The first contained mostly poetry and prose entirely devoted to the Holocaust. The second was dominated by martyrrology, but there were also some new threads: images of life in pre-war Poland and in contemporary times.

Soon after the war, several volumes were published by outstanding poets, most of whom left Poland for good shortly afterward. These included: Grade’s *Oyf di khurves* (On the Ruins) of 1947; Avrom Zak’s *Mit ash oyfn kop* (With Ashes on My Head) of 1947; Moyshe Knapheys’s *Megiles Yid* (Book of a Jew) of 1948; Zhikhlinski’s *Tsu loytene bregn* (Toward Bright Shores) of 1948; Heller’s *Durkh shotn un sheyn* (Through Shadow and Glare) of 1948; and Shpigl’s *Un gevorn iz likht* (And There Was Light) of 1948. Almost all this poetry focuses on mourning the Jewish people’s tragedy. Distinct themes addressed\(^24\) include: returning to the Holocaust reality in the imagination;


\(^{23}\) *Yidishe Shriftn. Literarish Zamlbukh* (Lodz: Związek Literatów i Dziennikarzy Żydowskich, 1946); and *Yidishe Shriftn. Literarish Zamlbukh* (Lodz: Związek Literatów i Dziennikarzy Żydowskich, 1948).

replaying the last moments of the lives and deaths of loved ones; the sense of finality of events; the need to tackle the experience of emptiness; the sense of guilt at having survived; the conviction of fatalism in the history of the Jewish people; a call for justice and for revenge against the perpetrators; accusations of indifference directed at the non-Jewish world; praise for resistance and rebellion; support for Israel’s struggle for independence; a request to cherish memories; faith in the Jewish people’s survival; and a sense of homelessness. The motif of a silent God is also frequent, and Biblical symbolism acquired new meanings for expressing the tragedy and finality of those events: Zhiklinski’s “Lider fun mayn heym” (Songs from My Home); Heller’s “Azoy geyen di Yidn tsurik in Eyrope” (How the Jews Are Returning to Europe); and “In varshever geto iz khoydesh nisn” (It Is the Month of Nisan in the Warsaw Ghetto). Work on the renewal of the Jewish people became a moral imperative, such as in Grade’s “Der mames tsavoe” (Mother’s Testament). Some poetry demonstrates bitterness at the Poles’ attitudes, and the view of Poland as no longer a safe haven, and hence an ambivalent attitude toward the country: Sutzkever’s “Tsu Poyln” (To Poland); Grade’s “Kelts” (Kielce); Yitzhak Yonason’s “Poyln, Poyln” (Poland, O Poland) and “Di heym” (Home); and Heller’s “Tsu —” (To —) and “Mit shoym oyf di lipn” (Foaming at the Mouth). Some works record the reactions of those returning to Poland, a land now contaminated, which has become a vast cemetery: Bomze’s “Friling” (Spring); Zak’s “Ikh for tsu dir Poyln” (Poland, I’m Coming to You) and “In Poyln dem land” (In the Land of Poland); and Heller’s “Oyf poylish felder” (In Polish Fields). Living among graves, difficult material conditions, and intensifying ideological pressures prompted many writers to leave Poland. The poetry also records the dilemmas facing survivors.

Shpigl’s dramatic poem “Gezegenung” of 1947 summarizes the discussions about whether to stay or go. In this work, Shpigl draws attention to one more significant aspect of post-war Jewish life in Poland: the difference between the experiences of those who spent the war in the USSR and were not direct participants in or witnesses of the Holocaust, and those who survived the war in the ghettos, like the author himself. “Gezegenung” is written as a conversation between two survivors: a ghetto veteran and a repatriate from the USSR. Their divergent experiences prevent them from finding common ground: In spite of the death of his close family, the repatriate attempts to

find meaning in his work, while the Jew from the ghetto knows that those who survived in the East will never understand those who went through the hell of the Holocaust. He leaves Poland because of his inability to live in a cemetery, his sense of incomprehension of the reality of the situation and the dilemmas of Jews sentenced to death by the Nazis. The repatriate accuses Jews in the ghettos of having allowed themselves to be humiliated by going submissively to their deaths, since it is nobler to die struggling. The hero of Shpigl's poem accuses all who think like the repatriate of profaning the names of those murdered, who have become sanctified through their undeserved deaths. This split at the heart of the Jewish community and highlighted by Shpigl is another indirect consequence of the war, resulting from the political changes in Poland. In many cases, this division between repatriates and those who survived the war in Poland did not hold because many repatriates saw no possibility of staying permanently in their native land. Rather, it was usually a division of an ideological nature.26

Much of the prose of this period was given over to realistic wartime images by writers who had been in the ghettos or survived in the East. The former category includes: Hersh Smolar’s memoir, *Yidn on gele lates* (Jews without Yellow Patches) of 1948; Rivke Kviatkovska’s short stories from the Łódź Ghetto published in the press; David Hofnung’s volume of short stories *Der veg fun payn* (The Road of Torture) of 1949; and Yeshaye Shpigl’s volume of short stories *Malkhes geto* (The Ghetto Kingdom) of 1947, which includes texts written in the Łódź Ghetto or recreated by Shpigl from memory shortly after the war. Shpigl’s prose is especially worthy of attention not only because he was an eye witness to the reality he describes, but also for its lyricism, vivid imagery, and metaphoric style, which is untypical of Holocaust literature. The muted narrative voice is devoid of any desire to depict either heroism or the fathomless tragedy of the times described, but merely registers the human striving to preserve such basic values as the need for dreams, order, and a semblance of the former way of life to provide spiritual support.27

The latter category, in turn, includes works by authors who only knew the reality of wartime Poland second hand because of their stay during the

26 Ibid.
27 Shpigl’s prose is the subject of a Master’s thesis by Małgorzata Kozieł, *Jesjaja Szpigiel i jego proza z łódzkiego getta*, written under the supervision of Professor Grzegorz Gąsda in the Department of Literary Theory at Łódź University (Lodz University: unpublished manuscript, 2006), pp. 83ff.
war in the USSR: Israel Ashendorf, Itzhak Guterman, Yosef Okrutny, and Olitski (published in the press). They tended to conform more readily than the poets to the directives of literary criticism, which were to provide optimistic literature focusing on the dignity and strength of the human spirit even in the most difficult wartime conditions. These writers present a rather simplified and tendentious image of everyday life in occupied Poland, Polish-Jewish relations characterized by antisemitism, and a heroic, almost flag-waving stance of Jews in the ghettos. Their prose often describes people visited by misfortune who nevertheless find the strength to pick themselves up and discover meaning in life by working for others. At this time, however, there are still relatively few works about the new Poland, and until the late 1940s, poetry, in particular, remains dominated by the Holocaust, which is an increasing cause for the dissatisfaction among literary critics.

The Holocaust, antisemitism, and political developments in Poland led many survivors to realize that, contrary to their original expectations, Poland could no longer be their home, and the void thus created could only be filled by emigrating and/or building their own state. For this group, the cultural dimension was the only lasting element of the vision of Poland as a homeland. Yitzhak Leib Peretz was a proud symbol of this (the fact that his tombstone was not destroyed in the war and did not disappear from the Polish landscape had symbolic significance for representatives of the decimated nation). A shared history, culture, and literature, as well as the memory of the Jewish contribution to the development of the Polish state, was the heritage émigrés took with them as facets of their identity. Sutzkever’s poem “Tsu Poyln,” which ends with a scene at Peretz’s graveside, shows the drama and bitterness of this farewell to the land, people, and great literature of Poland (Sutzkever himself emigrated). But it is also a proud signal of the future rebirth and perpetuation of Polish-Jewish culture.

28 The following subjects were given the best reception: national and social struggle in the period between the wars, the Jewish resistance movement during the war, the welcoming atmosphere in the USSR, ideals of the Soviet individual Jews in the Red Army, optimistic visions of Jewish life in new Poland, the struggle for a democratic Jewish state in Israel, etc. See competition guidelines for a one-act play for amateur dramatic circles in *Yidishe Shriftn*, no. 7–8 (1948), pp. 7–8.

(the “golden chain”) in another land — in the Jewish state. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that the appearance of a new literary center in Israel, especially by the creation of Di goldene keyt quarterly, as well as the dispersion of many outstanding literary personalities throughout the world, were also consequences of the war. Among those who left Poland in this very early period, mentioning only the best-known authors, were: Grade, Korn, and Sutzkever in 1946; Ashendorf, Bomze, Khaim Leyb Fuks, Yonosovitsh, Efraim Kaganowski, Knapheys, Elkhanan Vogler, Zak, and Zhikhlinski in 1948; Pesakh Binetski and Moshe Valdman in 1949; Hofnung in 1950; and Shpigl in 1951. However, there were those who stayed, moved by their faith in the vast potential the new Polish state promised to the Jews.

From 1950 to 1955

The Jewish Association for Culture held a congress in Wroclaw from October 14 to 16, 1949, to establish the guidelines for developing Jewish culture.30 The Yiddish literature of this period, which was being written with these specifications in mind, is in large part similar to Polish literature. Nevertheless, in addition to the arsenal of Socialist Realist typicalities, there are some different threads in Yiddish poetry that are virtually absent from the Polish poetry of that time: the subject of the Holocaust, above all.31 In the early 1950s, poetry remained the dominant genre. Alongside typical Socialist Realist works, collections were also published that included many poems written in the previous era. The image presented of the Holocaust and the

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lyrical reactions to it often differ from that called for by the theoreticians of the new reality. Their postulates included not treating the fate of the Jews as a “special case,” but on a par with the tragedy of every other nation that fell victim to the Nazis; preferably emphasizing the heroism and fortitude of the persecuted Jews rather than dwelling on their weaknesses; and not succumbing to total despair or drawing out the mourning process endlessly.32 They continue to register despair, disorientation, a sense of loneliness, sometimes even an echo of doubt as to whether it would be possible to rebuild a life on these ruins, and the struggle to find hope in small things. Such motifs appear in collections including: Segal's *Lider* (Poems) of 1952 and *Tsu mayn nayer heym* (To My New Home) of 1953; Olicki's *Mïtn ponim tsu der zun* (Facing the Sun) of 1952;33 and Rubin's *Mayn gas iz in fener* (My Street Is Decked with Flags) of 1953 and *Veytik un freyd* (Sadness and Joy) of 1955.

Heller was the most flawless practitioner of Socialist Realist postulates. Yet, at the same time, in his books *Heymerd* (Homeland) of 1951 and *In undzer tsayt* (In Our Time) of 1954, somewhat contrarily to his own recommendations voiced at the congress of the Jewish Association for Culture, he devoted more space to the Holocaust theme than in any other book of Polish post-war Yiddish poetry. In most cases, the Jewish themes in his poems served political propaganda purposes, reinforcing the ideology expressed in his works.34 The subject of Heller’s poems is the new Jew who wants to strengthen his home, rebuilt from the ruins on the solid foundation of Communism. Memory of the murdered Jews evolves in Heller's poems from the mournful brooding, full of pathos and the undisguised personal despair of


33 For more information on this subject, see Magdalena Sitarz, “The Image of Post-war Poland in the Works of Leyb Olitski,” in Grözinger and Ruta, eds., *Under the Red Banner*, pp. 185–202.

his beautiful wartime poems, to a commemorative form devoid of personal
tones, through the enthusiastic work of his Socialist Realist period. At this
point, it is worth noting the distorted image of history in his poetry. In-
surgents from the Warsaw Ghetto, who died for the same ideals as the Red
Army, become the sole representatives of six million murdered Jews. The
poet refers to them so frequently and exclusively in the heroic context of
active struggle against the Germans that readers get the impression that the
whole ghetto took part in the fight. This “prepared” memory of the Jews’
assimilated mass heroism and the fighters’ “progressive” ideals were part of the myth on
which the Communists wanted to build Jewish life in the People’s Republic
of Poland.

At the height of the Stalinist period, the Holocaust theme is marginal-
ized in some poets’ works, and only reappears in full force again during the
thaw. This is the case in Shklar’s poetry, for instance, which only features
significantly more about the Holocaust in the volumes *Bleterfal* (Falling
Leaves) of 1959 and *Poshete verter* (Simple Words) of 1962.

In this period, the prose comes closer again to the approved ideals,
praising the new socialist reality. “The new Jew,” based on the ideals of
Communism, is the hero of these works. One example is the main charac-
ter in Olitski’s short story “Oyslendishe valute” (Foreign Currency) of 1951,
who understood that honesty and hard work for the good of the socialist
state is more important than collecting dollars (an activity forbidden there
anyway). The new Poland gave Jews vast opportunities, fundamentally al-
tering their quality of life. In Yitzhak Guterman’s short story “Dos lebn hot
im gerufn” (Life Called Him) from his book *Banayte teg* (Renewed Days)
35 For more information on this subject, see Magdalena Ruta, *Bez Żydow? Literatura
jидyz w PRL o Zagładzie, Polsce i komunizmie* (Krakow-Budapest: Austeria, 2012),
36 For information about the Communists’ “appropriation” of the Warsaw Ghetto Upris-
ing by attributing Communist ideals to the insurgents, see August Grabski, *Dzialalnoś
komunistow wsród Żydów w Polsce (1944–1949)* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut History-
czny [ZIH]/Trio, 2004), pp. 312–316. Ruta, “Der Einfluss von politischen Veränderun-
gen,” pp. 65–75; Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory
of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), pp. 69–74. On the
manipulation of memory of the uprising in the Polish-language Communist press, see
Jacek Leociak, “Zraniona pamięć (Rocznice powstania w getcie warszawskim w prasie
polskiej: 1944–1989),” in Alina Brodzka-Wald et al., eds., *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady*
(Warsaw: ZIH, 2000), pp. 29–49. See also Renata Kobyłarz, *Walka o pamięć: Polityczne
aspekty obchodów rocznicy powstania w getcie warszawskim 1944–1989*
of 1951, in spite of their tragic experiences, even elderly people regain hope and strength, and work enthusiastically for the new society.

An important category in the prose of this period is reportage, such as in the series Biblioteka Przodowników Pracy i Racjonalizatorów (Library of Labor Heroes and Rationalizers) by Yankev Zonshayn, Simkhe Kants, and Yisrael Bialostotski. The heroes had textbook pasts — they were brought up in poor homes, fascinated with Communism from an early age, and worked hard during the war for the Soviet cause. They also had positive attitudes toward their current situation — they did manual work in factories or other settings, had good relations with Polish workers, and were active within the Jewish community. In spite of the tragedy that befell their people during the war, the heroes were not blinded by their Jewishness to higher causes, i.e., the struggle for justice, a better world, and the general international labor cause. They represented, like the hero of Zonshayn’s piece Der Ratsyonalizator Yitzhok Fetner of 1953, a new category of people shaped by Communist ideals. The Holocaust is only mentioned in the margins, as a difficult time in the hero’s past, which nevertheless did not rob him of hope.

It should be noted that these attempts at creating Socialist Realist literature did not satisfy the critics who identified with the Communist authorities and who complained that, although so many years had passed since the war, not a single, true monumental work on “contemporary themes” had been produced. They cited the writers’ insufficient ideological involvement, because they were still too strongly focused on the Holocaust as the reason for this.

Also around this time, in 1955, Olitski published Dodye Koval, an extensive family saga. This was the first post-war novel about the Jewish shtetl that took a highly critical stance on Poland under Sanacja’s government. It also marked the beginning of a current devoted to commemorating the destruction of the shtetl as a symbol of the Jewish past, which came to full fruition after 1956.

The foremost event in the Polish literature of this period was the publication of Leopold Buczkowski’s Czarny potok (Black Torrent) in 1954. This work, written shortly after the war, was innovative in its “broken” form, designed to reflect the disintegration of that world. His next Holocaust novel, Pierwsza świetność (First Glory), came out in 1966. Other important works

included Tadeusz Różewicz’s short stories *Opadły liście z drzew* (The Leaves Fell Off the Trees) of 1955.

**From 1956 to 1968**

After Stalin’s death, cultural policy became more relaxed and there was a departure from the Socialist Realist method in literature and art. As a result, in 1956, several works were published that hailed the coming of a new era. One of these was *Głosy w cienności* (Voices in the Dark) by Stryjkowski, written in Moscow (where he spent the war years) as a Communist shortly after the war. For Stryjkowski, the breakthrough came on a day when he heard of the failure of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising:

> I learned that from one day to the next the Jewish nation ceased to exist — the people who became mine again after the Holocaust. A Jewish Communist stops being a Jew. Now I felt like a Jew again.... I experienced a shock I feel unable to describe. But I had to express it somehow.... But [how]? Should I write about an uprising in which I did not participate? I have to erect a tombstone for the Jewish insurgents and the whole nation with all the modest means at my disposal. I have to save whatever I can from oblivion. I went back to my childhood years, to days that had sunk into oblivion. With a tremendous effort of memory, I raised the Atlantis that seemed to have been lost and drowned forever. Emerging from the threshold of my memory appeared scenes, details, and people who rose from the dead.... That is how my first novel, *Voices in the Dark*, came about, and that became the theme of my life.39

Thus, it is not surprising that *Głosy w cienności* may be read in the context of the Holocaust, even though it is set in the early twentieth century in Galicia. Most of the “voices” in this work have clear echoes of the Yiddish language, expressed by stylization based on various techniques, including linguistic calques. Stryjkowski’s approach is similar to that of Yiddish writers who had not experienced the Holocaust themselves, and therefore decided to write about it indirectly.

This period was also a catching-up time for works that could not be published during the years of the Stalinist terror. Among these were memoirs written during the war, such as Ludwik Hirszfeld’s *Historia jednego życia* (Story of a Life) of 1957; *Pamiętnik* (Diary) *Dawida Rubinowicza* of 1960; and Dawid Sierakowiak’s *Dziennik* (Diary), also of 1960. In 1962, Sandauer published his *Zapiski z martwego miasta* (Notes from a Dead Town).

This period also saw Grynberg’s debut, whose first work, the short story “Ekipa ‘Antygona’” (The Antigone Team), about a team exhuming bodies of Nazi victims in Poland, came out in 1959 in the biweekly journal *Współczesność*. It was also published with other short stories in book form in 1963. From then onward, exhumation in the metaphoric, and sometimes also in the literal sense (in the 1990s the author was present at the exhumation of his own father’s remains) became one of the leitmotifs in his works.

The title of Grynberg’s first, short novel, *Żydowska wojna* (The Jewish War, published in English first as *Child of the Shadows* of 1965 makes ironic reference to works by Josephus Flavius and Lion Feuchtwanger: The Jews, who are in a state of war, constantly have to go into hiding. The narrator is a little boy, in hiding with his family and friends, who observes the gradual disappearance of his loved ones. Grynberg’s next work, *Zwycięstwo* (published in English as *Victory*), which came out in Paris in 1969, could not be published in Poland due to his refusal to return two years earlier in view of the political situation and growing antisemitism there. The book covers the post-war period, and, like its predecessor, has an ironic dimension: The war is over, it concurs, but who really won?

The positive developments of the period around 1956, such as the relaxation of censorship, were accompanied by a resurgence of resentment towards Jews across considerable strata of society — not without some involvement from the political establishment. This prompted another wave of Jewish emigration to the West and to Israel. As a rule, those writers who worked in Polish tended to stay in Poland, but those who wrote in Yiddish left. Among them were Heller in 1956, Guterman and Kants in 1957, Olitski in 1959, and Rubin in 1960. Around the same time, from 1955 to 1957, a second large wave of repatriates returned from the East. Among them were writers who swelled the depleted ranks of Yiddish authors — for instance, Shloyme Belis, Yisrael Emiot, Yankl Gutkovitsh, and Tempel. In 1960, after

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40 For more information about writers leaving Poland or returning from the USSR, see Magdalena Ruta, “Preliminary Remarks on Yiddish Culture in Poland, 1945–1968,” *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia*, vol. 2 (2003), pp. 62–64.
years in the Gulag, Naftali Herts-Kon also came back. Another returnee was the outstanding writer Moshe Broderzon, however he died only a month after arriving back in Poland. Some of those who continued writing in Yiddish until 1968 were Elyahu Rayzman, Segal, Sfard, Shkjar, Zonshayn, Strauss-Marko, and Berger. Like Polish literature, Yiddish literature of that time took the previous period to task, and thus opened itself up to everything new. In their quest for answers to the question of their identity in those new times, writers expressed their previously stifled pain caused by the deaths of millions, and revealed an interest in traditional Jewish culture, contemporary Israeli culture, and the work of the Soviet Jewish writers murdered on Stalin’s orders in 1952. Retribution poems and voices polemizing contemporary Polish antisemitism became increasingly common, in both the press and books.

As in earlier periods, poetry was the dominant genre of Yiddish literature. During the 1956 thaw and over the next few years, collections on the primary theme of retribution were published. Among the most interesting in this respect are: Rubin’s *Trit in der nakht* (Footsteps in the Night) of 1957; Sfard’s *Lider* (Poems) of 1957; and Heller’s *Klorkeyt* (Clarity) of 1957 and *Baym rand* (On the Edge) of 1957.

However, the Holocaust remained the most important theme. Once again, echoing attempts immediately after the war, poets tried to reconstruct this apocalypse which they had not witnessed, or to express their subjective views on the contamination of their place by the deaths of their loved ones. Their poetry registers their sense of guilt, expresses their rebellion against God, and charges the Christian world with indifference. For instance, such motifs appear in Tsibulski’s collections *Hemshekh* (Continuation) of 1964 and *Dermonung* (Reminder) of 1967. Memories of the tragedy are relieved


of the ballast of ideology, and mourning assumes a personal character, because it affects everyone individually, on both personal and universal levels. Heller’s post-1956 work is marked by the return of more personal overtones in the “Baym denkmol fun geto” (By the Ghetto Memorial) cycle. Shklar’s work begins to feature more poems in which the lyrical subject speaks as a Jew, and the Holocaust becomes a central theme, e.g., in the “Farshvundene gasn” (Lost Streets) poetic cycle. Rubin also devotes more space in her poems to this theme than in the previous period, for example in “Ikh...” (I...) and “A vig-lid” (Lullaby); also Sfard in his poems: “In opgrunt fun di nekht” (In the Abyss of the Night); and Tsibulski in the poems: “Heshbn” (Account) and “In Majdanek,” in which the tragedy of the Jewish nation is an important element. Tsibulski’s and Sfard’s works were not published until after 1956. Reflection on the Jewish heritage was another important motif at that time. Yiddish itself was seen as a symbol of this: as a gift and comfort for the final journey, on the one hand; and as a kind of testament invoking memory, on the other. Language is a symbol of survival and continuity: Shklar’s “Toyznt yor” (A Thousand Years), Heller’s “Oyf zeyer shprakh” (In Their Language), and “Baym denkmol fun geto” (By the Ghetto Memorial) poetic cycle, while the Yiddish-language poet assumed the rank of the last guardians of the graves, such as Heller’s “Mayn ort” (My Place).

Another important theme in the poetry of that time is the place of the Jewish artist in Polish society. One feature of the Jewish subject’s consciousness in the poetry of Shklar, Tsibulski, Sfard, Rubin, and Heller is the sense of a bond with Poland, and its history and landscape. Recognition that this Polish-Jewish heritage is not easy is found in works in which poets address the subject of antisemitism. The poetry of the late 1950s begins to show a bitter note, mentions betrayed hopes, and even calls to emigrate (Rubin’s “Vider shoyn...” (Again...), and “Oyf di bregn fun Vaysl” (On the Banks of the Vistula); and Sfard’s “Di zelbe erd hot undz dertsoygn” (The Same Earth Raised Us).

In the last period of Yiddish literature in Poland, the prose written still describes it, albeit with progressively less schematism than previously, as a socialist country where Jews who had experienced the pre-war poverty and antisemitism and the wartime tragedy that befell their entire people could at last fulfill their aspirations and live with dignity. Works were also written including polemics that put antisemitism after the war and during the 1950s in the context of positive changes in the People’s Republic of Poland. This is the over-riding theme of Segal’s short story “Anopheles” (1956) and his collection of reportages Nad dziwną rzeką Sambation (On the Strange Sambation River) of 1956, both of which were published in Polish.
Again, however, the main thread is the Holocaust, which is present in various forms. As fictional reconstruction of wartime experiences, it is the subject of short stories by Segal, such as: “Tsvey nemen” (Two Names; published in Polish as “Ocalanie świata” — Rescuing the World), “Tsvishn lebn un toyt” (Between Life and Death; published in Polish as part of Skojarzeni — The Matched Couple) and “Regine” (published in Polish as “Opowiadanie z zabitego miasteczka” — A Story from a Little Murdered Town); Olicki’s “A bruder-keyver” (A Brother’s Grave; in the volume Menshn fun mayn shtetl — People from My Town) of 1958; Tempel’s “In di katakombn” (In the Catacombs; in the volume Der sheydim-ozyere — Lake of Demons) of 1962; and Berger’s “Der shtumer betler” (The Dumb Beggar) or “Dray fraynd” (Three Friends; in the volume Fun haynt un nekhtn — Stories from Today and Yesterday) of 1965. Analysis of the psychological effects of the Holocaust on survivors is an important theme in Segal’s novel Shaydvegn (Diverging Paths) of 1961, which was published in Polish as Na wyspie (On the Island) in 1961, and in Berger’s Nokhn mabl (After the Deluge) of 1967, as well as her short stories in the volume Fun haynt un nekhtn (see above), e.g., “In tog fun der heyliker Katerine” (On St. Catherine’s Day), or “Der farshpetiker Yid” (The Late Jew). After the Eichmann trial, Segal also wrote another novel, Der merder muss shtarn (The Murderer Must Die) of 1965, which is a psychological study of the war criminal, and was first published in Polish as Morderca musi umrzeć in 1963.

This portrait of the pre-war Jewish world with its rich communal life and customs, which aims to restore memories of a place that no longer exists, is also a direct, though chronologically remote, literary response to the Holocaust. The shtetl is the “hero” of Strauss-Marko’s novels, such as Geven amol a shtetl... (Once There Was a Shtetl...) of 1965; Segal’s Der tayvl in shtetl of 1967 (The Devil in the Shtetl), published in Polish as Kochankowie w Sodomie (Lovers in Sodom) in 1966); and short stories by Olicki in the book Menshn fun mayn shtetl (1958), by Tempel in Der sheydim-ozyere (Lake of Demons) of 1962, and by Berger, a series also called Menshn fun mayn shtetl in Fun haynt un nekhtn (see above). Even though some of the narrators who describe life in the shtetl have “progressive” views, there is no denying their love for every detail of their annihilated world. As Segal wrote:

All I am telling you about the Mandelboym family and about Blima Mandelboym may seem banal to you. Among you, some will doubtless ask why I am telling you all this. I do not know. Perhaps I seek understanding from you — understanding and forgiveness. Because...Blima
Mandelboym is dead. She died 20 years ago...maybe she was burned.... Yet, when the news of her death reached me, I did not hang myself in the old cemetery or drown myself in the river — I did not. Perhaps that is why I speak about... Blima and the old shtetl, where every stone is bathed in blood.44

This theme is taken up again later in a similar, though artistically more mature, way by Bogdan Wojdowski in his short story about Belcia from the Warsaw Ghetto, “Mały człowieczek, nieme ptaszę, klatka i świat” (A Small Person, a Songless Bird, a Cage, and the World) of 1975.45

The act of talking and writing about that world once so well known (and once so much criticized) takes on special significance as an act of commemoration — literature becomes a tombstone. This is what Olicki speaks about in the opening to his volume of short stories about Turzysk, his native town, which has the following dedication, in the form typical of Jewish memorial books:

To the martyrs and heroes of the sacred Holocaust
Whose names are mentioned in this book,
And to those martyrs and heroes
Whose names are absent from it —
I erect a MATZEVAH

To my native, annihilated shtetl,
To the annihilated towns and shtetlekh
Mentioned in this book,
And to all those
This book does not mention,
Which for generations were home
To Jewish joys and sorrows —
I erect a MATZEVAH46

45 For the English translation, see “A Small Person, a Songless Bird, a Cage, and the World,” in Polonsky and Adamczyk-Garbowska, eds., Contemporary Jewish Writing in Poland, pp. 239–244.
Yiddish literature in Poland, already much weakened by the emigration at the end of the 1950s, came to an end in early 1968 when the authorities suspended the literary monthly *Yidishe Shriftn* and closed the Yidish Bukh publishing house. The antisemitic campaign that year led to the emigration of virtually all the writers who were part of the Yiddish literary scene: Berger, Segal, Sfard, Smolar, Shklar, and Strauss-Marko, among many others. Polish-Jewish writers indirectly involved with Yiddish culture also left: the translators Wygodzki and Słucki, and Grynberg, who at that time worked as an actor at the State Jewish Theater in Warsaw, among others.

**From 1969 to 1989**

This period can be divided into two distinct stages: The enforced silence after the Communist authorities launched their antisemitic campaign in the spring of 1968, with intensified censorship (for instance, an anthology of Jewish poetry in Polish translation, ready for publication at that time, edited by Słucki and Salomon Łastik, was only released for publication 15 years later); and a revival brought on by the birth of the Solidarity trade union in 1980, and, even slightly earlier, after Isaac Bashevis Singer was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1978. Nevertheless, in spite of the censorship rules in force, the first of these decades still produced a few very important works by second-generation authors.

One example is Wojdowski’s novel on life in the Warsaw Ghetto, *Chleb rzucony umarłym* (literally, Bread Thrown to the Dead; published in English as *Bread for the Departed*). Born in Warsaw in 1930, Wojdowski spent over two years in the Warsaw Ghetto, and was later taken into hiding on the Aryan side. The major part of his work deals, directly and indirectly, with his wartime experiences. *Chleb rzucony umarłym* covers the period from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1940 until January 1943, when there was a “minor Aktion,” that is the first stage of deportation to death camps. It includes descriptions of many key events, such as the “Grosse Aktion” (Great Action) in the summer of 1942, when thousands of Jews, including Janusz Korczak and children from his orphanage, were transported to Treblinka. The inexorable extermination of the ghetto is seen through the eyes of a young boy, who perceives the reality for what it is: the most abnormal of situations making up his daily life. Wojdowski does not glorify the ghetto; on the contrary, he describes all the misery, ugliness, and disintegration of life there. The “bread” in the title is his leitmotif, a symbol of survival. Bread
is the object of desire of all the ghetto's residents, and no less so of the young
protagonist, who, like other children, becomes his family’s sole breadwin-
ner. The novel centers around a group of young smugglers, prepared to take
any risk to smuggle food from the Aryan side into the ghetto. The novel is
set almost entirely inside the ghetto walls and concentrates on the residents’
position, emphasising their isolation. It is loosely structured, often written
with deliberate misuse of language to reproduce the specific character of
the Polish used by these Jews, and to underscore that most of them spoke
Yiddish (as in Głosy w cienności and other works by Stryjkowski).

Another important event, marking a definitive turning point in Krall’s
personal career in journalism, was her above-mentioned interview with
Marek Edelman. This interview, originally published in the monthly jour-
nal Odra in 1976, and a year later, after battles with the censor, in book form
as Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem (Getting There before God); published in
English first as Shielding the Flame, and later as To Outwit God, heralded a
new phase in her work. The last days of the ghetto is the main subject of the
book, with deliberate deconstruction of the heroic myths of that time, and
including prosaic and even shameful details. Nevertheless, it pays tribute
to the dedication and sacrifice of those who died in the uprising. It is now
part of the canon of Polish Holocaust literature, alongside Borowski’s and
Nałkowska’s works.

Other noteworthy books published during this period are: Maria Czap-
ska’s Gwiazdy Dawida (Stars of David) of 1975; and Kazimierz Moczarski’s
Rozmowy z katem (Conversations with an Executioner) of 1977. A number
of important works by non-Jewish authors came out abroad. These includ-
ed Tematy żydowskie (Jewish Themes) by Stanisław Vincenz, published in
London in 1977, which incorporated a chilling text about the Kolomyia
Jews (a Yiddish version of which was previously published in the Kolomyia
Memorial Book in 1957).

The single most significant event on the poetry scene in this period,
although restricted to an underground audience, was the publication of
Jerzy Ficowski’s Odczytanie popiołów (A Reading of the Ashes; published by
a Polish press in London in 1979). This contained poems written earlier. In
a sense, the entire period from the turn of the 1970s and 1980s until today is
all about “reading the ashes,” as direct or indirect witnesses or survivors.

In the 1980s, riding on the tide of Solidarity and the relaxation of cen-
sorship over Jewish topics, several important ghetto diaries were published:
by Adam Czerniakow and Emanuel Ringelblum, both in 1983, and by Hen-
ryk Makower in 1987. In 1982, Mary Berg’s Dziennik (Diary) was published,
which is a translation from the English Warsaw Ghetto: A Diary by Mary Berg, first published in 1946 (although the original was written in Polish, but later edited by Shmuel Leyb Shneiderman).

Krall’s next book, a short novel entitled Sublokatorka (published in English as The Subtenant), was originally published in Paris in 1985, to circumvent censorship. It offers an ironic juxtaposition of Polish and Jewish life under the occupation through a symbolic approach to “light” (a stereotypical view of the “heroic” deaths of Polish underground fighters), and “dark” (an equally stereotypical perception of the Jews’ “passive” stance in the ghetto). This is played out symbolically by the fictional characters Maria, a Pole, and Marta, a Jewess, alongside the historical figures Krystyna Krahelska and Rywka Urman. Krahelska is killed by a bullet in the Warsaw Uprising, while Rywka Urman, crazed with despair and hunger, resorts to cannibalism.47

Another important book was published in Paris in 1988: Rymkiewicz’s Umschlagplatz (published in English as The Final Station: Umschlagplatz) attempts to address the Holocaust from the position of the second-generation witness. This excerpt illustrates this with an imagined dialog between the narrator and the Jewish boy in the well-known photograph throughout the world — a small boy in a peaked cap and knee-high socks with his hands up in surrender:

Artur Siemiątek, son of Leon and Sara, née Dąb, born in Łowicz...is my contemporary: we were both born in 1935.... He is in this photo taken in the Warsaw Ghetto, and I am in the photo taken on the high platform in the Otwock [Ghetto]. We may assume that both photographs were taken in the same month, mine a week or so earlier.... On the platform in Otwock, I am smiling nicely. The boy’s face — the photo was taken by an SS sergeant — betrays nothing.

“You’re tired,” I say to Artur. “It must be very uncomfortable standing like that with your arms in the air. I know what we’ll do. I’ll lift my arms up now, and you put yours down. They may not notice. But wait, I’ve got a better idea. We’ll both stand with our arms up.”48

But both the writer and perceptive readers are only too well aware that such

a role-swap, or even adoption of the same position, could only happen in
the author’s imagination.

In 1986, the first of Benski’s collections of short stories dealing indirectly
with the Holocaust was published in Poland, under the title Ta najważniejsza
cząsteczka (That Most Important Particle). The memory of the Holocaust is
a constant companion to the handful of survivors who constitute most of
the author’s heroes. In the title story, the sense of guilt takes on a tragicomic
dimension. A Jewish couple living in Warsaw after the war attempts to fit
in with other Jewish survivors. Fate has treated them kindly, as compared
to their relatives and friends. The narrator spent the war with his brother
in New York, and his wife was deported to Uzbekistan. None of his family
were gassed, executed by firing squad in a forest, or starved to death. Most
of them settled in the USA. He recognizes how embarrassing it is to be an
exception to the rule. However, when he starts inventing a new biography
for himself, based on the experiences of others, his wife realizes that they
could not possibly have managed to survive it all.49

Grynberg, who went to live in the USA, also continued to write, but his
work was only available in Poland through clandestine sources. His works
were published abroad: in London, Paris, and West Berlin.50

From 1989 to 2008

This period saw the return of writers previously known only from under-
ground circles, and debuts by new authors. Indeed, Grynberg actually un-
derscored his return in the title of his 1991 volume of poetry, Wróciłem (I
Returned), and in the publishing market and public discourse, he was suf-
fi ciently distinct to gain a reputation as a monothematic writer, a label he
confirmed in his own words. In an interview published in the daily Gazeta
Wyborcza in 1998, he said:

There is no subject at all of greater importance to humanity, until some-
thing more terrible than the Holocaust happens, and let us hope it never

49 See the English translation of this story under the title “Missing Pieces” in Stanislaw
50 For example, Antynostalgia (London, 1971), Życie ideologiczne (London, 1975), Życie
osobiste (London, 1979), Życie codzienne i artystyczne (Paris, 1980), Prawda nieartystycz-
czna (West Berlin, 1984),
The Holocaust is a great lesson and warning for the civilization in which we live — a turning point. The history of the Jews is certainly unique, but there are lessons for everyone to learn from it, because it did not evolve in a vacuum, and concerns all those who had a part in it. That is my message.  

Previously, in a collection of essays entitled *Prawda nieartystyczna* (A Non-Artistic Truth) of 1984, Grynberg made a similar statement, which is implied in the title of one of the articles: “Obsesyjny temat” (Obsessive Subject). He appoints himself as guardian of the vast cemetery that Poland has become due to the Nazis. His aim is to uphold the memory of those graves and prevent them from being defiled.

Like Krall in *Sublokatorka*, in many of his works, Grynberg makes a bitter, ironic comparison between the stereotypical perception of “Polish” death and “Jewish” death. Other important motifs in his work are the question of birthplace, and fathoming the mystery of his father’s death. These resurface in many of his works, with the narrator returning to the village of Radoszyna and attempting to talk to his former neighbors about his father, Abram. Most of the residents either did not remember him or tried to forget about him, and were particularly unwilling to talk about the circumstances in which he died. Pursuing the truth becomes a compulsive obsession for his son. In *Dziedzictwo* (Heritage) of 1993, published after the release of Paweł Łoziński’s film *Miejsce urodzenia* (Place of Birth), Grynberg transcribes interviews conducted with residents of the village where his father was in hiding and later murdered.

Although Grynberg’s oeuvre bears clear autobiographical hallmarks, it should of course not be read literally, identifying the various characters with real people and the narrator with the author. He treats his own life, like the biographies of others, with considerable objectivity and distance. Sometimes he blends different lives, attributing events that did not happen to a character in reality but were part of someone else’s experience.

In his later works, Grynberg makes increasingly frequent references to others’ fates. In the docudrama *Kronika* (Chronicle) of 1984, he looks at the Łódź Ghetto; in *Pamiętnik Marii Koper* (Maria Koper’s Diary) of 1993, he tells the story of a Jewish woman rescued by Polish farmers; and in *Dzieci Syjonu* (published in English as *Children of Zion*) of 1994, he uses archival

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accounts of what happened to Jewish children from families deported to the Eastern USSR during the war, and eventually taken to Palestine via Iran by General Anders’s Army.

His collection of short stories *Drohobycz, Drohobycz* (published in English as *Drohobycz, Drohobycz and Other Stories*) of 1997, brings together the true stories of many survivors who settled in various countries after the war. *Memorbuch*, of 2000, in turn, is the somewhat fictionalized biography of Adam Bromberg, Director of the State Publishing Company in Warsaw (Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe), who was forced to leave Poland by the antisemitic witch hunt in 1968. In his new émigré life in Sweden, he remained faithful to the publishing profession. Grynberg’s style features irony, the grotesque, and black humor. He places great emphasis on allowing his characters to speak, keeping narrative comment to the minimum.

In the 1990s, Krall’s writing blossomed. In book after book, she blends true stories from the Holocaust with descriptions of Jewish life in Poland before the war, often drawing attention to seemingly insignificant details. This contrast adds expressiveness to her work. Many of her heroes are children of the Holocaust, people in the prime of life, who often do not know how they survived, who their parents or grandparents were, or what happened to them. Some of them have been seeking the truth for years; others have only just learned about their roots. Still others desire to escape from the past. Krall writes not only about survivors, but also about those who worked to save others, denounced others, stood by passively, or committed crimes.

Krall sometimes makes indirect allusions to Yiddish literature, in particular to the Singer brothers as “a time before everything.” She believes that even the most terrifying events and characters described by the masters of classic Yiddish literature pale in comparison with the true events during the Shoah.

In addition to describing life and the nightmare of the war years, Krall makes frequent reference to the post-Holocaust landscape, blighted by facing the memory of the Jews. At the end of one of her best stories, “*Portret z kulą w szczęce*” (Portrait with a Bullet in the Jaw), based on the life story of Tomasz Blatt, who was an escapee from Sobibór death camp, she describes a trip they made together around the Lublin area, which was densely populated by Jews before the war:

We passed Izbica, Krasnystaw, and Łopiennik. The sun was setting. Everything was even uglier and grayer. Maybe it is because of the
wandering spirits, which do not want to pass on if they are not mourned or bewailed — the grayness of unmourned spirits.\textsuperscript{52}

In 1994, on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Wojdowski committed suicide, sharing the fate of other survivor-writers, including Primo Levi, Jerzy Kosiński, and Jean Amery. His posthumous novel, published three years later, bearing the title \textit{Tamta strona} (The Other Side), is set near Warsaw, in a guesthouse visited by the last handful of Jewish survivors. In this instance, the title is used metaphorically to refer to death (the same title was originally planned for the novel \textit{Chleb rzucony umarlym}, see above).

The 1990s were also a time of debuts for various authors of Jewish descent who started to speak openly about their roots, often in the context of their experiences during the Holocaust. The best-known example is Głowiński, who never returned to his childhood until publication of his autobiographical \textit{Czarne sezony} (published in English as \textit{Black Seasons}) in 1998, which tells about his experiences in the Warsaw Ghetto and the time he spent in hiding in a convent in Turkowice. He put it this way:

\begin{quote}
I had been thinking of writing down my childhood experiences during the occupation since my youth, but I never got started. I was neither mentally nor professionally ready... I also had to overcome my inner barriers and fears, from which it was hard to free myself.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

A number of new names also came onto the scene at that time, authors who did not decide to try their hand at writing until a mature age. Among these are: Dichter, a retired scientist from Massachusetts (a 1968 émigré), author of the autobiographical novels \textit{Koń Pana Boga} of 1996 (published in English as \textit{God’s Horse}) and \textit{Szkoła Bezbożników} of 1999 (\textit{School of the Godless} in English); and also Roma Ligocka, a painter and scenographer, who spent over half her life in Germany, and wrote \textit{Dziewczynka w czerwonym płaszczyku} (\textit{The Girl in the Red Coat} in English), published in 2001 and \textit{Kobieta w podróży} (\textit{A Woman in Transit}) of 2002. Notably, both these authors’ first novels are about their experiences during the Holocaust, while

\textsuperscript{52} Hanna Krall, “Portret z kulą w szczęce,” in Hanna Krall, \textit{Taniec na cudzym weselu} (Warsaw: BGW, 1994), p. 94.
their subsequent books focus on their later life. This is also the case with Głowinski’s next book, *Historia jednej topoli* (Story of a Poplar, 2003). Apparently, only after dealing with their Holocaust experiences were they able to address other issues, such as identity.

Ligocka’s case is particularly complex, as she writes from the standpoint of a Polish Jew who immigrated to Germany (she claims she has to live there, because that causes her pain, which is somehow necessary for her to be able to write). Dichter is worthy of special attention since he competently addresses a subject hardly touched on previously in literature, which continues to provoke considerable emotion: Jewish involvement in the Communist system in post-war Poland.54

Głowinski, Ligocka, and Dichter belong to the generation of writers who experienced the nightmare of the war as children. There is also, however, an even younger group of writers of Jewish descent, born in the 1940s and 1950s. Most of them live abroad: Viola Wein and Eli Barbur in Israel; Roman Gren in France; and Ewa Kuryluk and Anna Frajlich in the USA. The Holocaust is not the main theme for them, although, of course, they cannot completely ignore it. Their main issues are identity and finding a place in their new environment. One of their common features is that, in spite of having spent many years in other countries, they retained Polish as their medium of artistic expression. Ewa Kuryluk, a painter and art critic, author of many books and essays, describes, among other things, her experience as the child of a Jewish Holocaust survivor. She grew up in the shadow of her mother’s traumatic experiences, from which she was never able to recover.55

Matywiecki’s book *Kamień graniczny* (Boundary Stone), published in 1994, is an unconventional attempt at addressing the Holocaust theme. It takes the form of short chapters with citations from letters and diaries from the Warsaw Ghetto, and supplemented by the author’s comments. In spite of its documentary nature, it is a record of awareness about the Holocaust rather than of specific events associated with it. Matywiecki’s relationship with the ghetto is a special one: He was conceived there, and born on the Aryan side after the liquidation of the Jewish district by the Germans, shortly before his father’s death in the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944.

This period is also a continuation of “reading the ashes” by the survivors’

54 See his two autobiographical novels recently made available in English: *God’s Horse* and *The Atheists’ School* (Evanston, ILL: Northwestern University Press, 2012).
55 See her autobiographical work *Frascati* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2009).
children. Among the works indirectly addressing this, by underscoring the absence of the Jews, are: Huelle's Weiser Dawidek (published in English as Who Was David Weiser?) of 1987; and Szewc's Zagłada (Annihilation in English), of 1987 and Zmierzchy i poranki (Dusks and Dawns) of 2000. Other writers with long residency outside Poland but who continue to write in Polish have also begun to make a greater mark, among them Irit Amiel, Ida Fink, and Janina Bauman.

Books written much earlier, but forgotten or never published for political reasons, also came to life during this period. One example is Władysław Szpilman's Pianista (The Pianist), originally published in 1946 as Śmierć Miasta (Death of a City), edited by Jerzy Waldorff. Only in the wake of its success on the German market was a second Polish edition published in 2000.

These phenomena — mature writing debuts, unexpected reorientations of Jewish themes, and the emergence of writers of the young generation — have potential to continue in Poland for several reasons. There is still a significant interest in minority cultures and regional history; Jewish-related themes are still fairly fashionable, although not to the same extent as at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, when a novel by Sholem Aleichem, published by Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie in Wrocław, sold 150,000 copies. There are still writers who only recently discovered their roots, such as children of Holocaust survivors and their descendants. There are still many more historical and political issues that have not been addressed at all or in sufficient depth, such as the Kielce Pogrom of July 1946, and the post-war return of survivors. These matters are touched on in works now forgotten: Jastrun's “Pamięć Józefa Oppenheima” (The Memory of Józef Oppenheimer) and “Wiersz okolicznościowy” (A Celebratory Poem), Adam Ważyk's “Kronika” (Chronicle), Roman Bratny's “Spacer po pogromie” (A Stroll after the Pogrom), which are all included in the volume Pieśń ujdzie cało. Antologia wierszy o Żydach pod okupacją niemiecką (The Song Will Survive: An Anthology of Poems about Jews under the German Occupation), edited by Michał M. Borwicz and published by the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Warsaw in 1947. Reference to these issues is also made in Segal's short stories in Polish: “Powrót Józka Cytron” (The Return of Józek Cytron) in Opowiadania z zabitego miasteczka (Stories from an Annihilated Shtetl of 1956 and Anopheles” from Ludzie z Jamy (People from Jama) of 1957, as well as in works written in Yiddish and, therefore, not accessible to Polish readers, e.g., the long poem “Kelts” (Kielce) by Chaim Grade. The massacre in Jedwabne in July 1941 had already been addressed in Anna Bikont's
extended reportage *My z Jedwabnego* (We Came from Jedwabne) of 2004, in which historical and sociological threads are interwoven with her quest for her own identity. In the Polish-Jewish literature of the inter-war period, the salient issues included two homelands (Poland and Israel), Zionist ideology, attitudes to Jewish tradition, depictions of the Polish-Jewish *shtetl*, and the evolution of the traditional Jewish family under the influence of increasing acculturation and secularization, whereas, in the post-war period, the major themes were the Shoah experience, emigration, and the struggle with identity. In the past, linguistically assimilated Jews were the main audience for Polish-Jewish literature. Nowadays, however, most readers do not have any Jewish roots, but after years of silence, they want to learn more about Jewish history and tradition.

Current literature would be expected to reflect the recent attempts to revive the Jewish community in Poland, and Jews discovering their true background after their families concealed this from them for many years. Some writers seek to answer the question of what it means to be a Jew in Poland now, and the effect of the Holocaust on their experience. While authors of the second and third generations are continuing to make up for lost time, perhaps there is a fourth generation waiting for their turn — people who grew up or are growing up in totally assimilated families or in those continuing to conceal their roots.

**Concluding Remarks**

How has the Holocaust impacted Jewish literary life in post-war Poland? In terms of Yiddish literature, the direct consequences certainly include the destruction of the pre-war literary center in Poland through the murder, death or emigration of many prominent writers; a change in the profile of literary life, which became dominated by a single political force; restriction of thematic content; deterioration in the quality of the work; and the scattering of the surviving writers around the world. Another immensely important direct consequence of the Holocaust, however, is the revision of many Communist writers’ negative attitudes towards the traditional Jewish world that was annihilated. The indirect effects of the Holocaust, many of which were not revealed until years after the war, include the following: The changing political atmosphere led to attempts to fit personal mourning into the officially imposed model of Socialist Realist literature, which was optimistic by
definition; of particular significance is the use of martyrological themes for propaganda purposes throughout this period, which is particularly marked immediately after the war and after 1956; the demise of Yiddish literature in its “progressive” form, due to the antisemitic policies of the Polish Communist authorities, as well as the generation changeover and the increasing cultural assimilation of the second generation of Polish Jews.

One feature characteristic of Holocaust literature across the world is that it forces writers to seek new means of expression. This is clearly seen in Yiddish literature, and is also highly apparent in Polish literature. Comparison of the work of some Polish and Polish-Jewish writers reveals striking differences. For instance, Rudnicki’s pre-war writing is characterized by psychologism and the narrator’s egocentric stance, while in his works from the “epoch of the crematoria,” his tone becomes epic, and, occasionally moralizing. Nołkowska, known in the early period for her modernist, estheticizing prose, uses a style in Medaliony that is laconic, even formally indifferent, and thus all the more wrenching. Rymkiewicz, who is considered the main proponent of neo-Classicism in Polish poetry and a scholar of Romantic literature, wrote Umschlagplatz in the form of an autobiographical reportage novel, which was entirely unlike any of his other works. Głowiński, known for his cool objectivity as a critic, often gives vent to his emotions in his prose, which is based on his own experiences.

One striking difference between Jewish and non-Jewish writers is that, among the former group, there are many for whom the Holocaust is the most important or virtually the only theme. After she started writing about the extermination of the Jews, Krall never really returned to her previous subjects. Similarly, Grynberg, who considers the Holocaust the most fundamental theme, stated:

The Polish writer is not achieving his task and not carrying out his mission unless he takes account of this vast theme, takes a stance, speaks out on this most important event, which occurred in his memory or the memories of his loved ones.⁵⁶

Indeed, many writers of Jewish descent conceive this as their mission. The situation is different among non-Jewish writers, for whom the Holocaust is

generally only a minor subject in their oeuvre, as if writing a work about it were a kind of catharsis. As Julian Przyboś said, in 1946:

Until I take on — in at least one word of my poetry — the burden of this most terrible of things, I shall not feel myself to be a totally free poet, who survived, and did not die, in that time of hatred, martyrdom, and struggle.\(^57\)

In fact, there is probably no major Polish poet who has not at some stage of their career addressed the Holocaust in their work: Broniewski in “Żydom polskim” (To the Polish Jews) and “Ballady i romanse” (Ballads and Romances); Zbigniew Herbert in “PanCogito szuka rady” (Mr. Cogito Seeks Advice); Miłosz in “Campo di Fiori” and “Biedny chrześcijanin patrzy na getto” (A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto); Anna Kamieńska in “Stół Mordechaja Gebirtiga” (Mordekhay Gebirtig’s Table); and Wisława Szymborska in “Jeszcze” (Still). However, it is not a central or constantly recurring theme for any of the Polish writers, and neither is it for poets of Jewish descent, such as Tuwim or Słonimski, although the latter wrote several works that have become part of the canon, in particular “Elegia miasteczek żydowskich” (Elegy for Jewish Towns) and “Pieśń o Januszu Korczaku” (A Song about Janusz Korczak). This may be partly due to their sense of limitation, as expressed in Miłosz’s famous dilemma as to whether “certain spheres of reality can be the themes of poems and novels.”\(^58\) But however Szczypiorski’s well-intentioned but highly rhetorical words are taken — that Jews can afford to forget the Holocaust albeit Christians should not — in reality Jewish writers are not able to forget, while non-Jews seem to find this much easier.

So while it is undoubtedly the central theme for Polish-Jewish writers (even in those who do not make direct reference to the Holocaust, its echo is a constant presence, as in Stryjkowski’s writing), among non-Jewish writers it is merely one theme among many. While authors of Jewish descent often perceive the Holocaust in the context of previous tragedies, and mourn the destruction of Eastern European Jewry and its consequences for


\(^58\) Czesław Miłosz, “Ruiny i poezja,” in Miłosz, Świadectwo poezji (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1987), p. 84.
several generations, including future ones, the dominant motif among non-Jewish writers is “reading the ashes,” i.e., attempting to comprehend what happened, fathom the Christian conscience, and express contrition over the destruction of the Jewish presence in Poland. Some see the Holocaust as an unprecedented event (for instance, Rymkiewicz refers to the Holocaust as “that,” reasoning that no word can reflect the terrible uniqueness of that tragedy), while others (such as Szczypiorski) place the annihilation of Europe’s Jews in the context of twentieth century totalitarianism.

Polish Holocaust literature, like all of Polish literature, developed under unusual conditions. The meanderings of state censorship created a situation in which certain topics appeared and disappeared; some works were published, but in censored form, or in very limited editions; some were considered politically correct, others not; some writers, such as Ida Fink or Miłosz, and some works by Krall and Rymkiewicz in the second half of the 1980s, were published abroad, and sometimes foreign editions, either in Polish or in translation, preceded the domestic editions in Polish. This is the reason why some works of value are still unavailable in wider circulation. One example is Myszy i ludzie (Mice and Men), Mina Tomkiewicz’s autobiographical “bourgeois” novel about the Warsaw Ghetto, first published in translation into Hebrew in 1955, and in Polish, in London, in 1966.

Compared to Western literature, such as French or English, Polish Holocaust literature tends to be more documentary in character and economical in its use of linguistic and artistic means. Writers often avoid fictionalization, considering deliberate “enhancement” of events sacrilegious. They even go so far as passing over certain true facts in their biographies for fear that they might prove too improbable to the reader, undermining the credibility of the entire body of work as a result. According to an interview with Ida Fink:

In Podróż [published in English as The Journey — M.A.-G., M.R.], everything is true. I only changed the names. I did not include a number of true events in the book, so that the story would not seem too sensational.59

In other words, authors employ a kind of self-censorship, as opposed to

59 “Zawsze chciałam pisać. Z Idą Fink rozmawia Katarzyna Bielas” (I’ve Always Wanted to Write: Katarzyna Bielas Talks to Ida Fink), Gazeta Wyborcza, no. 160 (July 12), 1994, p. 11.
Western writers who seek sensational plots on the assumption that an accumulation of shocking scenes about the Holocaust will bring home the immensity of the tragedy to the reader, for instance, *Sophie’s Choice*, by William Styron, and *The White Hotel*, by D.M. Thomas. Similar tendencies will undoubtedly eventually emerge in Poland.

In the foremost works of Polish literature on the Holocaust, among which Borowski’s and Nalkowska’s narratives should be included, as well as Rudnicki’s series from the “epoch of the crematoria,” Wojdowski’s *Chleb rzucony umarłym*, Krall’s *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* and *Sublokatorka*, Grynberg’s *Żydowska wojna*, and Rymkiewicz’s *Umschlagplatz*, the common denominator is immense caution in the selection of words and means of expression. This type of prose was addressed to readers living in the shadow of war and capable of reading between the lines. It is no wonder it is very hard for foreign readers to understand.

Yiddish literature, too, albeit for different reasons, has always had difficulty in reaching broader circles of readers, in both Poland and the West, and among Jews and non-Jews. Even works of artistic value (e.g., the poetry of Sutkever, Zhikhlnskii, Korn, Heller, Sfard or Rubin), or those touching on important themes not addressed by other writers, to date (such as the Kielce Pogrom, returning after the war, or antisemitism throughout the post-war period, which is present in Segal’s and Berger’s prose) have no way of breaking through to readers beyond their original audience, who have been dead for many years. Paradoxically, there is very little awareness of Yiddish literature, including translations of Yiddish books, in post-war Poland, even among Poles with an interest in Jewish literature. 60 The reasons for this include the hermetic nature of the language, which makes this literature inaccessible to broader circles of readers across the world and the declining number of people able to read Yiddish in relation to the potential audience for this work. Another important factor is the issue of ideology,
reflected in simplification and schematic nature, especially of the early texts, which deters both potential readers and scholars.\footnote{Studies on this period have only just begun — see the articles by Nathan Cohen, Magdalena Ruta, and Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikov quoted earlier in this article.}

Polish literature, like its Yiddish counterpart, is often also marked by didacticism, schematicism, and Communist ideology (some of the works by Rudnicki, Sandauer, and Wygodzki, for instance, could answer this description). Also, simplifications are employed to convince readers that there were both “good” and “bad” people in each group, among the Jews, Poles, and Germans (e.g., Szczypiorski’s \textit{Początek} [The Beginning], published in English as \textit{Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman}), or the overuse of paradox (as in some of Krall’s works).

As already mentioned, compared to Western literature, there are few popular, extensively fictionalized works on the Holocaust in either Polish or Yiddish literature. This may yet change, since the reality of the Holocaust is receding and becoming increasingly symbolic to the contemporary Polish reader. This also begs the question as to how far contemporary generations of writers, i.e., potential, “surrogate” or vicarious victims and witnesses, are in fact talking about the historical event that was the Holocaust, and how far their real theme is their conception and awareness of it. It is difficult to know how representation of the Holocaust will evolve in the future and how Polish literature on this theme will develop, but there are grounds for assuming it will remain a very important motif for a long time to come, and that the dichotomy of Polish writers as witnesses and Jewish writers as victims will be perpetuated. Whereas, in the first two generations, Jewish writers were the dominant group, for obvious reasons, in the future, the category of potential, vicarious or delayed witnesses will become the dominant group. There are also certain aspects on which there has been insufficient or minimal reflection, to date, such as the issue of “accomplices in death,” seen not only in the metaphoric sense, as in Jan Błoński’s essay, inspired by Miłosz’s poem, “A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto,” but also in the historical sense. As Jewish themes were, to a certain extent, taboo for many years, and the Holocaust has been a particularly difficult and controversial issue, post-war generations have had little to do with it. It is therefore no wonder that there is much ground to be made up.

There also remains the very difficult issue of valuation. Should Holocaust literature be judged in the same way as other works, or should different criteria be adopted — moral, documentary, and didactic? How, for
instance, should one treat the writing of Wygodzki, a survivor, whose works are perhaps not the height of artistic achievement, but nevertheless constitute a unique poetic document of his experiences and, likewise, the work of Segal and other Yiddish writers?

Grynberg, in his essay cited above, claimed that “on the subject of the Holocaust, Polish literature has achieved more than the ‘superpowers’ — i.e., Russian and American literature, more than ambitious literatures such as Czechoslovak or Yugoslavian, and more than the old masters, such as English, French or Italian writing. Polish literature in this respect compares with Jewish literature [by referring to ‘Jewish literature,’ Grynberg has in mind writings in both Hebrew and Yiddish — authors’ note and emphasis].”62 He made this statement at the beginning of the 1980s in order to show that, in spite of its extensiveness in this area, Polish literature still had much to do, and Polish writers have a great responsibility because they were “at the epicenter of the greatest crime in history.”63 The plethora of works written since then is proof that the subject of the Holocaust remains a very important obligation in Polish literature. Publishing translations of the post-war Jewish literature written in Poland, in both Yiddish and Polish, would be important in opening them up to broader study.64

63 Ibid.
64 For a comprehensive anthology of Jewish literature, including Holocaust literature, see David G. Roskies, ed., The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989).
In the Second Polish Republic

In the inter-war period, many exhibitions were organized in Łódź, Warsaw, Kraków, Lwów (Lviv), Białystok, Wilno (Vilnius) and smaller towns; artists’ groups and associations were established; and basic institutions to advance and support the artistic efforts of Jewish artists were founded. Jewish youth studied at the School of Fine Arts of Stefan Batory University in Wilno and the Academies of Fine Arts in Kraków and Warsaw. The latter was attended by a large number of Jewish students.1

There were several professional associations of Jewish artists: the Kraków Association of Jewish Painters and Sculptors (Zrzeszenie Żydowskich Malarzy i Rzeźbiarzy w Krakowie), which, despite the name, was more than a local organization, with members throughout the country, as well as in Paris, and it organized almost 50 exhibitions during its eight years of activity (1931–1939);2 and the Association of Jewish Visual Artists in Poland (Stowarzyszenie Żydowskich Artystów Plastyków w Polsce), located in Warsaw, organized several exhibitions between 1937 and 1939, and offered very popular drawing and painting courses at its office at 10 Leszno Street.

There were also other organizations open to artists and art lovers. The oldest of these was the Jewish Art Lovers’ Circle (Koło Miłośników Sztuki Żydowskiej) in Lwów, founded before the First World War, and reactivated in 1919.3 After 1925, the Art and Literary Society, renamed the Jewish

1 The most comprehensive study devoted to the work of Jewish artists in Poland was written by Jerzy Malinowski, Malarstwo i rzeźba Żydów polskich w XIX i XX wieku (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2000).
3 The society practically discontinued its activities after the death of Maksymilian Biebenstock in 1923.
Artistic-Literary Circle in 1928, was extremely active, holding exhibitions, lectures, and literary evenings. Also in Lwów, the world’s first Curatory for the Protection of Jewish Art Monuments was established at the Jewish kehillah (community), whose primary objective was to make an inventory of Jewish monuments.4

The Jewish Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts (Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych — ŻTKSP), previously the Jewish Arts Committee (Komitet Sztuki Żydowskiej), the largest and most important Jewish art and exhibition center in inter-war Poland, was established in Warsaw in 1923.5 Between the “Exhibition of Jewish Art” in June 1918 and the last show — caricatures by Emil Umański — which opened on June 25, 1939, the society organized 98 exhibitions, presenting to the Warsaw public many diverse works in various styles by Jewish artists of all generations and backgrounds. The ŻTKSP’s exhibition halls were open to artists from all over Poland and abroad, from Austria, the USA, and France, among other countries; and the society supported young, talented artists by giving them a chance to make their debut and promoting their artistic careers in the future. A branch of the society also operated from 1930 to 1931 in Kraków.

Despite certain differences in areas of activity and diverse ideologies, the main objective of all these associations was to popularize and energize Jewish art, to develop an understanding and appreciation of art among the Jewish community, and to support Jewish artists in their struggle for subsistence and individual artistic growth.

During the inter-war period, and even earlier, from the end of the nineteenth century, the greatest problem and complaint among painters and sculptors in Poland, both Jewish and non-Jewish, was the limited interest in art. Little changed in that respect, despite years of effort and work, as evidenced by the “Jewish Artists’ Appeal to Society,” published in February 1939, in the weekly Literarishe Bleter, which stresses the meaning and significance of fine arts:


JEWISH ARTISTS IN POLAND AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

Jewish art is not a phenomenon detached from our lives; it is not merely playing around, rather...[it is] Jewish cultural property. Jewish fine arts... along with poetry, Jewish belles-lettres, and scholarship share the same task of beautifying, developing, initiating, and enhancing our existence, our human dignity, and our awareness and sense of what is beautiful, good, and true.6

The activities of artists and art lovers included planning and organizing exhibitions, talks and lectures, and meetings and discussions with artists. There was great demand for entertainment; the annual Jewish art balls, afternoon “black coffee” parties, and artistic evenings with art, music, and literature, were all immensely popular. For artists, exhibitions were the best method of presenting their output to the public and, if they managed to sell some of their works there, this was frequently their only source of income. However, finding buyers was not easy, which is why most artists worked in various other jobs. Some of them, including Józef Śliwniak, Władysław Weintraub, Mosze Apfelbaum, and Fryc Kleinmann, made theatrical scenery. Sculptors, such as Abraham Ostrzega and Feliks Rubinlicht, designed and made tombstones, and Chaim Hanft earned his living in applied art. Others devoted their passion and talent to advertising and typography. Among the most successful in this field were Henryk Berlewi, Weintraub, Icchak Vincent Brauner, Izrael Tykociński, and Mendel Reif. Stanisława Centnerszwerowa and Joachim Kahane worked as drawing teachers in high schools in Warsaw and Łódź.

Apart from Warsaw and Kraków, there were also important fine art circles in Łódź, Wilno, Lwów, and Bialystok. The first years after the First World War saw the foundation of the “Yung Yidish” literary and art group in Łódź, which proved to be one of the most important Jewish groups in the creative arts over the years. “Yung Yidish” members, Mojżesz Broderson, Marek Szwarc, Jankiel Adler, Brauner, Henryk Barciński, and others, were significant figures in the Jewish cultural life in Poland.7 The “Yung Vilne” group, which included both poets and painters, was formed in Wilno in the 1930s.8

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of Jewish painters and sculptors who were active in the inter-war period in Poland. Not all Jewish

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artists took part in Jewish art exhibitions: Whereas most presented their work both in “Polish” and “Jewish” exhibition halls, some only participated in the mainstream Polish art world. Until 1933, many Jewish artists went abroad for various periods, mostly to France and Germany. Students at art academies in the late 1930s did not manage to begin serious careers, and displayed their works mostly at school exhibitions. Some abandoned their artistic pursuits altogether. According to rough estimates, over 500 Jewish artists actively participated in the artistic world (Jewish and Polish) in the Second Polish Republic.\(^9\) It should also be noted that the Jewish art milieu was hardly monolithic. It encompassed diverse and conflicting ideological trends, from assimilation through very strong nationalist trends (Zionistic and Yiddish) to left-wing ideologies.

* * *

The Holocaust wiped out Jewish culture. Most of the artists who remained in the territories occupied by the Germans in 1939 eventually found themselves in ghettos, and the majority were murdered in the gas chambers of the death camps from 1942 to 1944. Some of those in the area occupied by the Red Army from 1940 to 1941 were deported to the interior of the USSR, and others managed to escape there after the Third Reich attacked the USSR. Those who remained, like the Jews in the General Government before them, were isolated in ghettos or incarcerated in labor camps and ultimately perished in death camps. Only a few managed to survive on the Aryan side, in the cities, forests, hiding places or dugouts.

“I belong to the generation of those, who, after escaping death almost by a miracle, stood at the threshold of a new life, terrified, helpless, stunned, morally and physically wounded, naked, stripped of all the dreams and ideals of youth,” wrote Marek Oberländer shortly before his death.\(^10\)

These words of the artist aptly convey the state of mind of Holocaust survivors. Crippled, physically and mentally shattered, destitute, deprived of their artistic output, artists experienced the fate, despair, and pain of survivors. Only a few out of about 500 pre-war artists survived. Those who lived through concentration camps include: Marek Włodarski (Henryk


\(^10\) Mariusz Hermansdorfer, ed., Marek Oberländer. Malarstwo, grafika, rysunek, exhibition catalog (Wrocław: Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 1980), p. 10. A short biographical text was written by Oberländer for the catalog of his first exhibition in Poland after a number of years. He died in Nice on July 9, 1978.
Streng), Izaak Celnikier, Sara Gorszejn, Sara Gliksman, and Zofia Rozenstrauch. Most of those who escaped death on the Aryan side were artists who had not participated in Jewish cultural life before the war, such as Henryk Kuna, Artur Nacht-Samborski, Gizela Hufnaglówna-Klimaszewska, Elżbieta Hirszberżanka (Malinowska), Jonasz Stern, Zofia Woźna (Bela Lesser), Leonia Nadelman-Janecka, Erna Rosenstein, Magdalena Gross, Ida Brauner-Wolman (Wohlman), and Herman Ehrmann.

Emanuel Proweller (as Anatol Wróblewski, his assumed name during the occupation) hid for two years in Ukrainian forests. Perec Willenberg, originally from Częstochowa, pretended to be deaf and mute in order to avoid exposure, and painted religious pictures sold at country fairs. Aleksander Bogen (Kacenbogen), who began his art studies in Wilno just before the outbreak of war, fought with partisans in the Wilno region.\(^\text{11}\) A greater number of artists managed to survive in the Soviet Union: Mieczysław Berman, Mojżesz Boruszek, Mauryccy Bromberg, Józef Czarnocki, Szeja Efron-Szenkman, Józef Fajingold, Abba Fenichel, Tomasz Gleb (Jehuda Chaim Kalman), Chaim Goldberg, Natan Gutman, Chaim Hanft, Henryk Hechtkopf, Karol Piasecki, Henryk Lewensztadt, Leon Lewkowicz (who died in Chinkent in 1950), Rafal Mandelzweig, Aron (Adam) Muszka, Marek Oberlander, Beniamin Pacanowski, Natan Rapoport, Dorota Szenfeld, Szmul Wajnsztok, and Fiszel Zawidowicz, among others; in England: Jankiel Adler, Marek Szwarc, Henryk Gotlib, Józef Herman, Franciszka, and Stefan Thompson; in France: Ludwik Lille, Henryk Berlewi, Berta Grünberżanka, and Sasza Blonder; and in the USA: Zygmunt Menkes and Icchak Lichtenstein.

Maksymilian Feurrig spent the six years of war in an \textit{Oflag},\(^\text{12}\) and, like the artists who survived in the West, never returned to Poland.

\section*{After the Second World War}

Many survivors, however, wished to return, at least for a while, to the homes and towns where they used to live. “After the war, I returned to Poland — where else could I go?” Jonasz Stern said, many years later.\(^\text{13}\) The painter

\textsuperscript{11} After the war, Bogen completed his studies at the Institute of Fine Arts in Vilna. In 1947, he returned to Poland with his wife.

\textsuperscript{12} A prisoner of war camp for officers only.

hoped to find his wife and friends from the Kraków years. Unfortunately, his wife,\(^\text{14}\) as well as several colleagues from the pre-war “Kraków Group,” had perished. Like other survivors, artists searched for relatives and acquaintances from pre-war times. “It still happens that someone you hoped to find crops up, but more and more seldom,” wrote Artur Nacht-Samborski in a letter to an acquaintance. “Every now and then I go to the kehillah and look through the lists of names,”\(^\text{15}\) he added. They tried to find their pre-war work and put their property affairs in order. At last, they could devote themselves to what numerous survivors saw as their most important duty towards the dead: remembrance.

In December 1945, thanks to Caritas, I reached Białystok\(^\text{16}\) — Izaak Celnikier recalls. “Together with several survivors, I tidied up and put a brick on the mass graves of thousands of Jews from the ghetto murdered by Germans. I wrote their names on the cement.”\(^\text{17}\)

In 1946, the Soviet Gulag deportees and prisoners began to return from the Soviet Union as part of a repatriation action. Some of them chose to rebuild their personal lives and professional careers in Poland; others, like Rafał Mandelzweig, Natan Rapoport, and Henryk Lewensztadt, soon emigrated to Uruguay, France or Palestine.

Those who remained frequently shared left-wing hopes for a democratic Poland, free of antisemitism, where it would be possible to reconstruct and develop a secular Jewish culture; others could not imagine living anywhere but in Poland. It was therefore a logical decision to establish institutions and organizations to support artists and to protect the cultural heritage of Polish Jews.

In October 1946, Chaim Hanft, Rafał Mandelzweig, Mieczysław Berman, Zofia Rozenstrauch, and Józef Sandel met in the Warsaw atelier of sculptor Natan Rapoport. They decided to reactivate the pre-war Jewish Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts.\(^\text{18}\) The art critic Józef Sandel was the prime mover of this initiative, which was also part of his work in the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w

\(^{14}\) “A testimony by Jonasz Stern of October 18, 1945,” AŻIH, file no. 301/4689, p. 3.


\(^{16}\) Celnikier, originally from Warsaw, was in the Białystok Ghetto during the war.


Polsce — CKŻP). Aided by his closest collaborators, Zofia Rozenstrauch, Henryk Eljowicz,\(^{19}\) Henryka Lwów, and Ernestyna Podhorizer-Zaikin (Sandel) initiated dynamic activities in all areas delineated in the Society’s constitution, which had the following main objectives:

1. To unite all artistic forces of the Jewry in the new, democratic Poland;
2. To popularize art among Jews through exhibitions, painting courses, talks, and lectures;
3. To acquaint the Jewish community with the history of art;
4. To search for and collect all works of art by Jewish artists murdered during the war;
5. To facilitate the development of talented artists by providing them with the necessary conditions.\(^{20}\)

However, as it soon turned out, these ambitious plans had to take second place since the most urgent need of the moment was to provide assistance to artists deprived of all their works and without any means of making a living. On many occasions, the society asked the Central Committee of Jews in Poland for “clothing and food” assistance, free dinners, and financial support for artists.\(^{21}\) The following excerpt is from Sandel’s letter to Michał Mirski, Chairman of the Voivodeship Committee of Jews in Poland (Wojewódzki Komitet Żydowski — WKŻ) in Łódź:

> We have been informed that the painter Wilenberg, resident in Łódź, has been ill for some time and his material situation is difficult. We ask the WKŻP chairman to look into this case, because it is our duty to save every Jewish artist who survived.\(^{22}\)

Unfortunately, Perec Willenberg, “doyen of Jewish artists..., worn out by the experiences of the occupation period and advanced age,”\(^{23}\) died on February 17, 1947.

\(^{19}\) Henryk Eljowicz was the brother of Maksymilian Eljowicz, a well-known Warsaw painter murdered in Treblinka.

\(^{20}\) An unsigned letter, November 11, 1946, probably from Józef Sandel to Marek (Bitter?), AZIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/16. The society’s constitution, approved in 1947, envisaged a similar, slightly extended range of activities.

\(^{21}\) Letter from Józef Sandel, January 10, 1947, AZIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/17.

\(^{22}\) Letter from Józef Sandel, January 3, 1947, AZIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/16.

In October 1947, the society approached the Central Committee of Jews in Poland’s Welfare Commission with a request to “allot clothing and products” to the repatriates Aleksander Bogen and his wife.\(^{24}\) Other artists were also supported with allocations of food and clothing.\(^{25}\) In the same year, the society asked for clothing on behalf of Professor Samborski, whose “clothes and underwear had all been stolen.”\(^{26}\) Although the war had ended two years earlier, the supply difficulties were so enormous that Professor Nacht-Samborski, who was at the State School of Fine Arts in Sopot at the time, found it impossible to replace his stolen garments.

The society endeavored to help, within its modest means, in other circumstances of life as well: the “modest sum of 5,000 zł (five thousand) was given to the painter, Mojżesz Boruszek, resident in Wałbrzych, to cover the initial expenses after the birth of his daughter.”\(^{27}\) The society also intervened on behalf of artists grappling with various difficult problems in ruined Warsaw. For example, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland was asked “for a room at 28 Jagiellońska Street to be used as an atelier”\(^{28}\) by Szymon Fogelman and Natan Gutman; and members of the society were approached — usually Marek Włodarski, professor of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw — with semi-personal requests for support to talented graduates of fine arts (e.g., to Izaak Celnikier), or for help with arranging a stay in Paris for the above-mentioned Fogelman, among others.\(^{29}\) Artists who went abroad could count on a letter of recommendation and some money.\(^{30}\)

\(^{24}\) AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/20.
\(^{25}\) AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/16 (help for Marek Włodarski, G. Hufnagel (Klimaszewska), Ruweller (sic!) (Anatol Wróblewski).
\(^{26}\) AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/19.
\(^{27}\) AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/19, see note 30.
\(^{28}\) The Warsaw kehillah’s Michał Bersohn Education Center used to be at 28 Jagiellońska Street. After the Second World War, that building housed the offices of the Voivodeship Jewish Committee and a Jewish school.
\(^{29}\) Numerous examples in AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/23. Letter to M. Boruszek, AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/10 (1949).
\(^{30}\) The archive of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland from 1948 holds recommendations for Dorota Szenfeld and Jonasz Stern addressed to the Association of Jewish Painters and Sculptors in Paris, AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/23 (1948). In one of the reports to the finance department of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland entitled “Bilans ŻTKSP za okres 1 XII 1946–30 XI 1947” (ŻTKSP balance sheet for the period from December 1, 1946 to November 30, 1947), is the following statement: “Allowance of 3,000 złoty for an artist leaving for Paris” (name not given), AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/45.
For artists with no means of livelihood, the matter of overriding importance was to secure a steady income, and it was even more important to young artists who were starting their careers. The material situation of art school students was very difficult. Orphaned, devoid of family support and any means of maintenance, they had to build a new life on their own. The Society made efforts to obtain funding for them. In 1948, it backed a request for a scholarship submitted to the Central Committee of Jews in Poland by Marek Oberländer, who graduated from an art high school.\(^\text{31}\) The Society also sought funding for artists in other Jewish organizations. The only scholarships, as far as is known, were awarded by the Organizing Committee of the Jewish Religious Congregations in Poland.\(^\text{32}\) In 1947, Henryka Lwów, a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and “Polish secretary” of the Society, received a monthly scholarship of 1,000 złoty,\(^\text{33}\) awarded initially for a period of six months, and later extended for another six.\(^\text{34}\)

After one year of activity and identifying the needs of art circles, the Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts suggested that the Central Committee of Jews in Poland grant permanent monthly allowances to artists with no other means of subsistence, award at least ten scholarships to students at academies of fine arts, and finally, allocate 250,000 złoty for purchasing their works.\(^\text{35}\) The society was not granted assistance at the requested level and securing permanent allowances, as given by the committee to writers and actors, also proved impossible:

\(^\text{31}\) AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/23 (1948).
\(^\text{32}\) Pisma Komitetu Organizacyjnego Żydowskich Kongregacji Wyznaniowych w Polsce z 2 V i 14 X (1947), one-page letter, AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/31, 32. The Warsaw kehillah had been supporting Jewish artists since the end of the nineteenth century by awarding them scholarships for studies in academies of fine arts.
\(^\text{33}\) In 1947, 1,000 złoty was not a large sum but it certainly helped them get by. In Warsaw at the time, a loaf of bread cost 40 złoty, one egg 24 złoty, a kilo of meat 265 złoty, and butter was even more expensive, at 624 złoty per kilo. Potatoes were the only relatively cheap staple, which cost 12 złoty a kilo. Andrzej Wyczański et al., eds., Historia Polski w liczbach: handel (Warsaw: GUS, 1995).
\(^\text{34}\) AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/18. The scholarship was certainly awarded partly thanks to the personal backing of M. Zylberberg, Head of the Jewish Religious Congregations in Poland’s Organizing Committee, and member of the Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts.
\(^\text{35}\) AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/2 (1947).
Unfortunately, as a letter from the society shows, this form of assistance was unavailable to Jewish painters despite the fact that their work involved greater expenses, e.g., canvas, paint, brushes, etc.\textsuperscript{36}

The establishment of the “Sztuka” Painters and Sculptors’ Cooperative in Łódź, where the largest number of artists (about 20) settled down, was another Society initiative.\textsuperscript{37} The cooperative, which aimed at securing a permanent source of income for Jewish artists, was directed by Henryk Hecht-kopf and Beniamin Pacanowski. Members of the cooperative, associated with the voivodeship Jewish committee, designed and created applied art (including posters, book engravings, and newspaper drawings), and also gave lessons to Jewish youth interested in art. The cooperative ensured a permanent income for the artists, on the one hand, and it enabled them to continue their personal artistic pursuits, on the other. The Jewish press published their drawings and the artists designed covers for books and journals. Józef Bau and Abba Fenichel, among others, worked on the graphic design of the publications by the Voivodeship Historical Commission in Kraków.\textsuperscript{38}

Owing to circumstances, artists often had to take up other occupations. Szejna Efron-Szenkman was a tutor at a dormitory associated with the voivodeship Jewish committee in Katowice. In an application of September 1947 addressed to the “Department for the Advancement of the Arts at the Central Jewish Committee in Warsaw,” she complained about difficult living conditions that did not allow her to do her art work, and asked for a non-repayable grant.

Apart from this, I repeat my request for a one-time subsidy so that I can continue with my art work because there are not many Jewish artists left.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{36} Letter, November 27, 1947, ibid., pp. 86–88.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 337; letter to the Group of Jewish Painters and Sculptors in Łódź — represented by Aron (Adam) Muszka at the time), AŻIH, ŽTKSP, file no. 361/2; and letter to the voivodeship committee in Łódź requesting all possible assistance for the studio, ŽTKSP, file no. 361/16.
\textsuperscript{38} Abba Fenichel designed covers for the following publications of the Central Historical Commission at the Central Committee of Jews in Poland: Rudolf Reder, \textit{Bełżec}, Kraków, 1946; Michał Borwicz, \textit{Uniwersytet zbirów}, Kraków, 1946. Józef Bau designed the publishers’ logo.
\textsuperscript{39} Letter to Józef Sandel, September 24, 1947, AŻIH, ŽTKSP, file no. 361/40.
The society did not approve the loan, probably because the voivodeship Jewish committee in Katowice informed them that the painter had already been granted a loan of 30,000 złoty to establish an atelier.\textsuperscript{40}

It is difficult to assess the actual extent and value of assistance provided to artists on the basis of letters, applications, and documents, despite their considerable number in the society’s archives. However, there is no doubt that this insufficient and frequently only temporary aid, which could not solve all the problems, at least covered the basic needs and most acute shortages. Most artists had to secure the necessary resources for living expenses and pursuing their artistic career. Some of them, Efron-Szenkman, Woźna, Wolman, and Wróblewski, among others, also applied for credit from the Bank of Productivization, which helped considerably. As Wróblewski put it, “It is a great success (in terms of the purse and the stomachs, of course). Besides, I will be able to work in peace for some time.”\textsuperscript{41}

Despite this daily preoccupation with existential needs, the society nevertheless did not forget how important it was for artists to be able to realize their artistic ambitions.

Each of them — Sandel wrote to Jakub Apenszlak — is only beginning to find in himself words, tones, and sounds. It takes them a long time because they also have to struggle with material difficulties: They have no paints, brushes, and other painting utensils, such as easels and palettes.\textsuperscript{42}

Supplying artists with painting materials, such as brushes, paints or easels, involved a great deal of effort. As the extant correspondence shows, appeals for help in this regard were sent all around the world, to private individuals, including Apenszlak, the painter Icchak Lichtenstein,\textsuperscript{43} and the art historian Otto Schneid,\textsuperscript{44} and to many foreign organizations, including the

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} AŽIH, ŽTKSP, file no. 361/37.
\textsuperscript{42} Letter of June 11, 1947, AŽIH, ŽTKSP, file no. 361/18.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid. Icchak Lichtenstein (1888 Łódź to 1981 New York) was a painter, graphic artist, and art critic. Together with Marek Szwarc and Josif Czaikow, he established a Jewish journal, Makhmadim, in Paris in 1912. In New York, he ran a publishing house under the same name.
\textsuperscript{44} Otto Schneid (born in Jablonków, 1900 to 1974, Toronto) was a painter, art historian, and critic. He studied and received his doctorate at Vienna University. From 1936 to 1938, he lived in Vilna, where he ran the YIVO Museum, and during that period, he frequently wrote (in Yiddish and Polish) for the Jewish press of Warsaw and Vilna. Shortly after the war, he settled in Jerusalem. He donated part of the royalties from
Association of Jewish Painters in Paris (L’Association des Artistes Juifs), as well as the Yidishe Arbeter Komitet (Jewish Labor Committee), and the Kunst-Sektsye baym YKUF (YKUF art section — Yidishe Kultur Farband) in New York. The latter, a left-wing, pro-Communist cultural organization, helped their fellow painters on two occasions to buy paints and brushes for the total sum of 340 U.S. dollars.

The largest, and most importantly, regular financial contribution to this cause was made by the Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee — AJDC/Joint), which actively supported the reconstruction of Jewish life in Poland after the war and financed the activities of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland to a considerable extent. Among the surviving documents are both the applications and the receipts for paints and painting tools, allocated from 1947 to August 1949. This was invaluable help for the painters, since, as Sandel wrote to the head office of the Joint in Warsaw:

In Poland, at the moment, paints and brushes are extremely expensive and of low quality, and...hardly available at all.

Artists in a stable financial situation, such as Professors Nacht-Samborski and Włodarski from the art school, refunded the grants they received for paints.

his newly published book to the society. See the correspondence between Schneid and Sandel, AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/18.

In 1947, Jewish painters living in France sent sets of oil paints to their colleagues in Poland. See, for example, Anatol Wróblewski’s statement of November 2, 1947: “This set is a gift from a Jewish painter in Paris, Dobriński”; or a note by Gizela Hufnagel-Klimaszewska from September 6, 1947: “I have received oil paints sent by Mr. Perlman from Paris,” ibid.

The Joint supported scholarly activities, among them, those of the Central Jewish Historical Commission, which became the Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny – ŻIH) in 1947. Financial assistance to cultural organizations and associations of artists was provided to the Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists, the Union of Jewish Stage Performers, the Jewish Association of Culture, the Friends of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem Society, the Jewish theater, and the editorial staff of journals and newspapers. See Tadeusz Epstein, “Wielki Powrót. AJDC w Polsce w latach 1945–1949,” Międzynarodowy, no. 91, no. 11 (2004), pp. 19–20.

ŻTKSP’s archive holds signed receipts for paints from 1947 until about 1949, AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/42.

Letter, May 29, 1947, in which Sandel reports that “the paints received from the Joint have been distributed — six tubes and two brushes per person.” AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/18.
The Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts was not the only promoter of Jewish artistic life in Poland. In November 1947, on the initiative of the Polish Workers’ Party members on the board of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, the national Jewish Art and Cultural Society (Żydowskie Towarzystwo Kultury — ŻTK) was established to support Jewish education, culture, and art, and promote relevant activities in the Jewish community. The society was no longer the only body representing Jewish artists. The statutory activities of both organizations overlapped at certain points, which initially reduced the society’s role, ultimately leading to its liquidation.50

The Jewish Association of Culture quickly grew in importance and broadened the scope of its activities, benefiting from backing from the state authorities as well as from the growing influence of Jewish Communists in the Central Committee of Jews in Poland. The society was criticized for not giving sufficient attention to artists active at the time in Poland. Artists living in Łódź, which was the largest center of Jewish painters and sculptors, especially raised this charge. According to the Chairman Henryk Hechtkopf, the newly established Jewish Association of Culture’s Section of Fine Arts had about 30 members from seven cities.51 The member list includes the names of 18 artists, most of them, except for Gutman and Fogelman, residents of Łódź.52 Most important to the section members, the Association offered them an opportunity to present their works to the general public in several “Collective Exhibitions of the Jewish Association of Culture in Poland’s Section of Fine Arts.” Exhibitions took place in Łódź, in January 1948; Wroclaw, in October–November 1949,53 and Katowice in 1950.

The Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts organized four

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50 As, for example, stated in point “b,” article 4 of the constitution: “organizing lectures and exhibitions of Jewish painters and sculptors,” AZIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/1.


52 The membership list of the Jewish Association of Culture’s Section of Fine Arts from that time includes 18 members: 11 of them also belonged to the Union of Polish Artists and Designers (Związek Zawodowy Polskich Artystów Plastyków); four remained outside the union; and three were students at the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, AZIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/41.

exhibitions, presented throughout Poland. There were two solo shows: “Human Martyrology 1939–1945” by Rafał Mandelzweig in 1946; and a show of Lea Grundig’s work (an Israeli artist, originally from Germany) in 1949. There were also two group shows. “The Exhibition of the Works of Jewish Artists — Martyrs of the German Occupation 1939–1945” was part of the fifth anniversary commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The second joint exhibition, “Rescued Works of Art of Jewish Artists,” open to the Warsaw public from August 29 to October 5, 1948, presented pictures, drawings, engravings, and sculptures that the society had bought from private owners. This exhibition toured Lower Silesia, visiting Wrocław, Dzierżoniów, Świdnica, Walbrzych, and Legnica from February to June, 1949. According to the report prepared for the Ministry of Culture and Art, it was seen by nearly 10,500 visitors, including 3,390 in Dzierżoniów.

The Holocaust aimed not only at the annihilation of the Jewish people but also at the destruction of their culture and works of art, which was carried out by the Germans in a planned and deliberate manner. Sculptures and pictures were burned, destroyed, and thrown out into the street. For this reason, in addition to supporting artists, the society considered the searching out and purchasing of works of Jewish artists as one of its most important tasks. Some of these works rescued by the society were shown in the group exhibitions mentioned above. The collection of about 250 paintings, sculptures, drawings, and engravings, assembled at the time, was intended to be the nucleus of a museum of Jewish culture envisaged by the Society (these works are now part of the collection of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw). These activities were enormously important for preserving the Jewish cultural heritage, which is particularly clear from today’s perspective. However, the Jewish Association of Culture was actually more involved in stimulating current Jewish art life.

The Society sought to revive and inspire contemporary Jewish art, which, in the post-war reality, was expected to be exclusively secular. Towards this

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54 The latter exhibition was prepared as part of the World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace, held in Wrocław, in August 1948. The participants visited the exhibition on August 29 or 30. See letters, July 31, 1948, from Julian Łazebnik and Grzegorz (Hersh) Smolar to Jerzy Borejšza, Secretary-General of the World Congress of Intellectuals for the organizing committee, AŽIH, ŽTKSP, file no. 361/23; and a letter, August 20, 1948, from Sandel to Borejšza, AŽIH, ŽTKSP, file no. 361/23. The Ministry of Culture and Sport gave a grant of 40,000 złoty for framing the paintings and printing exhibition catalogs (500 copies) in English and French.

55 AŽIH, ŽTKSP, file no. 361/5 (1949).
objective, the society initiated and organized three competitions jointly with the Central Committee of Jews in Poland. In late 1946, a competition was announced, to be adjudicated in March of the following year, for the portraits of five classical Jewish authors: Mendele Moykher-Sforim, Sholem Aleichem, Yitzhak Leib Peretz, Chaim Nachman Bialik, and Sholem Asch. According to the jury’s report, 21 entries to the competition, mostly from Łódź, were submitted. The jury decided that none of them deserved the first prize. Two joint second prizes and the third prize were awarded to Henryk Hechtkopf, Szmul Wajnsztok, and Beniamin Pacanowski, respectively, with an honorary mention to Izaak Rajzman. The jury recommended purchasing the works by Hechtkopf, Wajnsztok, and Rajzman for the Central Committee of Jews in Poland’s collection.56 The works that are still extant are unsatisfactory, and even those that won awards did not meet a particularly high artistic standard.

In January 1947, Natan Rapoport suggested a competition for a poster commemorating the fourth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.57 The Central Committee of Jews in Poland endorsed this initiative and, jointly with the Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, announced such a competition twice, in 1947 and 1948.

Seventeen entries were submitted to the first competition, and five of them are in the Museum of the Jewish Historical Institute’s collection. Considerable sums were allocated for the prizes. The jury awarded the first prize of 20,000 złoty to the design marked with the “Broniek” emblem by Aron (Adam) Muszka. The second prize of 10,000 złoty was divided between Dorota Szenfeld and Jecheskiel Mucznik. “Mass reproduction[s]” of the prize-winning works were made, and the poster by Hechtkopf received an honorary mention (of which there is no extant copy).

The next competition for a poster “symbolizing the heroic struggle of the Jewish population against the Nazi invader,” announced in January 1948, had a considerably wider national and international reach, and the sums allocated for the prizes were much more substantial than in the previous year. The jury — Marek Włodarski (professor at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts),

56 Protokół Obrad Jury z 6 III 1947 (Minutes of the Jury’s Deliberations on March 6, 1947), AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/5 (available in Yiddish). These works are in the Jewish Historical Institute’s collection, see letter, October 25, 1947, from ŻTKSP to CKŻP, with a request to purchase the award-winning works, AŻIH, ŻTKSP, file no. 361/20.

57 For more on the latter competitions, see Renata Piątkowska, “Konkursy na plakat rozpisane z okazji 4. i 5. rocznicy powstania w getcie warszawskim,” KHŻ, no. 2 (210) (2004), pp. 197–204.
Henryk Szner (Central Committee of Jews in Poland’s Culture and Propa-
ganda Department), Józef Sandel (Chairman of the Jewish Society for the En-
couragement of Fine Arts), Beniamin Pacanowski, Efrael Kaganowski, Hersh
(Grzegorz) Smolar, and Ignacy Falk — did not award a first prize. The second
prize of 50,000 złoty was awarded to Henryk Hechtkopf. Three joint third
prizes of 30,000 złoty went to Tomasz Gleb, Tadeusz Gronowski, and Dorota
Szenfeld. The jury also awarded seven honorable mentions (with prizes of
10,000 złoty) to Mosze Bahelfer, Chaim Hanft, Aron (Adam) Muszka, Izaak
Rajzman, Czesław Kowalski, Antoni Święty, and Tadeusz Trepkowski.

The commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Up-
rising culminated in the unveiling of the Memorial to the Heroes of the War-
saw Ghetto, by the gifted sculptor Natana Rapoport, on April 19, 1948. The
event’s significance went well beyond the artistic dimension. The decision to
erect the memorial, made in 1946 by the Central Committee of Jews in Po-
land, was met with an enthusiastic response from the Jewish population in
Poland and abroad. The construction of the memorial was financed by the
Central Committee of Jews in Poland and the Joint, as well as funds collected
from the Jewish population in Poland and abroad, e.g., Swedish Jews paid for
the granite (labradorite) from which the monument was made, whereas the
Organization of Polish Jews in Paris partly financed the cast. Money was also
collected from many communities of Polish Jews in South America.

The memorial was erected by survivors of the Holocaust. At the time, the
heroic struggle of the Warsaw Ghetto fighters was a powerful and important
symbol for Holocaust survivors, those who survived in the Soviet Union, and
for posterity. That heroic vision of the uprising was successfully realized by the
sculptor Rapoport, who, after his repatriation from the USSR, approached
the Central Committee of Jews in Poland offering to create “a memorial to
the Warsaw Ghetto insurgents,” in mid-1946. The choice of Rapoport, apart

58 See among others: Opinia, vol. 34 (1948), p. 6. Rapoport was assisted by Leon Suzin,
who made the first monument commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which
was unveiled on April 19, 1946. See Renata Piątkowska, “‘Żywa pamięć.’ Pomnik Bo-
haterów Getta Natana Rapoporta” in Katarzyna Chrudzimska-Uhera and Bartłomiej
Gutowski, eds., Rzeźba w architekturze (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu
59 AŻIH, CKŻP, file no. 303, I/7a, Protokoły posiedzeń Prezydium 2 V 1947–17 VI 1947,
Protokół 48 z 24 V 1947 (Minutes of the Presidium Sessions, May 2, 1947 — June 17,
60 In mid-1946, Rapoport returned to Poland and registered at the Jewish committee’s
office in Warsaw on June 5. See AŻIH, Karta Rejestracyjna nr 5674/st (1946).
61 AŻIH, CKŻP, file no. 303, I/3a, Protokoły posiedzeń Prezydium 2 VII 1946–29 VIII
from the high quality of his design, was also because he was one of the few Jewish sculptors in Poland at that time who had survived the Holocaust, who had achieved critical and public recognition even before the war. Work on the memorial was a profound emotional experience for him:

I had seldom worked with such inner tension, with such a feeling of profound respect for the task...before me.... What I felt this time was not just the usual, personal artistic responsibility to succeed in the work, but also an understandable national and social responsibility..., especially since it would be the first monument to the Jewish people.62

The Memorial to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto was not only a monument to the Jewish people, but a testimonial to the murdered and tortured Jews of Warsaw. Remembering those who had perished was perceived by survivors as their foremost moral and religious obligation. Between 1945 and 1948 modest monuments — stones, tablets or obelisks — were placed at execution sites; survivors erected monuments commemorating the annihilation of local Jewish communities in many cities and towns, including Białystok, Grójec, Skierniewice, Płock, and Otwock, and numerous other places; and the first efforts to “tidy up” the grounds of former death camps were also made.63 The unveiling of the Memorial to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto was the culmination of these activities, as well as a continuation of those symbolic often private and local initiatives.

Artists were also involved in creating exhibitions and pavilions at the former concentration camps of Majdanek and Auschwitz.64 Thanks to the efforts of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland and the Central Jewish Historical Commission, a “Jewish pavilion,” designed by Zofia Rozenstrauch (former prisoner of Majdanek and Auschwitz), Mojżesz Lubliański, and Dawid Opoczyński, was set up at Majdanek, and opened in September

1946, Protokół 59 z 26 VII 1946 (Minutes of the Presidium Sessions, July 2, 1947 — August 29, 1946; Minute no. 59, July 26, 1946), p. 53. The artist received a generous grant of 230,000 złoty to design and prepare plans for the monument.
64 Ibid., pp. 305–332.
1946. In 1947, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland became involved in creating a Jewish exhibition at the Auschwitz concentration camp. In 1947, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland became involved in creating a Jewish exhibition at the Auschwitz concentration camp. Chaim Hanft, Anatol Wróblewski (Proweller), Józef Sandel, Chairman of the Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, as well as Henryk Hechtkopf and Beniamin Pacanowski from the “Sztuka” Cooperative in Łódź participated in the preparatory work. The Auschwitz Museum was inaugurated on June 14, 1947. On the same day, a modest exhibition, prepared by the artists from the “Sztuka” Cooperative, was opened at the Jewish Pavilion.

In November 1947, the Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts began to prepare a competition for a monument “devoted to the martyrs of Auschwitz,” with the intention of inviting only a few selected artists to participate. Letters of invitation to a meeting devoted to this project, sent to Ida Brauner-Wolman and Zofia Woźna, are extant. However, the idea was eventually abandoned.

The Jewish pavilion at the Regained Territories Exhibition in Wrocław in 1948, designed by Chaim Hanft, was never opened, by decision of the authorities. Thus, the exhibitions of the Jewish Association of Culture’s Section of Fine Arts between 1948 and 1950 were the last collective undertakings of Jewish artistic circles. Revival of Jewish art life in all the wealth and diversity of the inter-war period was not possible in post-war Poland, as were attempts to rebuild other dimensions of Jewish community life.

Several factors contributed to this failure. First of all, the art circles were too small and dispersed to form a cohesive and active group. Jewish artists lived in different, remote parts of Poland: Szczecin, Walbrzych, Wrocław, and Katowice had two or three each; Kraków six; about 15 artists lived in Warsaw; and 12 in Łódź. Consequently, small Jewish art communities were only formed in Warsaw and Łódź. In January 1948, at the request of the Kunst-Sektsye of the YKUFU in New York, the Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts compiled a list of 60 Jewish painters and...
sculptors. The list included only a few artists of the older generation, with the majority being younger artists, who made their debut in the late 1930s, and the youngest only began to study art after the war. Later, fragmentary lists included fewer and fewer names, with emigration increasingly mentioned. Those who set off for Palestine, through Cyprus and DP camps, included Herman Ehrmann, Aleksander Bogen, Józef Bau, and Judyta Sobel. Natan Rapoport settled down in Paris, and was later followed by Wróblewski, Gutman, and Fogelman. Many artists left between 1956 and 1958: Henryk Hechtkopf, Sara Gliksman, Szejna Efron, Chaim Goldberg, Izaak Celnikier, and Leon Engelsberg, among them.

In the late 1940s, restrictions on the activities of social organizations, gradually imposed by the Communist authorities, stopped the development of Jewish artistic life. Finally, liquidation of all the institutions administered and financed by the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, which were taken over by the state on January 1, 1950, ended independent Jewish life.

However, the disappearance of Jewish institutions and associations did not put an end to individual creative pursuits of many eminent artists. These included: Marek Włodarski, Artur Nacht-Samborski, Jonasz Stern, Erna Rosenstein, and Zofia Woźna, in the older generation; as well as Izaak Celnikier and Marek Oberländer in the younger one. However, most of them participated in the mainstream Polish art life, choosing their individual paths — Jewish in a personal, rather than organizational or communal sense. After the war, Artur Nacht-Samborski wrote:

> During the occupation, we thought that we would become insane.... However...for everyone...living life with constantly bated breath, [and] a host of extraordinary problems...has made people very resilient.... One has to...learn whatever lessons one can and live on.

70 Ibid., pp. 297–299.
Nacht-Samborski, mature and fully formed both as an artist and a human being, “lived on,” only metaphorically revisiting the war and the Holocaust in his work. After liberation, he quickly returned to his art activities and participated in exhibitions; he also began to teach at the School of Fine Arts in Sopot in 1946. Marek Włodarski and Jonasz Stern were appointed professors in Warsaw and Kraków, respectively (the latter in 1952). Young artists of Jewish origin studied at the academies of fine arts all over Poland. Those at the Łódź School of Fine Arts included: Halina Olszewska, Judytta Sobel, and Bolesław Olomucki; and those in Warsaw: Henryka Lwów, Marek Oberländer, Izaak Celnikier, Helena Winogradow, Leon Engelsberg, and Mieczysław Kochanowicz.

Until the 1960s, there was a circle of Jewish artists in Łódź, who exhibited their works at the local Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów — TSKŻ) (and other exhibition halls there). Only the emigration related to the events of March 1968 put an end to this world.

The Holocaust and Art

Aside from the individual dimension of tragedy and pain associated with the Holocaust, for the vast majority of artists the Holocaust also became a crucial and inalienable element of their lives and art activity. After the Holocaust, they felt forever bonded with Jewish fate, the death of the people, and the destruction of its culture and tradition.

The survivors of the Holocaust, irrespective of whether they lived through the occupation in Poland, the Soviet Union or elsewhere, felt that they had to face the enormity of the crime, and the frightening emptiness left by the dead. Those who were far away from Poland during the war, listened with pain and a sense of helplessness to the reports of the deaths of their loved ones and the destruction of their people. Returning to the country, they found mostly emptiness, ashes and bones of the murdered, homes occupied by new inhabitants, and desecrated cemeteries. That was all that remained of over three million Polish Jews who died martyrs’ deaths in ghettos, death camps, forests, and hiding places on the Aryan side. In Warsaw, where the Jewish quarter used to be, only a vast expanse of ruins remained, recorded with delicate pen strokes by Henryk Hechtkopf in a series of ink drawings. Thanks to the contrast between the elegant lines, a subtle sepia tone, and the ruins which remained from the city that used to
bustle with life, those understated, muted drawings with their classical, balanced forms succeeded in capturing the tragedy of the city’s death.

For the survivors, including artists, the need to record their experiences, “to put experience into testimony,” was a moral imperative and duty. However, familiar art strategies proved mostly inadequate for conveying the trauma of wartime experiences and the tragedy of the Holocaust. For artists who wanted to “bear witness,” the most important question was, and still is, how to represent this tragedy, unimaginable in the history of humanity. How to arrive at the essence of those events; how to face up to those experiences? How could this “non-artistic truth” be represented in an artistic form? Is it possible to convey the Holocaust experience in the existing language of art? Every artist endeavored to find his or her own language and artistic form to memorialize the murdered and the nightmare of the wartime experiences. The proximity of the Holocaust, however, made it difficult to find suitable forms. Sara Gliksman painted “beautiful” pictures of the Łódź Ghetto, unable to free herself from the impressionistic style of her pre-war works, failing to devise a suitable artistic vehicle for ghetto memories. Marek Włodarski drew cruel documentary scenes that he remembered from the camp, using colored pencils.

Particularly noteworthy is the work of Jonasz Stern (1904–1988), and two painters who made their debut after the war, Marek Oberländer (1921–1978) and Izaak Celnikier (b. 1923). This choice is based on the high standing of their oeuvre and their intensely personal struggle with the subject of the Holocaust, typifying their output, despite their diverse experiences. Stern not only gave account of what he had witnessed, but also rendered his experiences in an artistic form. A series of engravings he created shortly after the war (1947–1949) provide insights into his approach to this subject and the medium that he chose for his artistic enterprise. His work is informed by the quotidian aspects of life in the Łódź Ghetto and the existence of the Judenrat, as well as the pain and suffering of the deportees. The engravings are characterized by a somber, muted color palette and a sense of timelessness, which reflects the artist’s desire to capture the essence of the Holocaust experience. Stern’s engravings are a testament to the power of art to convey the inexpressible and to bear witness to the unimaginable.

77 Kornel Filipowicz recorded his friend’s shocking testimony of death and survival. See
after his return to Poland in 1945 is an attempt to give testimony of life and death behind the Lvov Ghetto’s barbed wire fence. His dramatic images strike the viewer with their directness, power, candor, and, at the same time, the simplicity and economy of means of expression. Close to expressionism, his engravings, based on the contrast of large patches of black and white, with wide cuts, are less decorative than some of Stern’s pre-war works, although the artist did not quite escape a certain literal depiction.

It appears that Stern himself considered those modest engravings as not entirely satisfactory. Perhaps he felt that he had failed to find a suitable artistic form to convey what he had seen and experienced.78 Those first works offering concise testimony, recorded with apparent effort, have similar qualities to his written record, aimed at bearing witness, and memorializing those terrible times.

In summer 1964, the painter made his first visit to Lvov after the war. In an amateur photograph, he is standing in a ravine overgrown with grass and bushes. The spot had not been chosen by accident: In that gorge, thousands of Jewish inhabitants of Lvov were murdered, and it was the ravine that Stern managed to leave, crawling out from under a heap of dead bodies.

The artist’s first painting on his return to Poland was “The Pit,” which refers to the events of June 1, 1943. He described this in the following words:

I was standing naked, dried up. It will soon begin. I can still see, but no one will see me anymore, and I will not see the sun either. The dental bridge pinched me in my mouth, I spat it out on the sand, I will not need it anymore...79

As he later told Maria Anna Potocka:

When I was painting “The Pit,” I did not know what I was doing at all. I was just painting.... It was in me — I was not thinking, [and] I did not know that I was “doing” the pit.80

78 Stern exhibited these engravings, among other places, in Kraków, in October 1945.
“The Pit” marked the beginning of a new phase in the work of the 60-year-old artist, in whom the subject of the Holocaust was constantly present.81

In the Stalinist years, the official art, constrained by the Communist ideology and the Socialist Realist form, excluded any experiments with original and modern means of artistic expression. Some artists, including Stern, did not exhibit at the time, while others created works in which the straitjacket of academic realism combined with the socialist perspective on “Jewish” topics precluded any sincere and personal depiction of the Holocaust. In the official discourse, this subject was practically limited to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The 1955 “National Exhibition of ‘Young’ Art,” which opened under the title “Against the War, Against Fascism” in the Arsenal in Warsaw, marked a turning point in Polish art. Young artists, recent graduates of art academies, traumatized by the war, were searching for the meaning in life, spiritual values, and trying to understand human nature and make sense of human endeavor.82

For Marek Oberländer, in particular, and for Izaak Celnikier and Jewish artists of the younger generation who actively participated in preparing the Arsenal exhibition, the most important subject was the Holocaust. The documentary presentation of the subject in their works, horrifying, highly expressive, and full of pain, is disturbing. Oberländer’s works between 1953 and 1955 — “The Stigmatized,” “Kol Nidre,” and a series of engravings entitled “No More Ghetto” — were based on photographs taken by German soldiers. He spent the war in the Soviet Union, first in the Red Army, later in a penal camp. Thus, he did not witness the Holocaust directly, and his works draw on documentary photographs. For “The Stigmatized,” exhibited in the Arsenal, he was awarded a prize by the Po prostu weekly. These works of art, in the same way as Celnikier’s “Ghetto,” are more than a testimony to the Holocaust: They express the feelings of a Jew who miraculously survived the annihilation of his people. They are an entirely new record of Jewish martyrdom, absent until then in Polish art in such a form and with such emotional intensity. For Celnikier, who was in the Białystok Ghetto and later went through the nightmare of concentration camps, the subject of

82 See, for example, Jacek Antoni Zieliński, ed., Kragg Arsenalu 1955” malarstwo, grafika, rysunek z Muzeum Okręgowego w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim, exhibition catalog (Warsaw: Galeria “Zachęta,” 1992).
the Holocaust became the most important, and practically the only, theme of his work. As he wrote in the introduction to the catalog of his exhibition, his first in Poland after nearly 50 years: “I only depict what I have seen. I saw everything, I will forgive nothing...”

For Oberländer, too, the Holocaust was an experience he could not shake off, even though he would later depart from the expressive realism of his early works. In his hospital notes in 1964, he wrote:

I had no other reason to paint pictures but to rid myself of this nightmare destroying my nature, which makes me die every day, along with the people I have lost.

The Holocaust continues to be an important, painful theme of Polish art. For survivors it is not merely a theme but a necessity, a profound inner need to face up to the enormity and cruelty of the death of millions of human beings, the annihilation of a people and their old way of life. Artists, like all other survivors, battled against despair, a sense of guilt; they had to learn how to live with the experience of the Holocaust. In those post-war years it was even more difficult; they searched for a personal language to express “the inexpressible” through art. However, art gave no relief, offered no comfort or peace of mind. In his last interview before his death, Stern declared:

It is so hard that you can’t ever get it out of you through words — or through art. No way! You can’t paint it, it’s impossible. After the war, I escaped into painting; I escaped into social work; I escaped into fishing — so as to forget about it.

83 Izaak Celnikier, “Od artysty,” in Izaak Celnikier, p. 16.
84 Bohdan Czeszko, in his short story “Moje Kazimierze,” published in the Nostalgie Mazurskie. Opowiadania collection, wrote about Oberländer: “Marek never talked about his wartime experiences, he did not talk about his family or the place where he was born, he did not reminisce about his childhood. He kept all that double-locked and bolted to strangers...” reprinted in Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, ed., Kazimierz vel Kuzmir: Miasteczko różnych snów (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Sklodowskiej, 2006), p. 333.
The Impact of the 1956 Liberalization of Poland’s Political System on the Jewish Population

GRZEGORZ BERENDT

Introduction

The general population censuses conducted in the Polish People’s Republic did not specify nationality as a category. Formally, all citizens, regardless of their ethnic or religious background, constituted a collectivity of members of the socialist society, who all enjoyed equal rights. Only restricted circles of office-holders and state or party officials dealt with issues pertaining to national minorities. In the first half of the 1950s, Jews, who were granted the right to practice their religion and conduct secular cultural activity to a certain extent, were hardly mentioned. The nationwide mass media reaching the non-Jewish majority of the society passed over the achievements and problems of the Jewish segment of the population, except for annual reports of the celebration of yet another anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Some local radio broadcasting stations would occasionally feature programs about Jewish artists. The information policies of the state-owned mass media (the radio and press) meant that only people who knew Yiddish and listened to the Polish radio programs in Yiddish and read the Folks-Shtime newspaper were able to gather systematic knowledge about everyday Jewish cultural, social, and professional activity. This lack of objective information for non-Jews about the culture and customs of their Jewish co-citizens was conducive to the persistence of long-standing negative Jewish stereotypes among significant numbers of ethnic Poles.

From the very outset, the state political system of the Polish People’s Republic precluded discrimination on religious, national or racial grounds, as reflected in legal norms, including the Constitution of the Polish People’s Republic of 1952. However, these norms were consistently disregarded with respect not only to Jews, but also to Ukrainians, Germans, and Byelorusians.
The Act for Combating Antisemitism, discussed in 1946 in the wake of acts of aggression targeting Jews, was eventually not adopted. The only non-governmental organization with the statutory task of promoting an open and friendly attitude towards Jews, the Anti-Racism League and its periodical Prawa Człowieka (Human Rights), was closed down. In the late 1940s, the issue of antisemitism in Poland was absent from the public agenda for several years. Apparently, antisemitism was assumed to be a product of previous political systems that would automatically disappear in a socialist state. However, the facts told a different story.

Exorcized from the public sphere, antisemitism persisted in the private realm. This was due to the long-standing resentment, derived to no small degree from the negative teachings about Jews by the Christian Church. After the war, new political prejudices made matters worse: The entire Jewish community was held responsible for the role played by Communists of Jewish descent in the totalitarian state, especially in departments and services responsible for spreading Communist ideology and reporting to the Ministry of Public Security (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego — MBP). The term “Judeo-Commune,” already in use by antisemites before World War II, became very common, further supporting the view that “strangers” were establishing a new political system. Referring to Jews as a privileged caste of managers, executives, and party officials who were wealthier than the average citizen became a new feature of the antisemitic

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1 The creation of the league, initiated in March 1946, was not formally established until after the Kielce Pogrom in July of the same year. It was closed down following the imprisonment of the League’s activists who were affiliated with the Liberation Resistance Movement during the war. See Krystyna Kersten, Polacy — Żydzi — Komunizm, Anatomia półprawd 1939–1968 (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992), pp. 136–137, 142.

2 In May 1956, commenting on the increased ethnically-driven antagonism, a party commentator wrote the following about the practices in the past: “There was no consistent struggle against antisemitism. It was a shameful topic of which we steered clear, although Poland was the place that really needed to focus on this phenomenon.” See Notatka Wydziału Propagandy Komitetu Centralnego PZPR w sprawie wzrostu nastrojów nacjonalistycznych (A note from the Central Committee’s propaganda department on the matter of the increasing nationalist sentiment), May 30, 1956, AAN, Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, vol. 1679 (1956), p. 160; Głos Nauczycielski, no. 41 (October 7, 1956), p. 2; Życie Partii, no. 4 (1957), p. 52.

3 Passivity on the part of the powers-that-be in the matter of ethnic conflicts was not acknowledged as a mistake until 1956. See K. Głąb, “Rekonensans w obszar milczenia,” Głos Szczeciński, no. 206 (May 29, 1956).
stereotype. Thus, the so-called pre-war and post-war popular antisemitism merged with a new form of political antisemitism.

Although antisemitic acts were prevented from becoming public knowledge, the Jewish community targeted by these acts was well aware of the country’s prevailing mood. Anti-Zionist rhetoric, which was actually anti-Jewish, strongly resonated during the show trial of Rudolf Slánský from the Czech Communist Party leadership, in Prague in November 1952. A special delegation of observers from the Ministry of Public Security in Warsaw attended the trial. Looking for “a Polish connection,” they had earlier interrogated witnesses for the prosecution. In addition, Wiktor Grosz, Ambassador of the Polish People’s Republic, who had Jewish roots and was a pre-war activist in the Polish Communist Party, was obliged to attend the trial. He was well aware of the antisemitic ambiance pervading the entire case. However, broad segments of Polish society most likely remained unaware of this dimension. Nevertheless, some people who heard and read references to “Zionist agents” on the radio and in the press, reached the appropriate conclusions.

At the time, many Jews in Poland asked themselves whether their acceptance of aid in the 1940s from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint), which the official media described as a CIA tool, would be used as a pretext for accusing them of cooperation with “a foreign intelligence service.” In many households, people burnt Zionist publications dating back to that period. In the eyes of the Jewish community in Poland, the events taking place in the Soviet Union, where state-sponsored antisemitism had been growing increasingly stronger since the end of the war, were the most dangerous. This trend was manifested as follows: discrimination

5 Minutes of a session of the TSKŻ board in Łódź on September 15, 1955, AŻIH, TSKŻ, vol. 101 (1955); Minutes of a TSKŻ board session in Legnica on September 27, 1955, ibid., vol. 97. In March 1956, in Katowice, a police officer carried out a search at the Jewish cemetery after he was notified about a ritual murder of a Christian child there, ibid., vol. 9. The TSKŻ prepared an informative note in Katowice on March 8, 1956.
7 Andrzej Małkiewicz and Marianna Zacharewicz, ”Sprawa Slánskiego w świetle listów ambasadora polskiego w Czechosłowacji Wiktora Grosza,” in Jerzy Tomaszewski and Jaroslav Valenty, eds., Żydzi w polskim i czeskim społeczeństwie obywatelskim (Prague: Univerzita Karlova, 1999), pp. 188–190.
against Jews; drastic restrictions on Jewish national and cultural activities; barring Jewish youth from entering institutions of higher learning; continued targeting of religious circles; and arrests and death sentences of leading Jewish poets, writers, and actors, and cultural and political personalities. In January 1953, a modernized version of the medieval charges of poisoning by Jews began making the rounds in the Soviet Union, and a team of Jewish doctors treating the Soviet leadership were accused of this. It was feared that this antisemitic policy would evolve into a mass attack on all Jews spilling into the Soviet Union’s satellite countries. After Stalin’s death, such “anti-Zionist” texts, which were actually antisemitic, ceased in the Soviet press and, subsequently, in the Polish press as well. However, the Jews knew that this was not tantamount to cessation of antisemitic practices in the Soviet Union. Consequently, Jews living in “real socialist” countries, who believed that the political system would end antisemitism, were badly shaken.8

As of 1954, increasing criticism was expressed publicly from within Polish society, including from Jews, for the way in which the country was governed. Revelations by Józef Światło, a lieutenant-colonel in the Polish Ministry of Public Security, who defected to the West, played a major role in this development. In his statements, subsequently broadcast by Radio Free Europe, he uncovered the behind-the-scenes mechanism of governing Poland after 1944.9 Some writers of Jewish origin were also critical of the policies of the Polish United Workers’ Party. Only those who had previously demonstrated their complete acceptance of the new political system10 had access to the state-governed mass media (the press and the radio). The poet Adam Ważyk and his “Poemat dla dorosłych” (Poem for Adults), which was published in August 1955, was a case in point. Another poet, Wiktor Woroszylski, claimed that reassessment of his uncritical attitude toward the Communist system was greatly influenced by the atmosphere, saturated

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9 It should be noted that although the deserter’s Jewish roots were omitted in the attacks on him by the mass media, this very quickly became public knowledge, and Światło was cited as an example to back the claim about the Jews’ propensity for treason and civic disloyalty. See Trybuna Ludu, nos. 297 and 298 (October 26 and 27, 1954); see also, AAN, 237-X1 A, vol. 234 (1954), p. 29, note no. 6 about Światło’s escape; statements by the Ministry of Public Security employees concerning the provocateur Światło and the mood in the ministry, Warsaw, September 12–November 5, 1954, ibid., pp. 3–4, 14, 20, 27, 29, 35 and 39.
with antisemitism, which he encountered during his studies in the Soviet Union at the turn of 1952 and 1953.11

The Jewish Role in the Authorities’ Activities

In the second half of the 1950s, the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union sparked off profound changes in Poland. In a secret speech at the Congress, Nikita Khrushchev, then party leader, charged Stalin with responsibility for the suffering endured by citizens of the Soviet Union during recurrent waves of terror between 1929 and 1953.12 As a result of discussion of Khrushchev’s speech at thousands of party meetings, at which were Polish United Workers’ Party members, as well as non-party members, Polish society embarked on making a reckoning with the country’s post-war past. The main focus was placed on the mistakes and even the crimes committed by people in positions of political power. Intellectuals, students, and social groups demanded the total cessation of ideological terror and the opening up of the authorities to social, cultural, and political initiatives from the rank and file. Reform-friendly members of the Polish United Workers’ Party promoted these views, demanding so-called “socialism with a human face.”

In the summer of 1956, there was tremendous civic revival and discussion of topics that were previously off-limits. The Poznań riots on June 28–29 — a clear challenge to the political system — were bloodily repressed. The “Jewish question,” with antisemitic overtones, also emerged in the political debate.

Within the core leadership of the Polish United Workers’ Party, a group of activists started advocating for the implementation of an “ethnic-oriented manpower policy” in Poland.13 This concept was imported from the Soviet Union, where it actually ended or limited the access of people of Jewish origin in certain professions and leadership positions. Bolesław Bierut did not allow such practices in the areas of Poland over which he held sway. To a certain extent, however, they were applied in the army,

where the Soviet Marshal Konstanty Rokossowski enforced adjustments to Soviet needs and standards at an accelerated pace from 1949 onward.

Together with several other Soviet decision makers, Nikita Khrushchev championed the cause of evicting Jews from leading positions in state institutions. Official representatives of the Soviet Union expressed support for this policy on a number of occasions in Warsaw in 1956 and 1957. It is not surprising, then, that a group of Polish supporters of the “ethnic-oriented manpower policy” (the so-called “Natolin group”) assumed they would have the Soviet Union’s backing in their attempts to remove activists of Jewish origin who collaborated with Bolesław Bierut, after his death in Moscow on March 12, 1956. This would also provide the “Natolin group” with an opportunity to blame activists of Jewish origin for the “mistakes and deviations” during the first 12 years of the Polish People’s Republic, absolving themselves from responsibility for any problems and implying they were perfectly able to implement reforms in the system.

The ruling party’s need to provide new legitimacy became urgent in the light of growing social discontent with the inefficient economic system. Opinions were voiced, claiming that the working classes fared better before World War II. Moreover, most of the citizens were far from receptive to the internationalist rhetoric from the powers that be. The rulers were particularly worried since such opinions were also gaining a foothold among the working classes, whom they claimed to represent. In 1955–1956, becoming aware of this situation, the leadership of the Polish United Workers’ Party took urgent steps to search for understanding among the rest of Polish society. Several veteran Communists concluded that the ruling party would gain greater acceptance by eliminating Jews from leadership positions. In 1955, they derived political benefit from the first trial for violations of the law. Colonel Józef Różański, a Jewish Communist who was the Head of the investigation department of the Ministry of Public Security, was sentenced in the autumn of 1955. The press covered his trial and the relatively lenient sentence of five years’ imprisonment triggered a public outcry. Also,

14 According to a rumor that was circulating, people with these views were going to meet in a government facility in Natolin near Warsaw, and they consequently went down in history as the “Natolin faction,” “Natolin” or the “Natolin group.”
Colonel Anatol Fejgin, former Chief of the Ministry of Public Security, and Roman Romkowski, Deputy Minister of Public Security, were put on trial. Together with Różański, they were tried again in 1956–1957. Not only Jews were punished for these crimes, but cases involving Jews were covered by the press, while the others accused of similar charges were not mentioned. Nor was any mention made of Soviet advisers in the security and military counter intelligence services who actually initiated and promoted the use of terror. This is how history was rewritten, with Jews as the main, if not the only, perpetrators of crimes in the framework of repression. The image was enhanced by presenting a repressed society facing a hostile and harmful ruling group of “Jewish character.” In this way, the first proponents of this view intended to divert attention from their own coreponsibility for the route the country had taken during the first 12 years after World War II. On top of this, the reasons why Communists of Jewish origin played a major role in the liberalization process were completely distorted. According to the official interpretation, they were motivated by a desire to remain in power.

During the Sixth Plenary Session of the Central Committee, in discussing the choice of a new first secretary, Khrushchev backed the idea of reducing the number of “Abramoviches” in the Secretariat of the Polish United Workers’ Party and the Central Committee’s Politburo. Consideration of such topics in the plenum was the symbolic beginning of the end of real, equal rights for Jews in the Polish People’s Republic.

The “Natolin group” encountered opposition on the part of the so-called “Puławy group” (a reform-minded faction of the Polish United Workers’
Party) who were convinced that the terror-based\textsuperscript{20} system of government practiced until then should be abandoned. Moreover, they shared a dislike of party comrades’ attempts to score political points by using partly anti-Semitic phraseology hostile to reform and the intelligentsia. The “Puławy group” also stressed the need for more partnership-oriented and less subservient relations with the Soviet Union. With respect to “ethnic-oriented manpower policy,” they pointed out its discriminatory character, running counter to the party’s fundamental ideas. People with a critical frame of mind viewed it as a throwback to the Nazi-era “Aryanization” of public institutions. Jews and people of Jewish origin feared even wider repercussions of this exclusion policy based on racist criteria targeted against them.

As early as the spring of 1956, antisemitic concepts aimed at eliminating and settling scores with Jews filtered down to the lower rungs of power. In March and April that year, field activists from the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów — TSKŻ) reported an increase in aggressive and hostile behavior towards Jews. Historical research shows a connection between the number of antisemitic incidents and the increasing social turmoil and public expression of views that people were afraid to voice before. Resentment toward other ethnic minorities, such as Byelorussians, Germans, and Ukrainians, was also more openly expressed. This phenomenon became so widespread that the press reported it more and more often from May and June onward. First and foremost, the harassment of Jewish children by schoolmates and neighbors was deplored.\textsuperscript{21} According to one view, this resulted from the reintroduction of religious classes in state schools. However, linking these two issues with the events that took place that year is anachronistic. It should also be borne in mind that religious classes, which continued to be provided in major cities (such as Gdańsk, Kraków, and Łódź), did not completely disappear from public schools from 1950 to 1955. The minister of education’s decision led to a nearly complete reintroduction\textsuperscript{22} of religious classes. It went into effect on December 31, 1956, the day after it was announced, but was not implemented until the beginning of the following year.\textsuperscript{23} Consequently,

\textsuperscript{20} Referring to Puławska Street in Warsaw, where some of the people affiliated with the reform-friendly faction lived.
\textsuperscript{22} Except for the schools under the framework of the Society of the Friends of Children.
\textsuperscript{23} “Zarządzenie Ministra Oświaty z 8 XII 1956 w sprawie nauczania religii w
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this could have an increasingly negative impact on relations between pupils in the context of events in 1957. Likewise, suggestions that there was no discord between believers and nonbelievers in school children until 1956 are off the mark. On the contrary, such discord existed, but the press just did not report it. This situation changed in 1956 not only due to the apparently larger scope of the phenomenon, but also mainly to the absence of obstacles by the censors. This became a tool in the journalistic struggle against the clergy’s emerging role in educational institutions. Corrective comments on the situation in schools from 1956 to 1957 do not change the fact that they provided a stage for antisemitism during that period. However, in the author’s view, the intensified antisemitism in 1956 was not related to the teaching of religion, but mainly to comments by some of the parents about the alleged privileged position of the Jews and their detrimental effect on the life of the country. Children only expressed their families’ attitudes. In individual cases, they may have been influenced by negative comments in other environments, including antisemitic members of the clergy.

When Jakub Berman left the government and the Central Committee’s Politburo of the Polish United Workers’ Party, this marked a distinct

szkolach,” Dziennik Urzędowy Ministerstwa Oświaty, 31 XII, no. 16, item 156 (1956), pp. 151–152.

24 To date, there has not been any research examining the nature of these relations in the Jewish milieu, including schools where Yiddish was taught.

25 The problem of the negative attitude of the believers, who were in the majority, toward pupils who did not attend religious classes did not only apply to Jewish pupils. This is how the situation in the Kraków region was described: “Children who do not attend religious classes are mocked by others and, often, even by the teaching staff.” See report no. 189/3260 of the organizational department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, November 15, 1955, AAN, 237-VII, vol. 3834 (1955), p. 57.

26 To date, there has not been any research on the frequency of antisemitic acts in Polish schools in and before 1956.

27 Views critical of restoring religious instruction in schools were frequently voiced in the press in 1956. Actually, the “keeping the schools secular” slogan was the order of the day. In this context, cases of harassment of Jewish children were publicized from mid-1956 onward. Interestingly, the issue of conflicts over ethnic or religious background was not taken up by Głos Nauczycielski until December 1956. See, for example, “Przegląd Kulturalny,” no. 3, January 18–25, 1956 and no. 23, June 7–13, 1956; Głos Nauczycielski, no. 26–27, June 24 and July 1, 1956; no. 28–29, July 8–15, 1956; no. 45, November 4, 1956; Express Łódzki and Głos Robotniczy (Łódź), July 1956; Kronika, no. 5, March 1–15, 1957.

turning point in this context. Likewise, Hilary Minc’s absence from public life at that time was part of the same trend. Neither of these two men represented Jewish organizations, and both clearly expressed aspirations to be Polish Communists and build a new political system in Poland. However, most of society viewed them primarily as Jews. Consequently, the removal from the pinnacle of power of two prominent figures was construed as part of a general tendency to weed out people of Jewish origin from public life. This was the message spread by field activists of the Polish United Workers’ Party.30

Jakub Berman was a choice candidate as a scapegoat because, as the only Jew, together with Franciszek Mazur and Bierut, he was part of a three-man group appointed by the Politburo to supervise the Ministry of Public Security. Minister Stanisław Radkiewicz, member of the Central Committee’s Politburo, was presented as an inert puppet almost without influence, and Berman as the one who made decisions in important matters. This is how Aleksander Zawadzki, Chairman of the State Council, put it at a meeting of the Central Committee’s Politburo of the Polish United Workers’ Party, held on May 2, 1956:

When I reflect on the case of comrade Berman, I ask myself two questions: Can it be that I am driven by hate or maybe antisemitism? Comrades, I must confess to you that, for many years, my heart was aching when I watched what was going on. Berman would place Jewish comrades in all leading positions and not only good, old comrades: Światło, Romkowski, Fejgin, Różański, Brystiger, and Czaplicki. How can one explain this to oneself? I looked at the profile of comrade Berman, who is a member of the Jewish intelligentsia from a bourgeois family and

29 A press communiqué about Berman reads as follows: “As the outcome of analyzing the mistakes and deviations pertaining to the performance of party and state duties of past years, carried out by the Central Committee’s Politburo of the Polish United Workers’ Party, the Politburo took a critical view of comrade Berman’s activity in the fields he supervised. Consequently, comrade J. Berman tendered his resignation from his posts as member of the Politburo and Deputy Prime Minister.” See editorial: "Uchwała Biura Politycznego KC PZPR," Głos Robotniczy, no. 108, May 7, 1956.

30 AAN, 237-VII, vol. 3835, p. 77, report no. 35/3309, May 18, 1956. This document alleged that, after Berman’s departure, there was a tendency to spread antisemitic sentiments in the Wielkopolska and Kujawy areas.
who did not grow up in revolutionary conditions. All this presents a most unclear picture.31

Judging from the minutes, on the day that Zawadzki leveled these charges, no one took a stand. On the next day, he resumed the targeting of Berman, expanding even more on the Jewish issue. This time, he included other influential Jewish Communists, such as Hilary Minc and Roman Zambrowski, in his exposé. On May 3, among other things, Zawadzki said:

It would hurt me throughout the years, my heart was heavy and I would ask myself why a conscious Communist would act like this...creating a theory that only Jewish comrades could be trusted in secret matters. Is a Jew really more deserving of trust than a Pole?... Comrade Berman did not find even one trustworthy Pole with whom to discuss these matters.... His unlimited power and role in this country, and also of Minc and Zambrowski, kept increasing. Then, Zambrowski faded out, leaving the “Great Three.”32 They would rely on a specific category of people. Why are we talking about Polish nationalism and not Jewish nationalism, which is very dangerous?.... Until this very day, a lot of Jewish comrades occupy positions in the security services and that is where life-and-death decisions are made, as well as those regarding the country’s fate. Is there any reason to place Jewish comrades in positions requiring trustworthy people? Was it not possible to look for other people, Poles, in factories? Why was the political branch of the army staffed by Jewish comrades? It...[has become clear] that by placing Jews in positions of power, we are encouraging antisemitism in this country.33

On this occasion, Zawadzki’s tirades were not left unanswered:

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32 “The Great Three” referred to Bierut, Berman, and Minc.

33 The Archive of the “Karta” Center, Jerzy Poksiński’s Legacy, vol. 173; copy of the minutes of the session of the Central Committee’s Politburo of the Polish United Workers’ Party, May 3, 1956, p. 19; see also Jan Stępień, Ustąpienie, pp. 208–209; Zaremba, Komunizm, p. 231.

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Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz said: We must be very careful not to unleash a wave of antisemitism in Poland — and it is an easy thing to do. We know and we all understand the need to increase the scope of Aryan manpower and our responsible Jewish comrades have insisted on this even more than others. Is it now possible to brandish the slogan of struggle against Jewish nationalism, as comrade Zawadzki is doing? I think that Jewish nationalism can be found in certain circles, but it is not a political phenomenon and there is no reason to speak about our comrades' attitudes in this context. Such statements should be expected and we should be more careful. We know that there are groups of comrades, who allegedly approach the matter of dilution from the party's point of view, but quite often this is only a cover for personal aspirations and score-settling, and, at certain times, it becomes a matter of party principles. We have all weighed up the extent of comrade Jakub's responsibility for matters of security, but none of us ever expressed the view that he was representing Jewish nationalism in the Politburo. Comrades, I cannot go along with this; this cannot be a platform for discussion; and this is how I understood comrade Zawadzki's statements.³⁴

In his summary of the discussion, Edward Ochab, First Secretary of the Central Committee, indirectly backed the prime minister's position, stressing it would be good if Poland did not become the stage for trials, victimizing Communists of Jewish origin, as in other countries, like Czechoslovakia, for example. As soon as Zawadzki realized he was in a minority, he gave up defending his position, claiming he had been misunderstood. Nevertheless, the problem remained. Zawadzki's statement reflected the party's decision makers who, with a view to securing their own place in the leadership of the country, were prepared to ascribe the entire responsibility and blame for the terror and the authorities’ other failures in the post-war years to a relatively narrow group of Jewish Communists. As Cyrankiewicz's statement shows, he also saw the need to gradually increase the number of ethnic Poles in leading positions, but he opposed the method of introducing such changes based on “anti-Jewish” rhetoric.

In the last ten days of May 1956, the Security Services reported a growing tendency to express negative opinions about Jews publicly and remove them

from the positions\textsuperscript{35} they held. This period also provided an opportunity to get rid of incompetent leaders who had been promoted due to their “social background.” Tens of thousands of people lost their jobs at that time as a result of curtailed employment in the army, the administration, and the party apparatus and special branches. The exact number of Jews among them and the extent of their overrepresentation among the forcefully unemployed as compared to the Jews’ overall statistical proportion of society are not known. Reports coming in from various parts of the country indicated an increasing wave of ostentatiously anti-Jewish behavior in the public domain, such as in workplaces, on the streets, and in schools.\textsuperscript{36} Documents stemming from TSKŻ branches include a great deal of information about this topic.\textsuperscript{37} For example, in Tarnów, where no mention was made of antisemitic incidents until as late as mid-May, it was deemed necessary to bring them to the attention of the representative of the City Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party one month later.\textsuperscript{38} The authorities seemed to be losing control of the situation. They were not able to put a stop to external manifestations of anti-Jewish sentiments at the beginning and feared the consequences of their inefficacy. Everything seems to indicate that many people intentionally desisted from taking action. Most members of the Central Committee’s Politburo were opposed to an “ethnic-oriented manpower policy,” but some of them divided their comrades into Jews and non-Jews, advocating “dilution” measures. In this situation, they resorted to a method already tested from 1945 to 1950, allowing mass emigration in the “family reunification” framework. Józef Cyrankiewicz spoke about it in mid-June during a meeting with representatives of the Jewish community.\textsuperscript{39}

Samuel Maizels, who worked in the embassy of the Polish People’s Republic in London and as an officer in the civil intelligence service, at the same time, described the situation in Poland to Jewish World Congress delegates in the following terms:

\textsuperscript{35} Minutes of the session of the Presidium of the TSKŻ board in Łódź, May 22, 1956, AŻIH, TSKŻ, vol. 102 (1956).
\textsuperscript{37} See archival material including TSKŻ documents from 1956 kept in AŻIH, e.g., file nos. 2, 48, 52, 87, 98, 99, 102, 107, 115, and 127.
\textsuperscript{38} Minutes of the TSKŻ board session, held in Tarnów, May 15, 1956, ibid.; minutes of an extended TSKŻ board plenum in Tarnów on June 14, 1956, ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Editorial, “Nowiny Izraelskie,” no. 74, June 29, 1956; Folks-Shtime, no. 143, September 5, 1956.
Neither the government nor the party altered their attitude towards Jews. The Polish party members’ attitude toward Jewish members is very friendly. People try to be even nicer than before because they feel embarrassed and ill at ease because of antisemitism and the fact that Jewish Communists and Jews as such are being blamed for the regime’s mistakes. It is not true that the government intends to turn Jews into a scapegoat and blame them for its mistakes. On the contrary, the government endeavors to ensure the best possible care for the Jews under the present conditions. Antisemitism was curbed by force and only thanks to terror and curtailment of freedom was it possible to ensure protection for the Jews. The government and the party spare no efforts to combat antisemitism in the country. The entire press and well-known public figures have taken a determined stand opposing the threat of using discriminatory practices based on race against the Jews. The most famous journalists, actors, and artists protested against antisemitic behavior and discrimination toward the Jews in Poland. However, the party had to learn a lesson: Despite all its efforts in the area of reeducation of the Polish social masses and a determined struggle against discrimination, prejudice, and racial hatred, the party did not manage to educate the masses properly and, once again, antisemitism has come to the surface of Poland’s public life. In this situation, the government feels obliged to allow mass emigration of Jews. Several Jewish party members believe that emigration would facilitate matters for the authorities, making them more popular in the eyes of the Polish social masses. They do realize that...even the best government and the most efficient administration should be treated with distrust as long as they protect Jews and include them among their ranks.

Was Maizels presenting his own analysis of the situation or was he acting on his superiors’ instructions? Failure to mention advocates of “ethnic-oriented manpower policy” in the ranks of the Polish United Workers’ Party and also attributing the best of intentions to the party leadership indicate that he presented a position agreed upon with his superiors. However, a striking element in his opinion was his reversion to the “black legend.”

Note on the conversation with Samuel Maizels, Secretary of the Polish People’s Republic in London, on July 24, 1956, CZA, C 2; Israeli state note on the conversation with Samuel Maizels, Second Secretary of the Polish People’s Republic in London, on July 12, 1956, ISA, 30.11/01/2497/5.
according to which Polish society was imbued with racial prejudice and only police terror kept down attacks on Jews, and the “London-based Poles” were allegedly guilty of antisemitic incitement.

Zenon Nowak, member of the Central Committee’s Politburo of the Polish United Workers’ Party, opened up the Pandora’s box even more, during a session of the seventh plenum of the Central Committee in July 1956. For the first time in this forum, he raised the issue of Jewish “over-representation” in central government institutions and in the Polish Army. The speaker termed his predecessors’ views as an exaggeration to sound the alarm because of antisemitic incidents. He urged the party to take a stand on the Jewish “overrepresentation” claim in government institutions, since this was a political problem. His assessment also implied that Jews were not an integral part of Polish society. According to him, “overrepresentation” of people of Jewish origin in state institutions expressed the political authorities’ lack of trust in Poles, and, therefore, should not be ignored.

A few people reacted sharply to his speech, among them Leon Kasman, editor-in-chief of the daily Trybuna Ludu:

I would have understood it if comrade Nowak had deemed it necessary to tell our Central Committee that...there were considerable areas with an excessive density and accumulation of Communist manpower of Jewish descent; and that, concerning manpower policy, this factor should be taken into consideration with regard to staffing. What has arisen spontaneously in our country should be adjusted in a planned manner. However,...I could not agree more with comrades...who spoke out on this issue.... [I]ts tone...really grates on my ear.

On the other hand, as Mateusz Ochs, Head of the organizational department of the Central Committee, pointed out, regulating the presence of people of Jewish descent in key departments had been part of manpower policy for quite some time, albeit “the implementation of the policy had

43 Leon Kasman’s contribution; see also Władyka and Janowski, eds., Protokoły, pp. 644–645.
not been sufficiently supervised." He was not offended by Nowak taking up this topic, but rather by how he did this. On the other hand, Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki unequivocally rejected the adoption of an “ethnic-oriented manpower policy” as an applicable rule. Nevertheless, as he conceded, policies aimed at the “most backward part of the nation” sometimes required accepting “necessary deviations from principles.” Nowak’s positions were dismissed by the plenum and unequivocally criticized, although not directly and in an impersonal form, directly in Ochab’s concluding speech, and indirectly in the state-of-the-nation resolution. It was dealt with as a matter society did not need to know about. In the meantime, news about this incident gradually spread in Poland and abroad.

In the second half of that year, there were further antisemitic acts, which became part of a growing tide of hooliganism, which also involved aggressive behavior toward the police and state security officers. In the second, and especially the third quarter of the year, there was a sharp increase in the number of antisemitic acts in the Wrocław province. This was very significant, because almost half of the Jewish citizens of the Polish People’s Republic lived there.

The security services, which for two years had been the target of criticism on the part of various parties and circles affiliated with the powers-that-be, opted for a wait-and-see attitude, and Antoni Alster, Deputy Minister of the Interior, pointed this out and added: “Party, state, and industrial institutions are often intimidated.” This was the case with ordinary citizens, party activists, and also individuals with criminal and hooligan leanings.

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44 Ibid., p. 699.
46 Ibid., vol. 19, p. 421; see also Nowe Drogi, no. 7–8 (1956), p. 218.
47 Compared to 1955, the number of acts of hooliganism increased by 32.9 percent in 1956; note on the growing crime rate in 1956, see AIPN W, MSW II, vol. 5, pp. 42–51; Trybuna Ludu, no. 5, January 7, 1957; no. 91, April 3, 1957; no. 101, April 13, 1957; no. 108, April 18, 1957.
Gradually, the number of lower-level party activists advocating an “ethnic-oriented manpower policy” increased. One of the causes of this was the struggle to secure and keep jobs during a period of mass firing of white-collar workers regardless of their ethnic origin and political status. The “Natolin group” was manipulating people concerned about their future, which was easy in a situation in which many people won over by the Polish Workers’ Party or the Polish United Workers’ Party resented Jews.

In various locations, public mention of Jewish origin was used to undermine the qualifications of an activist to hold party office, from as early as December 1956 and in the first quarter of the following year. This could not be prevented by recalling the official position of the Polish United Workers’ Party on the issue of equal rights for citizens regardless of their ethnic background. To begin with, the takeover of party leadership by Władysław Gomułka in October 1956 made no difference in this respect, especially since Gomulka did not view chauvinism as a matter to be dealt with at the first opportunity. However, it is well known that, on a few occasions, he qualified antisemitic statements made by some members of the Polish United Workers’ Party as “anti-party work.”

The issue of equal rights for all citizens regardless of their nationality was stressed on several occasions. In 1956, Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz, Education Minister Witold Jarosiński, and Vice-Minister of Interior Zygfryd Sznek would all make statements to this effect.

The eighth plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, which took place from October 19 to 21, 1956, became a turning point. It resulted in Władysław Gomułka’s reelection as party leader, after an eight-year-long intermission. A crisis set in. Although people associated with both the “Natolin” and the “Puławy” factions found their way to the Politburo of the Central Committee, regardless of the differences of opinion dividing individuals, there would be no going back to the pre-1956 style of

51 Machcewicz, Polski rok, p. 226.
52 Nationalist chauvinism and racism, including antisemitism, were condemned in the final resolution of the seventh plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party and during the all-Polish advisory meeting of the members of the National Unity Front in November 1956. Representatives of the government, the Polish Writers Union, and other institutions spoke in a similar vein.
53 Folks-Shtime, no. 193, December 1, 1956.
government, and steps had to be taken to improve popular sentiment. The Roman Catholic Church ceased to be the target of attacks, and forced farm collectivization was abandoned. Moreover, the decision was made to set up cooperation with the Soviet Union on a partnership basis. These were the priorities of the new leadership at the time, and it was hoped that they would be instrumental in gaining the support of an overwhelming majority, if not all, of the citizens. This objective was achieved, as witnessed by the wide-scale voter turnout in the elections to the Sejm, the parliament of the Polish People’s Republic, in January 1957.

For a few months, following the eighth plenum, an official statement was still not forthcoming by the highest party authorities regarding the issue of antisemitism, but the position of the ruling party was presented in a different way. A publication of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party included an article entitled “Zaraza, która truje życie” (literally, The Venom That Poisons Life) by the well-known journalist and theater critic, Jan Alfred Szczepański, which was entirely devoted to the situation of Jews in Poland.\(^{54}\) The author vehemently condemned antisemitic excesses. Undoubtedly, he represented the official party position, and his text was approved by the press department of the Central Committee.

In this, as well as in other problems, appeals and recommendations of political authorities did not always translate into meticulous implementation by subordinates. In 1956–1957, one would still note the activity of those advocating the elimination of Jews from public life. Alerted by Jewish organizations, Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz determinedly took up the matter in parliament on February 26, 1957:

> The government should safeguard equal rights and duties for all citizens unwaveringly, regardless of race, nationality or faith. It should be determined in the struggle against any kind of discrimination and infringement of rights aimed at national minorities residing in Poland.
>
> We are witnessing worrisome incidents in this area and it is high time to put an end to this. Most of all, such chauvinism is insulting and humiliating to...[the members of a group], which, while few in numbers, are the victims of such a poisoned atmosphere. The fight against chauvinism is a fight for the moral health of our own nation. We should fully enforce the principle of equal rights and equal duties regardless of ethnic origin or faith. Any attempts at discrimination or infringement

\(^{54}\) *Trybuna Ludu*, no. 347, December 14, 1956.
of legislation that applies to the Jewish population, which has been living in their motherland, Poland, for centuries, should be determinedly countered by the government and its branches.55

By then, the political turmoil in Poland was over. The “Natolin group” did not manage to establish a dominant position in the Central Committee’s secretariat and Politburo of the Polish United Workers’ Party. The most dogmatic of them, and likewise some of the “Puławy group” members, were relegated to the sidelines of political life. The conciliatory attitude of the Catholic Church hierarchy was certainly conducive to dampening the mood of society, not to mention the release of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland, who, until then, had been held in isolation. The brutal Soviet suppression of the uprising in Hungary in the beginning of November had a muting effect on the slogans that could be heard all over Poland calling for eradication of Soviet influence in the country. Thus, various factors contributed to the strengthening of Gomułka and his entourage’s position. The regime became steadier, felt safer, and proceeded to solve problems previously viewed as less important.56

After the election, considered an unquestionable success by the leadership of the Polish United Workers’ Party and the government of the Polish People’s Republic, officials in ministries in charge of maintaining public order demonstrated a new zeal in performing their duties. The press reported on trials and sentences meted out to perpetrators of crimes and law violations, including those targeting Jews.57 The fact that information on this subject would appear on the very same day in publications of various regional committees of the Polish United Workers’ Party indicated that the involvement of the party media in the struggle against antisemitism was centrally preplanned.

By the end of 1955, practical assistance provided by state institutions

55 Gazeta Robotnicza, no. 51, February 28, 1957; see also Grabski, Sytuacja Żydów, p. 511.
56 As August Grabski, who described the situation at the turn of 1956, correctly put it: “The Jewish Question mattered a lot less to Gomułka than shaping relations with the Soviet Union and the Polish Church, creating a new farming policy, carrying out changes in the party apparatus, getting a grip on society’s democratic mood, and handling the January election, etc. It goes without saying that Gomułka’s statements had a predominantly pragmatic character (out of concern for the international image of the Polish People’s Republic) and were not necessarily an expression of principles,” Grabski, Sytuacja Żydów, p. 514.
to the Jewish population was also extended to the second wave of post-war repatriates from the Soviet Union, among them, several Gulag inmates who were granted amnesty after Stalin’s death. In the autumn of 1956, the stream of repatriates swelled to such an extent that it became necessary to appoint a Government Plenipotentiary for Repatriate Affairs. A population exchange was discussed during Gomułka’s visit to Moscow in November 1956, and the formal implementation rules were laid down in a repatriation agreement, signed on March 25, 1957. In accordance with this agreement, only those Poles and Jews and members of their closest family who had been citizens of the pre-war Polish Republic were authorized to return to Poland. In total, between 1955 and 1959, approximately a quarter of a million people arrived from the Soviet Union, including 18,000 categorized as Jews.

A concentrated effort aimed at mitigating conflicts between the Polish and the German, Ukrainian, and Jewish populations did not start producing results until April 1957, when the Central Committee’s secretariat of the Polish United Workers’ Party adopted a few resolutions on measures to be taken in relation to ethnic minorities. The Central Committee Commission for Nationality Affairs, set up a few months before, was dealing with this issue. A letter about combating discrimination among the Jewish population was sent to regional party committees. In the very same month, the text of the letter was published in the daily Trybuna Ludu. In accordance with guidelines set by the political headquarters, readers presented the party line on matters of nationality to members of the Polish United Workers’ Party. Numerous meetings were held to discuss the contents and answer questions in connection with those issues. Not everyone was convinced.

59 Weekly supplement to Folks-Shtime, no. 2, November 29, 1957; no. 7, August 17, 1957; no. 8, August 24, 1957; no. 10, November 7, 1957.
60 Resolutions of the secretariat of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party about the German and Ukrainian national minorities, April 1957, AAN, 237-V, vol. 318, pp. 68–72; APL, the Łódź committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, vol. 1323, pp. 32–41; report no. 2 of the Central Committee’s Politburo of the Polish United Workers’ Party, April 1957.
61 Letter from the Central Committee’s secretariat of the Polish United Workers’ Party to the KW, KM, KP, and KD, Warsaw, April 1957, APG, the Polish United Workers’ Party, vol. 646, pp. 140–144; see also Trybuna Ludu, no. 112, April 26, 1957; see also Grabski, Sytuacja Żydów, p. 512.
In several locations, Jews would still be publicly insulted. In Wrocław, for example, a representative of the Municipal National Council still viewed Jews as “top executives and speculators,” even though most of the Jews there were workers and craftsmen. The political authorities clearly managed to put a damper on the dissemination of such views. As stated by the final resolution — somehow considered as the turning point, putting an end to free debate in the party — adopted by the Central Committee’s tenth plenum of the Polish United Workers’ Party: “In order to ensure unity in political and ideological views and action, it is necessary to rid the party of people who spread anti-socialist and revisionist ideas, nationalists, chauvinists, and people who refuse to give up dogmatic and false attitudes.” With regard to Jewish issues, the political center basically persevered in restraining antisemitic rhetoric in the public sphere until 1967.

Jewish Institutions

A discussion characterized by score-settling and spurred on by news from the East following the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Union’s Communist Party coincided with reports on meetings preceding the Third National TSKŻ Congress, which took place on April 15–16, 1956. Many people interested in working for the association, but critical of its methods, demanded changes. Also, members of the TSKŻ leadership, such as Szymon Zachariasz and David Sfard, voiced their support for change. There were also voices asking for more space for Jewish issues in the association’s everyday activity. There was criticism of the policy of abandoning the Yiddish language. This applied primarily to state schools that taught Yiddish, but in which most of the classes were conducted in Polish. There were objections with regard to the Idisz Buch publishing house’s list of publications. There was insistence on a bigger share of classics in Yiddish and works of authors writing in Israel and other capitalist countries, who were not necessarily affiliated with the Communist movement. A group of poets and prose writers in Yiddish, who were members of the Polish Writers Union and at the

62 Weekly supplement to Folks-Shtime, no. 2, June 29, 1957.
63 Trybuna Ludu, no. 299, October 30, 1957.
same time closely connected to the TSKŻ, were convinced of the need to open up to Jewish literary circles abroad. Participants in the discussion reiterated charges of lack of interest in Jewish matters on the part of officials of the committees of the Polish United Workers’ Party, the national council presidia, and city council members. Acrimonious opinions were voiced about TSKŻ staffers from Warsaw who avoided calling on the TSKŻ regional branches for months. In the provinces, people clamored for more frequent performances by the State Jewish Theater.

Many Jews publicly took issue with the hostile propaganda of TSKŻ-affiliated Communists who had been targeting Israel and creating an atmosphere of distrust toward its institutions, for example the Israeli Legation in Warsaw. Mobilization of malevolent sentiment against religious people and institutions was considered a breach of constitutional rules. Many people opposed the politically prescribed attitude towards foreign Jewish institutions, including the World Jewish Congress and the Joint. The same applied to reparations paid by the government of the Federal Republic of Germany to survivors of the Nazi occupation. From a material point of view, everyday existence under “real” socialism was such a burden for thousands of families that they were prepared to accept these reparations.

The position of Jews living in Poland regarding these issues was not uniform. Some Communists still held doctrinaire views, clamoring for suppression of the counteroffensive by the “reactionary forces,” criticized concessions to the private sector and religious congregations, and opposed contesting the Soviet Union’s policies.

The Third National TSKŻ Congress was held in an atmosphere of assessment of the first five years of the organization’s activity. Members of the board’s Presidium, who were the real decision makers, conceded that mistakes had been made in several areas, which resulted in pushing an entire category of Jews, such as small merchants, who were persistently
presented as a hostile and alien element in terms of class struggle, away from the organization. Although by then, and even a few years previously, efforts were made to gain support from the craftsmen, who were former members of ethnic parties (for example, the Zionists), people of the Jewish faith, and those applying for emigration. Representatives of these groups did not forget the unpleasantness, or rather harassment, to which they had been subjected on the part of overzealous activists of the Polish United Workers’ Party.71

During the congress, the former practice of excluding some groups of Jews from the TSKŻ field of interest was condemned. The foundations of the political and socioeconomic system of the Polish People's Republic and the leading role of the Polish United Workers’ Party were fully accepted, but it was deemed necessary to cooperate with non-Communist circles. However, there would not be any dialog, under any circumstances, with people who openly voiced anti-Communist views. The attitude towards families wishing to emigrate to join their relatives abroad was reassessed. Their desire to emigrate was recognized as their natural right, and the Israeli option was not construed as a sign of hostility towards the Polish People's Republic, as in previous years.

The debate during the congress did not result in loss of leadership for those who had been members of the TSKŻ board's Presidium. The association would be reformed by people who had been unable to do it for a couple of years. Perhaps there were no better candidates. The leadership of the Polish United Workers’ Party supervising the organization did not see the need for change.

In the years 1956–1957, the board’s Presidium, with the same members as before, tried hard to gain credibility in the eyes of its organization’s members. Its representatives knocked on doors at the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party and on those of various ministries calling on decision makers to fight antisemites. Grzegorz Smolar, the TSKŻ board Chairman, also voiced the worries of the Jewish community in the public sphere, for example, during the National Unity Front’s all-national congress. Unlike the anti-Zionist activity from 1950 to 1953, Jewish TSKŻ Communists did not shy away from speaking out in public against tolerance of antisemitic attitudes and they defended the idea of real equal rights for Jews. This was one of the positive signs of the changes in 1956. One of the examples of the TSKŻ leadership’s interventionist policies was the

71 Pre-congress TSKŻ conference in Łódź, April 2, 1956, AŻIH, TSKŻ, vol. 55.
letter to the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party secretariat, signed by Smolar. It pointed out antisemitic acts and made suggestions with regard to arguments disavowing some of the accusations against Jews, emphasizing that most Jews did physical work, refuting the black myth about “Jewish top executives” who exploited Polish workers and were responsible for their families’ low standard of living. Smolar recommended mentioning the common fate of Poles and Jews over the centuries in order to discredit yet another accusation leveled against Jews, namely their lack of involvement in the struggle for the country’s independence. These facts and claims were later directed against party members by the Central Committee’s secretariat of the Polish United Workers’ Party, indicating that the TSKŻ initiative produced some results.

On the one hand, the TSKŻ sent letters to state institutions requesting emigration permits for people not able to lead a normal life in Poland and who assumed they would be able to do so abroad with their relatives’ assistance. On the other hand, Jewish Communists protested against activities which, in their view, bolstered the mood of those interested in emigration, such as exclusively positive press reports about living conditions in Israel. There were instances when the association’s activists, usually in vain, tried to discourage Jews from emigrating by pointing out that normalization was advancing in Poland.

The TSKŻ became the main patron of repatriates, who arrived in increasing numbers from the Soviet Union from 1955 onward. The organization looked for apartments and work for repatriates who were not so capable of fending for themselves after they left the transitory centers. This made it easier for them to begin a new stage of independent life. The successful negotiations by the TSKŻ leadership that resulted in the allocation of apartments for the newly arrived repatriates, at a time when thousands of families were barely managing to subsist in very difficult housing conditions, may be viewed as a major achievement. They managed to convince members of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party,

72 Smolar’s letter, February 8, 1957, to A. Sław, the TSKŻ board Chairman, AAN, 237-XVI, vol. 149, p. 10.
73 Folks-Shtime, no. 129, August 11, 1956; no. 135, August 28, 1956; no. 196, December 6, 1956; see also Berendt, Życie żydowskie, pp. 319, 321–322.
74 From 1955 to 1959, a total of 250,000 pre-war Polish citizens and members of their families returned from the Soviet Union, including 18,000 affiliated with the Jewish milieu; see also Małgorzata Ruchniewicz, Repatriacja ludności polskiej z ZSRR w latach 1955–1959 (Warsaw: Volumen, 2000), pp. 72–82.
the government, and the decision makers in the local national councils, at a later stage, that the repatriates deserved substantial assistance. The TSKŻ was also successful in providing facilities for a substantial number of Jewish manufacturing cooperatives and several workshops. However, the struggle had just begun. In conditions of economic shortage, it was also necessary to overcome numerous difficulties with regard to allocation of raw materials for manufacturing.

Immediately after the repatriation, the schools in which Yiddish was taught overflowed with hundreds of children who mainly spoke Russian and had insufficient command of the Polish language to merge smoothly into the Polish-speaking pupil environment in other schools. Their parents wanted to spare them harassment in this respect, and therefore TSKŻ-affiliated schools seemed a secure place for their children. Not to mention that many repatriates considered Poland as only a stage on their way to the West.

The reconstruction of institutional cooperation with the Joint and the Jewish vocational organizational ORT was very important for the entire Jewish community. Thanks to foreign assistance, a social welfare system encompassing thousands of adults and children was established. In the framework of vocational courses, ORT instructors helped many people who had been made redundant or were repatriates from the Soviet Union to acquire new professional skills. Yekhiel Burgin, who arrived in Legnica from Wilno under the framework of repatriation, stressed that foreign material support

75 Weekly supplement to Folks-Shtime, no. 12, November 21, 1957; David Sfard, Mit zikh un mit andere (Jerusalem: Farlag “Yerushalaimer Almanach,” 1984), p. 220. ORT — the abbreviation stems from the Russian name of the Obshchestvo Rasprostranienija Truda sredi Jewriew (Promotion of Skills among Jews) organization, since it was founded in the Russian Empire with a view toward assisting Jews in acquiring new professional skills. After the First World War, the organization’s headquarters were moved to Berlin. The organization was active in Poland for 20 years during the inter-war period. ORT representatives returned to Poland after the war, where they ran vocational courses and helped to organize work cooperatives and craftsmen’s workshops by supplying tools and machines. In 1949, the Communist authorities banned the organization’s activities. They were resumed in the autumn of 1957 and continued for another ten years. During that period, some 16,000 people attended the ORT vocational courses, mainly repatriates from the Soviet Union and those fired in the years 1956–1957. As in the 1940s, ORT helped to set up Jewish craftsmen’s workshops and production and service cooperatives.
was also most important in improving the physical condition of people who had previously been eating low-quality food.76

At the time, Jewish community life revolved around TSKŻ-affiliated institutions and religious congregations. The relatively modest funds at the disposal of the TSKŻ and the ZRWM religious organization were considerably increased in November 1957 when the Central Jewish Social Assistance Committee was established to distribute the resources provided by the Joint. Some of these resources most likely came from the Jewish Agency, and the Israeli Legation in Warsaw delivered them.

This social assistance enabled people to eke out a living while they were waiting to embark on the long journey to Israel or other countries. Therefore, many people did not make any attempt to settle down in Poland but mainly circulated between their homes, Jewish manufacturing cooperatives, Jewish schools, TSKŻ clubs, and synagogues. Such a state of affairs was considered favorable, first and foremost, by people trying to persuade Jews that Poland held no future for them and they ought to leave.77

For a while, the pre-war Communists active in the ranks of the Polish United Workers’ Party and the TSKŻ complied with the principle of adopting a noncritical attitude towards the Soviet Union. In 1953, in the columns of the Nowe Drogi publication, educator and journalist Michał Mirski condemned the Kremlin doctors, making the accusations that they acted to the detriment of the patients at face value. However, in 1956, the very same Mirski recanted his allegations at the TSKŻ congress and at a Communist Party session of the Polish Writers Union.78

Mirski and his colleagues from the Presidium of the TSKŻ board decided to take an unprecedented step. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Khrushchev omitted the information about the assassination of hundreds of Soviet-Jewish social and cultural activists and the liquidation of their organizations. This

76 Yekhiel Burgin, Fun Vilne bis Yisrael (Tel Aviv: self-published, 1988), pp. 215–225. According to Burgin, the repatriates would receive 20 US dollars every second month. Although it is not possible to exclude the possibility that these funds were provided by the Joint, the Polish authorities claimed they were benefits from the Israeli Legation; see also Szaynok, Z historią, p. 295.
led Smolar, Zachariasz, and Mirski to publish an article about their friends and comrades-in-arms who were executed in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and after 1948. After a certain delay, the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party consented to publish this text anonymously in the *Folks-Shtime*79 daily. None of the satellite countries of the Soviet bloc had ever dared to criticize the Soviet political elites publicly in such a manner. The text created quite a stir. The Kremlin accused the authors of being “anti-Soviet,” because they claimed the Soviet Union had antisemitic policies.80

The TSKŻ leadership gave repeated assurances that taking up difficult and painful problems pertaining to the Soviet Jews’ situation was an expression of care and friendship, without any intention whatsoever of harming “the fatherland of the world proletariat.”81 However, they did pay a price for courage. As of May, the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party discussed stripping the *Folks-Shtime* of its status as a party publication. This measure was eventually implemented on December 8, 1956. From then on, the newspaper became only a TSKŻ publication. In 1958, the Central Committee of the Secretariat of the Polish United Workers’ Party forbade criticism of the Soviet Union in *Folks-Shtime*.82

The activities of the “dissidents” in the TSKŻ leadership never went beyond the limits laid down by the Central Committee of the secretariat of the Polish United Workers’ Party. On several occasions, they would reiterate their support for the authorities of the ruling party that came to power in the wake of the seventh plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party. They had no qualms about accepting the reversal of the liberal rhetoric that took place in the second half of 1957.83

This turning point in October made the ZRWM’s job much easier. The expansion of the TSKŻ, which had been striving to gain complete control of the “Jewish street,” was curtailed. It is quite possible that peaceful relations were facilitated by Aleksander Libo, who was previously active in the TSKŻ’s Łódź branch, taking over as the ZRWM’s Chairman. In December

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80 Zeszyty Teoretyczno-Polityczne, nos. 1–2 (1957).
81 *Folks-Shtime*, no. 195, December 5, 1956; no. 197, December 8, 1956.
83 *Folks-Shtime*, no. 170, October 23, 1956; no. 173, October 27, 1956; no. 175, October 31, 1956.
1956, during an extended plenum of the TSKŻ’s board, he moved to restore the teaching of Judaism in TSKŻ-affiliated schools. The press reporter made no mention of the reactions by other participants in the debate. However, they apparently dismissed the proposal, because Judaism was no longer taught in schools where Yiddish was part of the syllabus.

The sporadic publication of pictures or correspondence documenting religious ceremonies in synagogues was a certain concession to the milieu of religious Jews. However, the ZRWM did not produce any press outlet or leaflet. Be that as it may, it is not known whether this was due to lack of the ZRWM’s motivation or refusal by the state authorities. After a few years’ absence, representatives of the Orthodox Agudat Yisrael Party returned to the banks of the Vistula River. However, they did not succeed in establishing a permanent representation, mainly due to the opposition of Jewish Communists.

Information about the everyday activities of religious congregations and the ZRMW after 1956 is relatively scarce. Thus, the parity adopted between members of the TSKŻ and the ZRWM during the establishment of the Central Jewish Social Assistance Commission, which was set up in November 1957, is interesting.

Once Poland had opened more to the outside world, the activity of the State Jewish Theater and the Jewish Historical Institute became easier. It became possible to renew old ties and establish new ones with foreign partners.

Reactions of the Jewish Population to the 1956–1957 Events

The entire Jewish community was marked by the trauma of war-induced suffering and personal experiences of antisemitism. Thousands of survivors suffered from diseases caused by their experiences between 1939 and 1945. Wartime memories were still fresh when the demons of antisemitism re-emerged unexpectedly in 1956. Many Jews became more convinced than ever of the omnipresence of anti-Jewish sentiments in Polish society and became far from certain that the state institutions of the Polish People’s Republic could provide a real safety net for the Jewish population. They had

84 Ibid., no. 196, December 6, 1956.
85 An Agudat Yisrael delegation arrived in Warsaw in June 1957; see also the weekly supplement to Folks-Shtime, no. 5, December 20, 1957.
failed before on a couple of occasions. After all, the wave of post-war pogroms in the years 1945 and 1946, such as in Kraków in August 1945 and in Kielce in July 1946, which was much more tragic in terms of the number of victims, was not easy to forget.\textsuperscript{86}

From the end of May 1956, antisemitism became a widely debated topic in the Jewish community as a consequence of antisemitic incidents in several cities and the ensuing press reports.\textsuperscript{87} Jews felt increasingly threatened and besieged and wondered about the attitude of the leadership of the Polish United Workers’ Party and the government administration toward the rising tide of antisemitic sentiment in Polish society. Lack of reaction and public statements on this matter on the part of authoritative party and government leaders (in particular, the Central Committee’s first secretary) reinforced the view that the authorities felt powerless in combating or encouraging the antisemitic trend,\textsuperscript{88} both of which would place the Jews in a precarious situation. In Dzierżoniów, there was an attempt to blame Jews for the failure of the Six-Year Plan.\textsuperscript{89} Curiously, some of the Jews viewed unfavorably the easing up by the authorities on conditions for obtaining travel documents and permits to emigrate to Israel as part of the family reunification scheme. Throwing the borders wide open was thought to be an attempt on the part of the state authorities to get rid of the Jews.

In September, during board meetings of the TSKŻ branches (for example, in Dzierżoniów, on September 29, 1956) up to 80 or 90 percent of the organization’s members were thought to be considering emigration. During general meetings, also attended by those who were not institutionally affiliated with the association, activists would face demands to focus less on acting to limit antisemitic incidents and more on providing assistance for emigration.\textsuperscript{90}

Some 20 percent of the Jews living in Poland at the time, who had no

\textsuperscript{86} Michał Rudawski, \emph{Mój obcy kraj?} (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Tu, 1996), pp. 186–187; see also Berendt, \emph{Żydzi na Gdańskim}, p. 59.

\textsuperscript{87} Concerning the situation among the Jewish population, information prepared by the regional committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party in Wrocław for use by the Polish United Workers’ Party’s Central Committee, October 4, 1957, AAN, 237-XIV, vol. 149, p. 56, note no. 76; Machcewicz, \emph{Polski rok}, pp. 218–220, 226–227.

\textsuperscript{88} Minutes of a session of the TSKŻ board’s Presidium in Legnica, October 16, 1956, AZIH, TSKŻ, vol. 98.

\textsuperscript{89} Minutes of a session of the TSKŻ’s Propaganda, Literature and Press Commission in Dzierżoniów on October 26, 1956, ibid., vol. 89.

\textsuperscript{90} Minutes of a session of the TSKŻ board’s Presidium in Dzierżoniów, November 20, 1956, AZIH, TSKŻ; see also Berendt, \emph{Życie żydowskie}, p. 329, 332.
desire to remain in the Polish People's Republic for various reasons, applied for emigration papers\textsuperscript{91} from 1951 onward. However, there is the question of the motivation of those who had not previously applied for emigration permits but were now joining in the exodus.

As memoirs of Holocaust survivors indicate, many among them survived the German occupation and exile in the Soviet Union not just as a result of a fortunate accident, but because they often let intuition take over in assessing the situation, thereby making the right decisions faster than others. On several occasions, instincts would lead them to change their place of residence just before the lethal onslaught of genocidal killers or the Soviet internal security police. Later on, similar factors resulted in decisions to leave the country, abandon the achievements of many years of work, and start new lives in completely different conditions. Many were driven to emigrate from Poland by a sense of loneliness caused by the loss of most of their relatives during the years of the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{92} Consequently, they strove to join their few relatives who lived abroad. Representatives of circles that maintained close ties with Jewish institutions\textsuperscript{93} were leaving the country in great numbers. This was clearly evidenced, at times, by the departure of more than 90 percent of the pupils in schools where Yiddish was taught. The parents of these pupils did not see any chance of living a normal, secure life in Poland, and, at the same time, cultivating their Jewishness. In a great many cases, the decision to emigrate was influenced by growing disillusionment with Communism in the 1950s. Those affected by this sense of disappointment were the pre-war supporters of the Communist movement and representatives of the party generation that did not join the party until after 1944. Several people felt betrayed by comrades who, in

\textsuperscript{91} Statements of emigrants from Poland who arrived in Israel from 1951 to 1955, and interviews with foreign guests visiting Poland during that period, are interspersed with claims that, as far as they knew, most of the Jewish citizens of the Polish People's Republic wished to emigrate. Such views should be duly noted, but it should also be noted that people expressing such views had limited knowledge of the prevailing mood in the Jewish milieu; see also CZA, Z6, vol. 738 (1953). Outline of the situation of Jews in Stettin as presented by Kalman Rozenberg to Israeli diplomats in Warsaw, October 28, 1953; Nowiny Dnia, no. 29, March 29, 1953; Nowiny Izraelskie, no. 54, March 11, 1953; no. 7, January 1, 1954; and no. 48, April 8, 1955; The Jewish Chronicle, no. 4350, September 5, 1952; no. 4377, March 13, 1953; and no. 12, December 2, 1953.

\textsuperscript{92} Grabski, Sztuacja Żydów, p. 513

their view, had reneged on egalitarian Communist ideals with regard to equality of rights for national minorities. The version of socialism to which they had been exposed lost its value as a method of solving social and inter-ethnic problems.

As a result of this ideological crisis and the outbreak of antisemitism in 1956, more than 51,000 Jews and non-Jewish members of their families left Poland. Once abroad, the émigrés would refer to Polish antisemitism as the main cause of their emigration. Today, it is impossible to determine to what extent emigration was affected by additional factors, such as fulfillment of individual aspirations, reunification with relatives, and a dislike of the Communist system. There is no doubt, however, that such a massive emigration considerably weakened Poland’s Jewish community.

One of the people determined to stay in Poland wrote, in the lofty style saturated with the official propaganda of that time:

We who remain here, on our Polish soil, we want to work and create and to build socialism here — a likeable socialism. We know that there are those who deny us the right to call Poland our motherland. We shall remind them of that right. We know that all honest Poles are with us. This cheers us up and instills hope in us.

The year 1956 went down in history as the beginning of yet another significant exodus of Jews from Poland. It was an exodus that, formally, was not forced on the Jews, but no one from the government and the Communist party leadership was trying to dissuade Jews from leaving.

Those who remained, together with other Polish citizens, benefited from changes resulting from the political thaw. A whiff of freedom blew across the country, traces of which remained following the limitation of the freedom of speech in the autumn of the following year. Demonstrators protesting against the closure of the Po Prostu weekly — a channel for young

94 AAN, 237-XIV, vol. 149, p. 4, information of the Minister of Interior for the use of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, February 4, 1957; information on the deliberations of Jewish activists in the Łódź committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, May 9, 1957; June 15, 1957, ibid., p. 35.
96 The weekly supplement to Folks-Shtime, no. 5, July 20, 1957.
supporters of further democratic change in the country — were bludgeoned by the police and dispersed.

Ideological terror was not resumed, but it soon became obvious that the authorities allowed very little room for political and intellectual freedom. It was easier to keep in touch with relatives living in the West or who still lived beyond the eastern border. The decade of “small stabilization” resulted in a certain improvement of living standards. Ideological indoctrination eased up somewhat, including within Jewish organizations. Although it was still practiced in public institutions and in the mass media, the domestic space was no longer invaded by obnoxious agitators sent by various organizations, including the TSKŻ. Thanks to institutions dealing with the preservation of Jewish culture, people had access to more varied products, both with regard to form and content, as compared to the 1949–1955 Social Realist canon.

Until 1967, there was no longer fear of participation in Jewish social activity, especially among young people who did not remember the years of terror. Furthermore, young people and adults were not afraid to demonstrate their pro-Israeli leanings. Yet another shock and a further wave of emigration would follow the so-called “anti-Zionist” campaign, which was openly antisemitic, unleashed by the party and state authorities in 1967 and 1968.

97  Berendt, Emigracja ludności, pp. 50–59.
The “March ’68” Antisemitic Campaign: Onset, Development, and Consequences

FELIKS TYCH

Introduction

The term “March ’68” is used as a shorthand reference to the tempestuous political events in Poland from 1967–1968. Some consider the student protest demonstrations and the call for democratic reforms circulated by writers, academics, and other intellectuals to be the dominant components of “March ’68.” In reality, the political atmosphere at the time was dominated by the first, large-scale public antisemitic campaign in Poland’s post-war history. This campaign was instigated by the antisemitic lobby within the Communist Party (Polish United Workers’ Party, Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza — PZPR) leadership, which had been in power since 1944. It began on a large scale in June 1967, during the Six-Day War (June 5–10, 1967) between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The campaign was stepped up in March to April, 1968. The events in Poland were the most significant eruption of antisemitism in post-war Europe since the notorious anti-Jewish campaigns staged by Stalin in the USSR, especially between 1949 and 1953, which was known as the “Fight” against “cosmopolitans,” “Jewish nationalism,” or “Zionism,” or the “Kremlin Hospital Doctors’ Plot,” or was unnamed. Władysław Gomułka, the First Secretary of the ruling party and his close friends among the higher party echelons were the predominant players in the 1967–1968 antisemitic campaign in Poland. Gen. Mieczysław Moczar, Head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ministerstwo Spraw

1 The author of this article was a witness to this campaign and a number of statements are based on his own experience.

Wewnętrznych — MSW), the most important figure in the Security Service (Secret Police), which was an essential part of the MSW, was an important instigator of the campaign and the de facto chief strategist. By this time, the MSW had already been “purged” of Jews, mainly on the initiative of Moczar and his praetorians. As early as the second half of the 1950’s, the removal of Jews began from certain positions within the PZPR and the MSW, partly in response to pressure from Moscow.

Although post-war Poland was under the USSR’s military and political aegis, the Polish Communists found out that taking power was no easy task. The attitude of most of the Poles toward the Communists was hostility, or, at best, reserve, which meant that the ruling party initially suffered from a lack of loyal personnel in both party and government posts. One reason for this dearth of cadres was the execution of the cream of Poland’s pre-war Communists, on Stalin’s orders. Between 1931 and 1938, they were lured to Moscow, the headquarters of the Communist International (Comintern), on various pretexts. Stalin did not trust the pre-war Communist Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Polski — KPP) because some of its leaders attempted to engage in polemics with him several times at the Comintern. Some openly accused Stalin of eradicating the opposition and democracy within the Soviet Union’s Communist Party and the Comintern.³ Also, hundreds of Polish Communists, including many Jews, were killed by the Germans in occupied Poland. A few thousand Polish Communists — some of them Jews — survived the Second World War, most of them in the USSR. Between September and December 1939, they fled from the part of Poland occupied by the Germans to that occupied by the Soviets.⁴ Between summer 1944 and summer 1946, their return to Poland helped the Communists create a nationwide party and government infrastructure. Even though they were born in Poland and still Polish citizens, and few in number, the majority of Polish society perceived them as undesirable aliens. The irrational conviction, “Poland is run by Jews,” became widespread. The first “purge” of Jews from the highest PZPR echelons took place in 1956. Pressure from Moscow and the antisemitic lobby within the PZPR Central Committee


⁴ On September 17, 1939, the Soviet Army invaded the eastern part of Poland (half of the country’s pre-war territory), which was incorporated into the Soviet Union. The German army invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.
led to the removal from the PZPR leadership of Jakub Berman and Hilary Minc, two senior party figures who were pre-war Communist activists and, since 1944, had been members of the Central Committee’s Politburo, the highest-level body in the party apparatus. During the internal debates preceding this action, some Politburo members openly resorted to antisemitic arguments. At the Politburo meeting on May 2, 1956, Aleksander Zawadzki, one of the Kremlin’s trusted men in Poland, said: “I have looked at the profile of Comrade Berman, who is a Jewish intellectual from a bourgeois family, and did not grow up in a revolutionary environment. Taken together, all this produces a very murky picture.” Antisemitism was also behind Roman Zambrowski’s removal, in July 1963. Until then, he had been a member of the PZPR Central Committee and Politburo. Berman, Minc, and Zambrowski were assimilated Jews, but they did not hide their Jewish roots. They were expelled for two reasons: 1) In order to make the PZPR an ethnically pure Polish structure; and 2) As scapegoats for the PZPR’s dark Stalinist period. The antisemites in the party wanted to divert society’s attention from their own involvement in Stalinist policies. Paradoxically, the “thaw” following Stalin’s death in March 1953 led to a wave of antisemitism within the PZPR. This overt emergence of anti-Jewish attitudes initially failed to elicit any reaction from the PZPR authorities and government. Eventually, a dramatic appeal to the PZPR leaders was issued in December 1956 by the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów — TSKŻ), which, in 1950, became the sole official secular organization representing Polish Jews. Personal interventions by Hersh Smolar, the TSKŻ Chairman, broke through the government’s passivity in the face of the growing number of antisemitic incidents. As a result, on February 6, 1957, Józef Cyrankiewicz, Prime Minister and Politburo member, made a statement in parliament about the need to respect the constitutional equality of all citizens. He called for fighting against “all attempts at discrimination and violation of applicable laws in connection with the Jewish population.” This was followed by reopening the gates for Jewish emigration, which had been closed since 1950. The question remains as to whether the 1956–1960 Jewish emigration wave, known in Israel as the Gomułka Aliyah, could be attributed to the Polish authorities’

5 Protokół nr 91 posiedzenia Biura Politycznego KC 2V 1956 (Minutes no. 91 of the Politburo meeting, May 5, 1956), AAN, Warsaw, KC PZPR, no. 1673, p. 10.
6 Cyrankiewicz’s speech quoted in the daily Trybuna Ludu, the official organ of PZPR, February 27, 1957, no. 57, pp. 3–5.
humanitarian treatment of Jews, who felt insecure in Poland at that time, or was merely a convenient opportunity to get rid of about 42,000 Jews, 30,000 of them in 1957 alone. Overall, this represented the majority of Poland’s remaining Jewish population. For some PZPR leaders, opening the gates for Jewish emigration was also a way of flirting with Polish nationalists — a signal that the PZPR wanted to get rid of Jews. For the decision makers, it was a humanitarian gesture while, for others, it was a type of ethnic cleansing. The Jews were still considered unwelcome among large segments of the Polish population.

Between 1954 and 1968, the PZPR was not only preoccupied with the “Jewish question,” but also how to quell the spate of reformist rebellions within party ranks, the first of which took place two to three years after Stalin died in 1953, was another headache for the party leaders. In the months leading up to the March 1968 events, they witnessed the rise of the reform movement within the Communist Party in neighboring Czechoslovakia. The “Prague Spring” came as a great shock to the PZPR authorities. Gomułka feared that he might share the fate of Antonin Novotny, his Czechoslovak counterpart, who was removed from his post as party leader by the Prague reformers, in January 1968.

Moreover, after two years of extremely poor harvests, signs of economic crisis were increasing, food prices were on the rise, and the authorities were facing the prospect of mass workers’ protests. In this situation, an anti-Jewish campaign was not only a maneuver to divert the population’s attention from these threats to the establishment, but also an attempt to create a new Communist Party image that would be more palatable to many ethnic Poles. Indeed, most Poles were less irritated by the Communist system than by the equal treatment accorded to Jews in terms of access to party and government positions. Why was there antisemitism when the Jews made up only one percent of Poland’s entire population? It was nourished by several complementary sources: 1) The legacy of the antisemitic surge in Poland during the 1930s; 2) Witnessing the genocide of Polish Jews by the German occupiers and their antisemitic propaganda; and 3) The resulting material benefits that accrued to a segment of Polish society.

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More about the Roots of the 1967–1968 Antisemitic Campaign

Over 23 years after the fall of the Communist regime, a growing number of young Poles are asking why the PZPR resorted to antisemitism after the country had lost almost 90 percent of the Jewish population in the Holocaust. The most succinct answer is the bitter observation by Maria Janion, an eminent Polish thinker and scholar, that the vast majority of Poles did not mourn the Jews who were killed. Her research showed that one has to go further back than the twentieth century to understand the sources of Polish antisemitism, which became a high-priority issue in the National Democrats’ (Endecja) program, one of the main Polish political groups with late nineteenth-century roots. Under various names and currents, antisemitism remained a theme in Polish history, and continues to shape the country’s political and moral tone. Antisemitism also became a feature of the sermons in the Catholic churches and the local diocesan press. In the March 1968 campaign, millions of people who had witnessed or propagated antisemitism in pre-war Poland were still alive. In the 1930s, influential antisemitic organizations called for a “Poland without Jews.” Posters with slogans, such as “Jews to the ghetto,” or “Poland without Jews,” were common in street demonstrations. Bills were introduced in parliament by antisemitic political parties calling for Jews to be summarily stripped of their Polish citizenship and forced to emigrate. At the same time, segregation of Jewish and non-Jewish students in university lecture halls was enforced, and quotas for Jewish candidates in higher education were imposed. Jews were refused employment in government bodies and the judicial system. They were not allowed to serve as professional officers in the Polish Army, and rarely proposed as candidates for university chairs. A long list of professions were closed to Jews. Since all this took place before the German occupation of Poland, it further intensified anti-Jewish attitudes among an important part of the Polish population during the Holocaust. Poland’s main pre-war political parties — the National Democrats (Obóz Narodowy), the ruling “Sanation” camp (after Pilsudski’s death in 1935), and the underground Polish state during the 1939

8 See Maria Janion, Do Europy tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2000).
to 1945 German occupation — treated the Jews differently from other Polish citizens. The following excerpt from the secret dispatch sent by Gen. Stefan Rowecki, Commander-in-Chief of the main Polish underground army in occupied Poland, to Gen. Władysław Sikorski, Prime Minister of the Polish government-in-exile in London and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish armed forces, on September 25, 1941, reflects the attitudes of most Poles during the German occupation: “Please take it as an established fact that the overwhelming majority of the population is antisemitic.”

The anti-Jewish currents in Polish society were deepened when Hitler’s Germany embarked on the Final Solution of the Jewish Question, i.e., the extermination of Europe’s entire Jewish population. The situation of the Jews grew increasingly desperate. The Polish writer Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, who was active in the Polish underground movement and was a key figure in organizing the underground “Żegota” Jewish Aid Council, addressed this new situation and its catastrophic impact on Polish society’s morale. After the Germans launched the “Aktion Reinhard” (a cryptonym for the SS operation aimed at annihilating all Jews in the part of occupied Poland the Germans called the General Government, Kossak-Szczucka described the situation in an article published in the Polish underground press in May 1942: “The degeneration and barbarity brought upon us by the slaughter of the Jews is becoming a burning issue. For not only were the ‘Shaullists’ [volunteer policemen recruited by the SS in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia to annihilate the Jews in occupied Poland and in their own countries — F.T.], Volksdeutsche, and Ukrainians used to carrying out these monstrous executions, but local people volunteered to take part in the massacres in many places (Kolno, Stawiski, Łagodne, Szumów, and Dęblin). We have to act against such a disgrace using all the available methods.... As yet, no one has addressed this matter. The [underground] press passes over this evil in embarrassing silence, while this crime spreads like an epidemic, escalating into an addiction.” She returned to this issue in a pamphlet published by the Polish underground, in October 1942, pointing out that the impunity of

those committing these crimes was causing “increasing instances of active cooperation by peasants in the German extermination campaign.... This is a very dangerous precedent.”

Her fears proved prophetic. Some Poles, individually or in organized groups, continued the Germans’ unfinished extermination of the Jews in the immediate post-war years (1944–1947). Such killings claimed the lives of hundreds of Jewish survivors. Historians estimate that the number of victims ranges from around 700 to 3,000. The actual figure would seem closer to around 2,000.

In 1946, the eminent Polish sociologist Stanisław Ossowski drew attention to the change in Polish society’s moral condition as a result of the “gigantic experiments on people and human collectives” to which the Poles had been subjected during the war years (1939–1945). He directed attention to the emergence of “more or less numerous elements inured to blood and murder” in Polish society, as a result of the war, and “insensibility to crime,” which was, “to a considerable degree, the result of war-time training. Murder of Jews had ceased to be out of the ordinary.” The moral degeneration in various sectors of Polish society during the German occupation and the Holocaust was clearly reflected in the wave of bloody pogroms in Poland immediately after the war. The largely hostile reception accorded by Polish communities to the few surviving Polish Jews was particularly tangible when Jews attempted to recover their homes or possessions they had left with their Polish neighbors for safekeeping.

Assuming that Poles over the age of 13 could remember such incidents and the hostile attitude toward Jews, an estimated 50 percent of Poland’s population of 32 million in 1968, must have been conscious witnesses to the events between 1930 and 1947 and would have harbored antisemitic resentment. In light of the findings of Polish sociologists, the generation of

Poles who reached maturity during and directly after the war, born between 1924 and 1928 or 1929 and 1940, “demonstrate the greatest antipathy toward Jews.” In 1977, a decade after the March 1968 events, as many as 41 percent of Poles still declared antipathy toward Jews.\textsuperscript{15}

The effects of this mental legacy were intensified by the extension of equal civic rights to the Jews by the Communist authorities in 1944. As mentioned above, for the first time in Polish history, Jews were given access to positions in the state administration, the army, the judicial and national education systems, including the universities, and other positions open to Polish citizens with the proper qualifications. This new status of Polish Jews was greeted with hostility by most Poles, but it was the taboo placed on subjects such as the Holocaust and antisemitism that gradually led to the eruption of antisemitism in the mid-1950s and in 1967–1968. Antisemitism was taboo even in the political schools for Communist Party activists. Some decision makers remained idle in the naïve hope that the new social system would have a therapeutic effect on the antisemites. The ban placed by government censorship on the publication of antisemitic texts was ineffective.

Even during the German occupation, there were several antisemites among the Communist Party members. However, since they were not the dominant force in the party between 1944 and 1956, they did not make their views public until 1967/1968. Grzegorz Korczyński, commander of the PPR-aligned People’s Army (Armia Ludowa — AL) resistance detachment in the Lublin region, had a group of Jewish partisans executed because they represented a “hindrance” to him in forging good relations with the local peasants. After the war, he was sentenced to life imprisonment for these murders, but he was informally amnestied by Gomułka and Moczar’s intervention, at the end of April 1956. He became a member of the PZPR’s Central Committee in 1959, and rose to be Deputy National Defense Minister, with the rank of Major-General in 1965.\textsuperscript{16}

In the summer of 1944, another AL detachment, operating under the name “Świt” (Dawn) in the Kielce region, executed a group of Jews who had escaped from a German labor camp in Skarżysko and asked to join the partisans. Immediately after the war, at least two officers and Communist Party activists were involved in allowing the Kielce Pogrom of July 1946 to take place:


Kazimierz Gwiazdowicz, the local Deputy-Commander of the Citizens’ Militia (police) in Kielce, and Władysław Sobczyński-Spychaj, Head of the local security office. They were tried by a party court for “negligence,” but reinstated to their positions in the party and political police shortly afterward.17

The League for Fighting against Antisemitism, established in 1946, was the only civic initiative aimed at countering antisemitism in post-war Poland. The initiative came from a group that had been active during the German occupation in “Żegota,” the Polish and Jewish secret underground organization for rescuing Jews. This group of Polish academics and PPS18 activists included Władysław Bartoszewski, Adolf Berman, and Irena Sendler. In February 1946, the League was officially registered, and launched an irregularly published periodical Prawa Człowieka (Human Rights), starting in September 1946, as well as several pamphlets and leaflets. The league’s activities and publication of the periodical came to an end in 1951, most probably due to pressure from the media department in the party’s Central Committee.19

There were also covert acts of resistance against antisemitism: Bolesław Bierut, the first President of Communist Poland, and Head of the PZPR, from September 1948 until his mysterious death in Moscow in March 1956, bravely declined to obey Stalin’s persistent suggestions to stage a show trial of some Jewish Politburo members. Stalin wanted a trial modeled on those of László Rajk in Hungary (1949) and Rudolf Slánský in Czechoslovakia (1952). Rajk and Slánský, “who were leading Jewish members of their country’s Communist parties, were sentenced to death. Both trials included other defendants who were also Jews.

In the late 1940s, early 1950s, and in 1967, the Soviet press, in general, and the leading satirical magazine, Krokodil, in particular, published Nazi-like, Stürmer-style, antisemitic cartoons, which were then reprinted by the press in other Communist countries, but only rarely in Poland, until 1967–1968.20

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17 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “An AL Unit and Its Attitude Toward Jews: The Trial of Tadeusz Maj,” Yad Vashem Studies, vol. 40, no. 1 (2012), pp. 75–118. I would like to thank the author for the opportunity to quote from this manuscript before its publication.
18 PPS (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna), a social-democratic party, dating from 1892. In December 1948, under pressure from Stalin and the PPR (Polska Partia Robotnicza), the PPS merged with the PPR to form the PZPR (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza).
20 See Agnieszka Skalska, Obraz wroga w antysemickich rysunkach prasowych Marca 68 (Warsaw: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2007).
The Setting for the Antisemitic Campaign

The Israeli army’s victory in the Six-Day War (June 5–10, 1967) against the armies of neighboring Arab countries, who were preparing to attack the Jewish state, provided the immediate pretext for unleashing a public antisemitic campaign in Poland. In a show of ideological correctness, the hunt for Jews was disguised by the PZPR leadership as an anti-Zionist, as opposed to an antisemitic, campaign. When Moscow called on Eastern Bloc countries to sever diplomatic relations with Israel, after the outbreak of the Six-Day War, the Polish government immediately obeyed. Romania, the only Soviet Bloc country that refused to conform, did not face sanctions as a result.21 A considerable portion of Polish society, apart from the Jews, was pleased at Israel’s victory — simply because it was a victory over countries supported by the Soviet Union.

Moczar bombarded Gomułka with reports about celebrations organized in various institutions by Jews and their Polish friends after Israel’s victory over the Arab armies. They were not all consistent with the truth, but they achieved their aim. Those named in the reports lost their jobs immediately. The antisemitic lobbies in the PZPR central and the Warsaw PZPR committees, which were in close contact with Moczar’s entourage, had evidently decided this was a good time to deal a blow to the Jews.

Not everyone in the PZPR leadership approved of the antisemitic campaign. Politburo members Edward Ochab, Adam Rapacki, Stefan Jędrychowski, and Eugeniusz Szyr (the only remaining Jew) opposed the campaign. Even Gomułka, who was torn internally between the pre-war Communist Party’s anti-racist demands and antisemitism legalized by Stalin after the war, made sporadic attempts to rein in the most zealous of the March 1968 excesses. Yet, he also played a major role in unleashing the antisemitic campaign with his emotive speech of June 9, 1967, delivered at the Trade Unions Congress, held in Warsaw’s most prestigious and largest conference venue, the congress hall of the Palace of Culture and Science. In his speech, he condemned the Jews for taking pleasure in the Israeli army’s victory and referred to them as a “fifth column,” i.e., traitors. This speech was broadcast live on the radio and reprinted the next day in virtually every Polish daily. It became the first signal for launching an overt public smear campaign against the Jews. Ochab prevailed over Gomulka and

the reference to the “fifth column” was removed from the latter’s speech in the press version. In July 1968, the Politburo accepted Ochab’s resignation from that body, which was followed by that of Adam Rapacki, another non-Jewish Politburo member, in November 1968. Like Ochab, Rapacki was disgusted by the antisemitic campaign.

The large-scale removal of Jews from government posts began with the political police, which was part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of National Defense (Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej — MON), where it was almost completed by the end of 1967. After the fall of the Communist regime, scholars established that between 250 and 300 senior Jewish officers were dismissed from the Polish Army during the March campaign.

The first large March 1968 demonstration was organized by university students in the courtyard of the University of Warsaw (Uniwersytet Warszawski — UW) on March 8, 1968. The students were protesting against the expulsion of Adam Michnik and Seweryn Blumsztajn, two UW student dissidents active in the democratic movement. Of the several hundred students who gathered in the courtyard, a considerable number came from Jewish homes. In the first few hours of the gathering, the PZPR branch at UW received a telephone call from the Warsaw PZPR committee. The message was simple: The students should not be prevented from gathering since “this boil finally has to be allowed to burst.”

The Secret Police clearly wanted a demonstration by the opposition, including young people from Jewish families, in order to launch a broader repression campaign with antisemitic overtones. The names of students whose parents worked in party or government bodies were immediately communicated to the media, and the parents lost their jobs. An hour into the demonstration, several hundred policemen, some in civilian clothes, others in uniform, appeared in the university courtyard and brutally broke it up with batons, sparking a wave of student protests across Poland.

On March 19, 11 days after the UW student rally, at the request of the

24 This information was given to the author by fellow historian Professor Andrzej Jezier-­ski on the day that the students organized the gathering in the courtyard of the University of Warsaw, on March 8, 1968. Professor Jezierki received the above mentioned phone call from the Warsaw PZPR committee.
PZPR Warsaw committee, Gomułka met with “activists” from the Warsaw PZPR bodies. This meeting, again at the Congress Hall of the Palace of Culture and Science, took place under the slogan “The party’s position affirms the nation’s will.” Gomułka’s speech was sprinkled with “anti-Zionist” insinuations. The audience did not like Gomułka’s division of Jews into Zionists and other Jews. For most of the audience, every Jew was an enemy. The 3,000 or so Warsaw party activists in the Congress Hall reacted to Gomułka’s anti-Jewish allusions with hysterical support for the anti-Jewish purge. At one point, the auditorium began chanting “Gierek, Gierek!” He was the PZPR secretary of the voivodeship committee in Upper Silesia, and replaced Gomułka at the PZPR’s helm two years later. There were also cries of “Moczar, Moczar!” These were both signals to Gomułka that if he did not ruthlessly pursue the anti-Semitic campaign, he would be replaced as PZPR leader. The event was stage-managed by Józef Kępa, Moczar’s friend, who was the leader of the Warsaw PZPR, and a major figure in the March 1968 events. The meeting clearly indicated that Gomułka was a hostage to the more radical PZPR wing.

In an interview during the first few weeks of the March campaign, Moczar expressed the view that the Jews in the party leadership were “attempting to dilute the memory of our national traditions.” He called on “all veterans who fought and suffered for our fatherland” to “stand in a united front against the slanderers [referring to the Jews — F.T.] who are conducting an increasingly active anti-Polish campaign.”

During the offensive against the Jews, another topic was activated by the PZPR’s Central Committee. Many Jewish PZPR members were blamed for being “revisionists” because they called for more democracy and justice in the political system. Andrzej Werblan, an influential member of the PZPR Central Committee, announced that “revisionism has grown, not alongside the party, but within the party itself,” and was the result of “a certain constellation of the cadres,” namely “the large group of people of Jewish lineage.”

The “anti-Zionist” meetings of factory workers and party organizations held across the country, and much trumpeted in the media in March and April 1968, were not always merely stage-managed productions based on scenarios prepared by local PZPR committee or Security Service (Służba Bezpieczeństwa — SB) agents. Sometimes, they created the illusion of free-

25 “Wywiad z Prezesem ZBOWiD Moczarem” (Interview with ZBOWiD Chairman Moczar), Trybuna Ludu, no. 203, April 13–15, 1968, p. 2.

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THE "MARCH '68" ANTISEMITIC CAMPAIGN

dom of expression. However, criticism of the "top brass" was only permitted when the targets were Jewish.

"Shedding" the Jews, which gave some people the illusion of democracy, produced a record increase in party membership in 1968: 34.5 percent more candidates applied for PZPR membership than in the previous year. In 1967, 158,507 people joined the PZPR, compared to 213,098 in 1968.27 In 1968, the party numbered 2,104,331 members, and as many as 2,203,553 by 1969.28 An atmosphere of Jew-baiting prevailed. Those who had managed to survive the Holocaust and the difficult war years in the USSR began thinking of emigration. Even Jews born after the war had such thoughts. The Jews were expressly told they would be allowed to leave Poland, but with no right of return. The 13,000 "March '68" émigrés were not issued with passports, but with travel documents authorizing them to make a one-way journey. Formally, they were only allowed to go to Israel, but the majority chose to go to Denmark, Sweden, and other countries. Only 3,478 went to Israel.29

The "March '68" émigrés previously resisted all other waves of Jewish emigration from Poland. However, between 1945 and the early 1960s, some 220,000 out of the 250,000 or so Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust and then returned to Poland, left the country for good. Many of those who decided to emigrate as a result of the "March '68" events were former PZPR members. In June 1967, there were around 32,200 Jews living in Poland who maintained contact with Jewish organizations.30 The antisemitic campaign affected active members of the democratic opposition, as well as those who were — or were thought to be — Jews. The Secret Police decided who was or was not a Jew, conducting large-scale investigations.

Antisemitism broke out in both the large and smaller towns. Anti-Jewish hysteria held sway in the Polish Army. The mediocre hack end of the journalistic profession was another bastion of antisemitism. For journalists of this ilk, these were times of rich pickings. There was also the category of "writers," who were careerists from outside journalistic circles. Such denunciatory articles were richly rewarded, not only in terms of authors’ fees, but also with secure jobs. The daily Trybuna Ludu, the chief party mouthpiece,

27 PZPR w 1968 r. Dane statystyczne. Do użytku wewnątrzpartyjnego (Warsaw: PZPR, Central Committee, Organizational Department, 1969), p. xi, xii.
30 Ibid., p. 138.
was particularly well known for publishing articles of this sort, each naming a specific Jew destined for “the axe.”

Dismissals usually took place by notification from above — the central or local PZPR or Secret Police authorities. Many Jews lost their jobs due to the zeal of party activists or antisemites in various workplaces. At the universities, promotion was the standard reward for “hunters” who “stalked” Jews. Similar procedures prevailed in publishing houses and many other institutions. Many Holocaust survivors and their children decided to leave the country even though they saw Poland as their homeland and nurtured deep bonds with Polish culture. Some were forced out of Poland by loss of their jobs and lack of hope in finding other work. For yet others, the radical change in the previous paradigms of running “their” party served as the ultimate impulse to emigrate. This pogrom-like atmosphere was also the root cause of some suicides. Dismissing Jews from their jobs, and hence robbing them of their livelihood, was a well-aimed blow at individuals and entire families. It was highly effective, since the government or the party were involved in virtually all areas of the economy, administration, education system, cultural institutions, and the media. Anyone thrown out of one factory or institution had no chance of finding work in similar places. Some adults were sacked for their children’s participation in the students’ protests.

The Aftermath of the March 1968 Campaign

By promoting the “March ’68” exodus, Poland lost scores of preeminent scholars, writers, journalists, able civil servants, publishers, and those active in various branches of the arts. Their positions were rapidly given to careerists who stood to gain from the March 1968 events. In many cases, ethnic Poles opposed to antisemitism were dismissed from their jobs, like the Jews. At several universities, many Jewish lecturers were dismissed and students expelled either following orders from PZPR headquarters or as a result of decisions taken within the academic institutions themselves. The universities of Łódź and Wrocław, the teacher training institute in Opole,

and some departments of the University of Warsaw were notorious for their brutality in these purges. In contrast, the Jagiellonian University in Kraków did not dismiss a single Jewish professor or lecturer, while the Catholic University of Lublin accepted students expelled from other universities.

Pressure, not only from the institutions and the general atmosphere in the country, but also from the surrounding non-Jewish community, played a considerable role in decisions of Jewish or mixed Polish-Jewish individuals and families to emigrate. It was not uncommon for Polish neighbors to pester Jews with questions, such as when they would be vacating their homes and garages, or to daub antisemitic slogans on their doors. The last straw for some Jews came when non-Jewish children taunted their children at school. In many cases, these Jewish children only learned about their roots from their schoolmates, since their parents had kept this from them to spare them the stigma of “otherness.” Things were different for the children from families who confined themselves to the Jewish community, whose background was a given, even though they often came up against antisemitism. This is how one Jewish student, seeing a friend off at a Warsaw railroad station, described his feelings about his own forthcoming emigration: “You could feel this atmosphere of repeated farewells, because everyone was saying goodbye to everyone else. Then, suddenly, it was as though I saw the light. My whole Jewish world was leaving! Some part of my life was coming to a close. My Poland was coming to an end.... We — myself and my whole Jewish world — were leaving Poland.” Those without a Jewish world in Poland suffered even greater trauma. As one young man, who emigrated to Sweden when he began to consider what being a Polish Jew meant, put it: “I gradually came to the conclusion that the problem was often that the Jews had become too involved in Poland. As if they were trying to be better Poles than the Poles themselves. As if they experienced their Polishness in a more intense form. A sense of resentment began growing inside me, and I did not really know who it was directed against: the Poles; Poland; the Jews because of their emotional bond with Poland; or at myself, for all those...years when, although I was a Jew, I felt Polish.” Older people also experienced terrible trauma after devoting their best years to raising their country from the ruins of war. One young man wrote about his parents who had imbued him with a sense of Polishness: “I think the stories my mother told me about Polish antisemitism when she was here in America was her way of working through it. Just like the stories of other late émigrés from Poland. What else could people feel who started to consider themselves Poles in Poland after the nightmare of the Holocaust; and when the Poles spat in their faces and
called them outsiders after many years? As they gradually came to realize, the antisemitic atmosphere of March 1968 had been there before, though less intensively, but they did not want to see it."

Leo Leszek Kantor, a “March ’68” émigré who settled in Sweden, wrote: “March ’68’ was not only about Krakowskie Przedmieście.... It was not only about Władysław Gomułka and his speech. It was about the hundreds of thousands who joined the party as a result of ‘the PZPR’s most successful propaganda campaign ever.’ It was about the dismissal of doctors, engineers, bookkeepers, and teachers from their jobs all over Poland. It was also about the plunder of property, the confiscation of everything that could [possibly] be taken at the border, including diplomas and unfinished doctoral theses.... Ultimately, March 1968 was about the 20-year ban on returning to Poland that [later] affected children desperate to visit their dying parents.... It was also about the suicides of Aleksander Ford and the promising math student Orlański.”

Not all PZPR members supported the antisemitic campaign, and even at the very top of the PZPR there were some individuals who opposed it. This was abundantly clear from the Politburo meeting on April 8, 1968. As mentioned above, Edward Ochab, former First Secretary of the PZPR Central Committee and incumbent Chairman of the Council of State, who resigned from his lofty position as a mark of protest against the “antisemitic circus” sponsored by the state and party apparatus, was among those openly opposed to the March campaign. In his letter to Gomułka, he wrote: “I protest against the antisemitic campaign organized by various reactionary elements, yesterday’s Falanga, and their present high-ranking protectors.”

Ochab undoubtedly counted certain Politburo members and other ranking party apparatchiks, as well as Moczar himself, among these “high-ranking protectors.” Deputy Prime Minister Stefan Jędrychowski, another Politburo member, explicitly wrote about the similarities between the March events and German Nazism: “Before long, we will have to produce our birth certificates and dig up our grandfathers and grandmothers to prove that

32 All three quotes come from Joanna Wiszniewicz’s book of interviews, Życie przecięte: Opowieści pokolenia Marcia (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2008), p. 389, 427, and 542, respectively.
34 Falanga was a fascist, antisemitic organization, active in Poland from 1934 to 1939.
we are not Jews.” Gomułka accused him of one-sidedness and defended the party’s policy, praised the media, which, with very few exceptions (the weekly Polityka and the Catholic weekly Tygodnik Powszechny, among them), supported the antisemitic campaign.36 At the Politburo meeting on April 8, 1968, it was decided that the government would draw up appropriate official procedures “regarding the departure from Poland of citizens of Jewish descent who express their wish to emigrate.”37

Foreign Affairs Minister Adam Rapacki, an ethnic Pole and former PPS member, remained faithful to his moral code. On receiving a list to sign, enumerating Jews and others who had not supported the antisemitic campaign destined for dismissal from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych — MSZ), he added his own name to the list, demonstratively walking out of his office for good. In May 1968, the Committee for MSZ Personnel Affairs appointed Zenon Kliszko, Central Committee Secretary and Gomułka’s closest collaborator, to compile this list.38 In November 1968, Jerzy Albrecht, Finance Minister, former Secretary of the PZPR Central Committee, and a leading PPR (Polish Workers’ Party, Polska Partia Robotnicza) underground activist during the war, also tendered his resignation as a sign of protest.

In the second half of the 1980s, during Mikhail Gorbachev’s perestroika and glasnost, Wojciech Jaruzelski, then Head of the PZPR Central Committee, came to the conclusion that a critical review of the March events was necessary. In 1967 and 1968, General Jaruzelski, first as Deputy-Minister of National Defense, then as Chief-of-Staff of the Polish Army, and as Minister of National Defense, from April 1968 to November 1983, acted unfairly toward his Jewish subordinate officers in the Polish Army. They were men with fine wartime military records and many of them had been Jaruzelski’s comrades-in-arms at the front during the Second World War. Allowing himself to be swept up in the wave of events, he “purged” the Polish Army of Jewish officers. In 1988, on the twentieth anniversary of the March 1968 events, he ordered the party press to undertake a review of this disgraceful campaign. He commissioned at least three articles critical of the March 1968 events for the central PZPR press. All were pared down to such a degree by Jaruzelski’s entourage that it was difficult to discern the criticism the party leader expected. Those who had so drastically modulated the original

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
articles before they went to print convinced Jaruzelski that they had to be toned down because “the comrades would have been offended by the proposed texts.”39 Eventually, not even the head of the party in power was in a position to deprecate the March campaign at that point, because he was still surrounded by people who had actively participated in those events and either had no regrets about this or did not wish to be stigmatized for the part they played.

Long-Term Consequences of the “March ’68” Campaign

The three successive PZPR leaderships between 1968 and 1989 did not make any attempt to distance themselves publicly from the March events. The historical dimension of the Jew hunt in Poland from 1967 to 1968 is defined, above all, by its irreversible consequences — a significant portion of the few Jews still remaining in Poland emigrated. The March 1968 events caused a palpable decline in the Jewish presence in Poland and the impoverishment of Jewish life in all respects: culture, education, academe, and art. In 1967, the Polish branch of ORT was closed down, and the Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny — ŻIH) was reduced to a state of semi-hibernation. The architects of the March 1968 events seriously considered closing down the ŻIH altogether, thus prompting the emigration of the institute’s outstanding team of historians specializing in Holocaust studies. These scholars moved to research institutions in Israel and France, and the ŻIH did not begin to recover from this blow until the early 1990s, after the political transformation in Poland, but even this did not occur immediately.

The March 1968 events were not merely an isolated and transient episode, as reflected in the 20-year-long entrenchment of the “March activists” in Poland’s power structures and in the de facto legality of antisemitism in Poland to this day. In 1980, the Grunwald Patriotic Union, an antisemitic organization, was founded by people from Moczar’s circles, who were the ideological heirs to the pre-war antisemitic political organizations. Many professional army officers feeling nostalgic about the March 1968 events

39 The author obtained this information in March 1988 from Professor Zenobiusz Kozik, a historian who was invited to prepare the articles commissioned by Wojciech Jaruzelski for the twentieth anniversary of the “March ’68” events. His text was considerably altered by the editors.
became Grunwald members, including some “national Communists” from Moczar’s school. This organization and its newspaper, Rzeczywistość, were only disbanded after the fall of the Communist regime in Poland in December 1989. The extent to which the “March boys” succeeded in entrenching themselves is reflected in the career of General Władysław Ciastoń, who was Head of the Security Service, and retained the rank of under secretary of State, until as late as March 1990, i.e., the end of the transitional dual power setup following the 1989 bloodless democratic revolution in Poland. Ciastoń “oversaw” the progress of the March 1968 campaign in Łódź, Poland’s second largest city. He ordered the use of a Nazi antisemitic flyer in the 1968 campaign, which he had especially translated from German into Polish, without any indication that the original text was authored by German Nazis. Stanisław Januszewski, an old comrade of Gomułka’s from the days of the German occupation, was outraged, and as Editor-in-Chief of the daily Dziennik Łódzki, informed Gomułka of this. Gomułka reacted immediately to this information and ordered party sanctions to be imposed on Ciastoń, who was reprimanded by the party and temporarily removed from his department in the Secret Police. His comrades from the Secret Police took care of his subsequent career.40

Hanna Świda-Ziembę, Professor of Sociology at the University of Warsaw, offered the following comment on the consequences of Jewish emigration from Poland after 1968: “Polish Jews contributed...attributes characteristic of traditional Jewish culture — a certain reserve combined with a refined intelligence, a curiosity about the world, broad-mindedness, and multi-dimensionality. Blended with our romantic traits, this always benefited Poland.... As it is, Polish society has undergone an amputation.”41 Due to its disastrous effect on Poland’s image abroad, an order from the top ended the open antisemitic campaign in the media on June 24, 1968.

The aftershocks of the March activists’ entrenchment in the power structures dogged the country for a long time, even though Moczar himself was “promoted” from the top MSW job in July 1968. He was appointed Secretary of the PZPR Central Committee and member of the Council of State. His dream of becoming first secretary was not fulfilled. The primary aim of the “March ’68” discourse — removing Jews from involvement in governing

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40 The author obtained this information from Stanisław Januszewski in July 1968.
the country and the Polish political class — was realized. In October 1997, Father Henryk Jankowski, parish priest of St. Bridget's Church in Gdańsk, who was known for his vehement anti-Jewish declarations and activities, announced that “the Jewish minority in the Polish government cannot be tolerated, because the nation fears it.”

In the aftereffects of the March campaign, for several decades, discussion of the Holocaust in Poland was dominated by unfounded views, spread by the “March press.” The Jews, they claimed, did nothing to save themselves from the Germans, and failed to express any gratitude to the Poles for their part in saving them, often at the cost of their own lives.

March 1968 has been the subject of many monographs, source publications, press articles, memoirs, and reflections by participants, victims, and witnesses to the events. Some home in on the events themselves, while others explore their historical context.

Some see the sources of post-war antisemitism in the demoralization of a considerable part of Polish society during the German occupation, especially since the Holocaust took place before the Poles’ very eyes. The author of this article often heard statements such as, “the Jews don’t deserve anything better” in occupied Poland. Prejudice and superstition concerning Jews are still fairly frequent phenomena in Poland. For example, it is often believed that the Jews allegedly collaborated *en masse* with the Soviet occupying forces after the Red Army’s invasion of the eastern half of pre-war Poland in September 1939; they established Communism in Poland after the Second World War; and that they formed the core and evil spirit of the Security Police (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa — UB).

Any objective observer of the historical process knows full well that Communism would have been introduced in Poland by Stalin irrespective of whether Jews had access to the ruling Communist Party hierarchy or not. Stalin had all the political grounds (the Yalta agreements with the Western allies) and military wherewithal to subordinate Poland at his will. The UB was not changed by the expulsion of Jews from high positions. Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, as is well known, was not murdered by Jews. The Jews did not give the order to open fire on Polish shipyard workers, in December 1970, two-and-a-half years after “March ’68.” The order came from Gomułka’s circle.

* * *

On the thirtieth anniversary of “March ’68,” Henryk Grynberg, poet, prose writer, and Holocaust survivor, pointed out that “no one was brought to accountability for March [’68]. Once again, 30 years have passed, the system has changed again, and the government has changed over...[ten] times, but no-one has been punished.”44 Granted, a few years ago, the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej — IPN) launched an investigation by the public prosecutor into the “Communist crime,” as the events of March 1968 came to be known, but the outcomes were never made public.

Post-War Emigration of Jews from Poland: The Case of Kraków

EDYTA GAWRON

Introduction

Soon after the end of the Second World War, Jews who survived in various ways began to arrive in Kraków and many other places in Poland. The survivors moved around, registering in different localities, and were often unwilling to disclose their Jewish identity, making it difficult to determine their exact number.1 Emigration, which continued uninterruptedly from 1945 onward, was another reason for the apparently constantly changing number of Jewish inhabitants of Kraków.

As a point of departure for discussing emigration, it is advisable to consider: 1) those who were able to leave, i.e., the number of people who returned to Kraków (as a potential “starting base”); 2) their modes of survival and the consequences (in terms of experience, health status, family, etc.); 3) “the return experience” (safety, repossesion of former dwellings, reception by the local community, employment, etc.); and 4) group solidarity of survivors.

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Table 1. The Jewish Population of Kraków in 1946
According to Last Place of Residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of residence during the occupation</th>
<th>Number of people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USSR (later repatriates)</td>
<td>4,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camps in occupied Poland</td>
<td>618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest hiding places</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camps in the Third Reich</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunkers</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidden by Poles</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisans</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,637</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The survivors’ psychological and physical condition and their attitude to remaining in Poland might have been very diverse on account of their wartime experiences. The Holocaust had an enormous impact on the survivors’ future and their decisions depended to a large extent on the survival of loved ones, but were also influenced by family members. A number of Jews left Kraków without registering their change of address (a legal requirement introduced in Communist Poland) and, therefore, practically without any trace of departure in official documents. For obvious reasons, such behavior seemed the most common among those who left Poland illegally.

The number of those who still lived in Kraków in July 1947 and decided to identify with the Jewish community seems to be fairly accurately reflected by the registration conducted that year for matzoth (unleavened bread) for the Passover festival.² According to these figures, 6,045 Jews lived in Kraków at that time. The largest group among them was aged between 21 and 49 — a figure that did not change significantly until the end of the year. Assuming the Jewish population of Kraków averaged about 6,000–8,000 in the early post-war years, it constituted about two percent of the city’s total population. However, only slightly over 2,000 of the Jews living there at the time

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² The annual registration for receiving matzoth before Passover in the Jewish kehillah (Jewish religious community).
originated from Kraków (and lived there before 1939). The attitude of this group towards staying or leaving the city, and ultimately the country, must have been somewhat different from those who had not been able to return or had been obliged to leave their native regions for various reasons.

On the national scale, most estimates put the number of Jews in Poland at 200,000 in the first half of 1946. However, these data require explanation, especially in the context of migratory movements. The highest number of Jews in post-war Poland, as noted in statistical records, was in July 1946. It was the period when a large influx of repatriates from the USSR was drawing to a close, while emigration from Poland was not yet large-scale. The number of people registered with the Central Committee of Jews in Poland’s (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce — CKŻP) Department of Records and Statistics was 242,926, which is considered to be the number of Jews living in Poland at the time.

Historians and sociologists, both in Poland and abroad, have debated and researched the causes, course, and consequences of Jewish emigration from Poland after the Holocaust. Albert Stankowski, Maciej Pisarski, Grzegorz Berendt, August Grabski, Natalia Aleksiun, Bożena Szaynok, Yehuda Bauer, Lucjan Dobroszycki, and Józef Adelson carried out and published the most well-known and objective studies on the early post-war years.

3 AŻIH, CKŻP Wydział Ewid. i Statyst, 683, Ziombkostwo Żydów Miasta Krakowa (zamieszkających do 1939 i obecnie, 1947) (The Landsmanschaft/Association of the Jews of Kraków [who lived there in 1939 and now, in 1947]).


5 Quoted in ibid., p. 398. As the author emphasizes, the figure he gives most probably includes all Jews who contacted Jewish organizations after the war. Since about 40,000 Jews were reported to have left Poland, most of them individually and illegally, in the first half of 1946 alone, this figure is certainly overstated.

Stankowski and Berendt, mentioned above, as well as Piotr Wróbel, Dariusz Stola, and several teams of sociologists studied the emigration of Polish Jews in the decades that followed.

**Causes and Forms of Emigration**

“When the war, everything was done to keep Jews from putting down their roots in Poland.”

Y. Zuckerman

The period of occupation and extermination of Jews did not appease anti-Semitic attitudes in Poland and, in a certain respect, actually led to their radicalization. The conviction that there should be no more Jews in Poland accompanied these attitudes. The Poles’ feelings toward them and the survivors’ wartime experiences led them to reflect seriously on whether they should remain in Poland. At the same time, these conditions should be treated as a point of reference while evaluating early post-war events and experiences. Pogroms and individual crimes perpetrated against Jews not only intensified panic and fear, but also undermined the hope for a better future.

In June 1945, the Kraków voivode described the mostly unfriendly attitude of the Polish population towards Jews in Kraków as follows:


POST-WAR EMIGRATION OF JEWS FROM POLAND

There are cases of robberies combined with murders committed against Jews; their causes and perpetrators usually remain unknown, however, antisemitic motives are apparent.9

One month later, the situation in the Kraków voivodeship had deteriorated significantly. The influence of antisemitic feelings in the ranks of the Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza — PPR) and the People’s Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe — SL) should not be underestimated.10 In Kraków itself, there are no records of antisemitic acts with more serious consequences. After the war, Poles noticed a growing number of Jews assuming higher positions in the public administration. It is difficult to determine to what extent the inhabitants of Kraków and other large Polish cities shared the belief that “there are [were] lots of Jews holding high posts. You do not see them in the street because they go by car.”11 Undoubtedly, the participation of Jews in party and administrative structures deepened their isolation and reawakened the “Judeo-Bolshevism” (żydokomuna) stereotypes. Andrzej Chwalba describes two polar opposites in public feelings about Jews:

In 1945, people saw, because that is what they wanted to see, that not only had the Holocaust victims returned to life, still mourning their murdered brothers, but [they] had also [become their] new masters, “lackeys of the Soviets.”12

Another cause of hatred might have been the need to find an enemy or, as Krystyna Kersten aptly put it, it was not so much that the Jew was the enemy, but rather the enemy was the Jew.13

The tendency to centralize Jewish communities seemed to be accompanied by a characteristic phenomenon mentioned by Anna Cichopek:

9 APKr, Sprawozdanie sytuacyjne Wojewody Krakowskiego za miesiąc czerwiec 1945, UW II, p. 905.
10 For more information on antisemitic propaganda in the PPR (Polska Partia Robotnicza) and SL (Stronnictwo Ludowe) ranks at the local level in Kraków and in the region, see Anna Cichopek, Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie 11 Sierpnia 1945 r (Warsaw: ŻIH, 2000), pp. 61–63.
12 Ibid.
In the summer of 1945, the more peaceful it was in the provinces of Kraków, the more dangerous it became in Kraków itself.\textsuperscript{14}

There is no doubt that the mass influx of Jews seeking safety in larger cities led to the opposite result: heightening antisemitic feelings among the inhabitants. This resulted, among other things, in a pogrom, which took place in Kraków on August 11, 1945, with two dead (one killed on the spot, the other, later, from injuries). A few days after these anti-Jewish excesses, the CKZP board held a meeting. In the minutes, the pogrom was described as a planned and premeditated activity, which could have had more tragic consequences had it not been for the resolute conduct of the government administration and official press.\textsuperscript{15}

Neither the suppression of the disturbances, nor the assurances from the authorities, convinced the Jewish community that it was safe to stay in the city, or generally, in Poland. Aggression against Jews produced a sense of alienation, intensifying their desire to emigrate. For many Jews, the events of August 1945 in Kraków, as well as reports of murders and attacks against Jews in Southeastern Poland (Little Poland), precipitated their decisions to leave the country almost immediately. Emigration from Kraków and other cities continued uninterruptedly from the end of the war, but was noticeably accelerated after August 11. This situation was obviously not improved by reports of pogroms in Parczew, a small town near Lublin, on February 5, 1946, and in Kielce, on July 4, 1946. In response to the repeated anti-Jewish excesses, Jews also took other steps: More of them changed their identities, both in terms of family names and places of residence. Jews also endeavored to increase their sense of security by staying together in groups and limiting interactions with individuals or groups thought or known to harbor antisemitic views.

The Kielce Pogrom on July 4, 1946, symbolized escalation of the feeling of danger. Jews perceived such cases of aggression as a sort of continuation of pre-war antisemitic attacks. After the Kielce events, between 500 and 800 Jews crossed the Polish-Czech border every day. Another result of the Kielce Pogrom was the possibility of rapid emigration. The Polish authorities, sharing to some extent the Zionist interpretation of the pogrom, allowed open borders for Jews who wished to leave.\textsuperscript{16} Without the formal

\begin{enumerate}
\item Cichopec, \textit{Pogrom Żydów}, p. 65.
\item AŻIH, Prezydium CKZP, Protokół Posiedzenia Plenum Centralnego Komitetu odbytego dnia 14, VIII, file no. 303/26 (1945), pp. 215–216.
\item For more on the issue of Jewish reaction and emigration, see Jan T. Gross, \textit{Fear. Anti-}
\end{enumerate}
procedure normally required, Zionist organizations launched a propaganda campaign calling upon the Jewish population to leave Poland. They also had already established a network of agencies and contacts to transform the idea of emigration into a reality.

The situation of Jews in Poland in the early post-war years contributed to a wave of Jewish emigration from Poland and the rest of the Continent. The causes of the emigration from Poland between 1945 and 1951 can be divided into three main categories: psychological, political, and direct. The last category is a synthesis of the other two, together with many other factors, frequently individual, which influenced the decision to emigrate.17

Psychological factors were largely related to the fact that the Holocaust had been perpetrated on Polish territory. Although Poles had no say in the location of death camps, questions about the Polish attitudes towards Jews during the Holocaust and to the survivors’ post-war return remained: not only the openly expressed antisemitic views, but also frequently hostile attitudes and statements toward those of Jewish origin. Jewish survivors returning to their native regions often did not find any family or friends, and their former neighbors not only did not appear overjoyed to see them, but actually cursed them. This had a very negative impact on the Jews.

One of the consequences of the policy of exterminating the Jews was their disappearance from the economic sphere of Polish society. In particular, this applied to property of those murdered or displaced. Real estate, especially houses, shops, and craftsmen’s workshops, and movable property left behind by the Jews deported to ghettos or death camps were largely taken over by their Polish neighbors, who found it difficult even to contemplate the idea of returning it. A considerable portion of Polish society wished to preserve the new status quo. This was one of the reasons why the political programs of most of the underground political parties once again

17 This division is based on two sources: a memorandum submitted by the CKŻP to the Anglo-American Committee (on their visit to Poland in March 1946), which, apart from stipulations concerning Palestine, also classified the causes of emigration (AAN, PPR Sekretariat, 295/VII/149, pp. 366a–368); and the classification that was developed by the Government’s Officer for the Productivization of the Jewish Population in Poland (AAN, MAP, no. 788).
stressed Jewish emigration.\textsuperscript{18} Attempts to repossess property by the Jews returning to Kraków and other cities intensified this phenomenon.\textsuperscript{19}

Political factors depended on foreign and domestic events as well as on the situation within the Jewish community itself. Among these were “ideological” issues that emerged in the early post-war years, and consisted primarily of a stronger sense of national identity and community among Jews persecuted because of their ethnic origin. An important question for survivors was why Jews had not been able to defend themselves. Among the reasons suggested was the absence of a Jewish state, which might have protected Jews from the Nazi terror. This was behind the demand to build a Jewish state and resume Zionist activities. The creation of the State of Israel considerably strengthened the desire to emigrate to the Land of Israel. Those who had not been able to leave previously because they did not have permission to enter Palestine were formally allowed to emigrate. This was a decisive factor for some Jews. Irrespective of their earlier attitude towards Zionism, they believed that the emergence of their own country presented a unique opportunity for a new, independent life. It is necessary to mention that, despite the proclamation of the Jewish state, there were still thousands of Polish Jews remaining in displaced persons (DP) camps (in Germany) and hoping to emigrate to either the US or some other Western destinations, but not to Israel.

At the same time, a series of political measures in the late 1940s — gradually restricting and eventually precluding legal activity of Jewish organizations, institutions, and political parties — was another factor favoring the decision to emigrate.

The renewed “Judeo-Bolshevik” stereotype — identifying Jews with Communist activists and blaming them for the new social and political situation in Poland — was another factor in the resentment towards Jews. Finding it impossible to live under such threatening conditions, many Jews chose to emigrate. In this connection, many of the Jewish repatriates arriving from the Soviet Union, and often entire families, had suffered at the hands of the Communist terror machine.

\textsuperscript{18} For instance, the program of the Polish Socialist Party — Freedom Equality Independence (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna — Wolność Równość Niepodległość), mentions the need to do away with the “unnatural and one-sided concentration of Jews in commerce and certain professions, as well as the complete removal of the parasitic groups of bankers, usurers, etc., originating mostly from the Jewish population,” Andrzej Friszke, \textit{O kształt niepodległej} (Warsaw: Biblioteka Więzi, 1989), p. 435.

\textsuperscript{19} In Kraków, over 40 Jewish enterprises were formally returned to their rightful owners in the early post-war years; however, this change was short-lived.
Finally, various personal experiences and events directly led to the decision to emigrate, as the last in the chain of reasons for leaving Poland.

**Forms and Directions of Jewish Emigration from Poland**

During the first post-war years, illegal emigration, via the southern border of Poland, was the most popular form. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych — MSZ) and the Kraków voivodeship office, by MSZ order, prohibited the granting of permits to leave the country, e.g., for Czechoslovakia. Departures nonetheless continued, both legally and illegally, on a considerable scale and at high cost. According to Yehuda Bauer’s estimates, in 1944–1947, Brichah, the most active organization involved with illegal emigration, helped over 100,000, and at most 140,000, Jews to leave Poland. Although large-scale illegal emigration was terminated in late February 1947, it continued on an individual basis until 1955. Owing to its clandestine character, there are no reliable data about its extent.

Illegal emigration took on two forms: individual and in groups. Both were facilitated by the large-scale migration of people and the provisional borders, which were frequently left without appropriate protection. Jews regularly used the services of the many smugglers, who required certain sums of money. In time, this mode of emigration encountered growing obstacles. The southern direction of emigration, which, in the case of Kraków, was determined by the proximity of the Czech border, became increasingly popular among people arriving in the city (which already served as a transit center) with the intention of quickly leaving the country.

In this region, however, emigration on a larger scale took place primarily in organized and illegal groups, especially in 1945. The greatest number of

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20 Cichopec, *Pogrom Żydów*, p. 121.
21 Brichah, created in February 1944 in Równe by Jewish partisans associated with Dror and Hashomer Hatsair, organized a route whereby Jews could immigrate to Palestine. From the beginning, the authorities considered Brichah as illegal. As the front shifted to the west, the organization’s coordination center was moved to Polish territory and its activities spread throughout the country, in the parts liberated from the Germans. On the operation of Brichah and emigration of Jews from Eastern Europe, see Bauer, *Flight and Rescue*.
22 Ibid., pp. 113–152.
23 The unofficial permission of the authorities, or rather turning a blind eye to illegal emigration, ceased at the end of February 1947.
Jews left the country with the assistance of Brichah.\textsuperscript{24} In mid-1945, Kraków became the organization’s coordination center. Despite its illegal character, Brichah was connected with legally operating groups, evidenced not only by the presence of their representatives in the organization’s leadership, but also in the modest funding from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint).\textsuperscript{25} The scale of illegal, but verified, emigration of Jews from Poland during the early post-war years is illustrated in the table below. The data show a rapid increase in this type of emigration from July to September 1946, i.e., immediately after the Kielce Pogrom.

Table 2. \textbf{Illegal Emigration of Jews from Poland between 1945 and 1947}

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>9,875</td>
<td>6,475</td>
<td>9,760</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>2,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>1,098</td>
<td>3,052</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>19,000</td>
<td>33,346</td>
<td>12,379</td>
<td>2,545</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1,897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>1,029</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>6,586</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>126,140</td>
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</table>


The first route whereby emigrants left Poland went through Krosno and Sanok to Czechoslovakia and Hungary and from there to Romania. After the war, the Brichah operation concentrated mainly in the following areas:

- The north, with centers in Szczecin, Žory, and Zgorzelec.
- The southwest, between Walbrzych and Kudowa, and between Silesia and Moravia.
- The southeast, the borderland between Cieszyn and Krosno.

Prague was one of the stops on the route of illegal emigrants, from where they frequently traveled to Budapest or more remote destinations. In Kraków, those wishing to leave were supplied with false Austrian, Greek, French or other documents. Illegal crossings were made on the southern

\textsuperscript{24} Tomaszewski, \textit{Najnowsze dzieje Żydów}, p. 408, 414.

\textsuperscript{25} This financial assistance reached Brichah not in the form of subsidies, but indirectly, via Jewish organizations supported by the Joint, sometimes even without the Joint’s knowledge. See Bauer, \textit{Flight and Rescue}, p. 128.
POST-WAR EMIGRATION OF JEWS FROM POLAND

stretch of the border near Nowy Sącz and Krosno. Groups of illegal emi-
grants were usually led by Jewish guides.

At the peak of the emigration wave following the Kielce events, Ku-
dowa-Nachod was the crossing point most frequently chosen. The location
of the main transit points on the Polish-Czech border was motivated not
only by geographical proximity, but, above all, by the attitude of the Czech
authorities towards Jewish emigrants, which was very friendly. This location
also favored an efficient and speedy transfer of emigrants to the DP camps
situated in the American Occupation Zones in Germany and Austria.

Legal emigration, arranged by legally operating Jewish organizations,
requiring the completion of legal formalities, was more time-consuming
but safer. Documents entitling the holder to permanently leave the country
were issued by the Polish MSZ. Applicants for “passports issued for emi-
gration purposes,” had to produce visas from other countries, or promises
they could stay there permanently. Moreover, potential emigrants were
required to produce a CKŻP registration certificate.

In early 1946, an emigration office was established at the CKŻP for the
main task of assisting Jews wishing to emigrate in an organized manner,
including handling passport and visa formalities, as well as representing ap-
plicants requesting permits to leave from the Central Administration Offic-
es. The Emigration Office also cooperated with the Joint, the Hebrew Im-
migrant Aid Society (HIAS), and the Palestine Office (Pal-Amt). These
organizations had agencies in Kraków. During the first half year, the office
procured 838 emigration passports and 200 Swedish visas, as well as sup-
plying emigrants with food, money, and clothing.

Legal emigrants were also independently supported by HIAS, which
acted legally on the basis of a permit issued by MAP, and had branches in
Warsaw, Białystok, Katowice, Kraków, Lublin, and Łódź.

Most people applied for visas from the USA, Canada, Australia, and

26 AMSZ, Biuro Konsularne, 20, vol. 4.
27 AAN, MAP, file no. 788, pp. 131–134.
28 HIAS, the oldest international organization in the USA providing assistance to Jewish
immigrants, was established in New York in 1909 by combining the Hebrew Shelter
Aid Association and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. In 1927, the HIAS joined
the ICA (Jewish Colonization Association), which, in cooperation with Emig-direct (a
Berlin-based organization for helping emigrants), created the European counterpart of
HIAS, the HICEM (acronym of HIAS, ICA, and Emig-direct).
29 This organization limited its operation to Palestine as the destination for emigrants.
30 AAN, MAP, file no. 788, pp. 141–145.
South American countries. The scale of legal emigration before 1949 was relatively small: The most optimistic estimates by the American Joint suggest a figure of about 15,000 emigrants per year. In the period under discussion, from 1945 to 1947, 11,815 legal Polish-born emigrants managed to reach Palestine.

Since circumstances obliged Jews to change their place of residence, choosing a new location was one of the problems. They frequently sought to reunite with their families and friends living outside Poland, and often outside Europe. To many emigrants, Australia and Venezuela were no more foreign than Silesia and Western Pomerania, with Szczecin as the main city. The only difference was the distance from central Poland: the greater it was, the safer it seemed to be emotionally.

In Kraków, apart from the reactivation of Zionist, as well as other political parties, the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemet LeIsrael) started again on August 6, 1946, with the objective of raising funds to purchase land in Palestine. The financial resources collected came from individual donations, proceeds from specially arranged social events, and from other work by the Jewish cooperatives. On May 18, 1947, the Jewish Reconstruction Fund (Keren Hayesod) resumed activity. On February 22, 1948, the Committee for Aid in the Struggle for Palestine was established, which collected eight million złoty in Kraków alone that year. The initiatives toward creating the Jewish state were institutional (Zionist organizations, schools, and orphanages) as well as individual and informal (privately organized social meetings to mark events bringing the idea of the Jewish state nearer to fulfillment, and support the efforts involved). For instance, in December 1947, after an agreement with the PPR group at the Voivodeship Jewish Committee, “unprecedented crowds” attended a Palestine event organized by the Zionists for all the Jewish parties.

After the Jewish Socialist Workers’ Party Poalei Zion-Hitachdut was formed by uniting two political groups, the Party’s activity focused mainly on organizing Hebrew- and English-language courses and lectures dealing with the situation in Israel and the World Zionist Organization. Considerable

33 The chairmen of the fund in 1946, and successive years, were: Dr. Ozjasz Sternhell, Izaak Halpern, and Samuel Scharf.
34 By the end of 1946, 1,241,724 złoty had been collected.
35 Opinia, no. 28 (1948), p. 2.
attention was given to distribution of the Jewish press. Summer camps for children were also organized (for example, a group of children went to a summer camp in Klodzko in Lower Silesia in the summer of 1948). Throughout that period, Poalei Zion-Hitachdut members continued to immigrate to Palestine and, after the founding of the state, to Israel. This corresponded with the party ideology and program, but at the same time weakened its standing in the Jewish community. There were more departures in 1948, when some of the activists left Poland, heading to Israel via France. Each departure of a large group was a major event. On June 29, 1948, a special farewell party was held for a group of Poalei Zion-Hitachdut activists leaving for the Land of Israel.

Using their influence in several countries, various Jewish parties endeavored to obtain permits for emigration not only for their members but also for other Jews. As a result of these efforts, undertaken by the Bund, among others, several hundred visas for such countries as Sweden, Norway, and France were obtained. The activity of the American organization Vaad ha-Hatzala, which enabled several thousand Orthodox Jews to emigrate, was another example. There was no single destination, rather the choice depended not only on political preferences or family circumstances, but also on the opportunities offered to immigrants by potential countries for future settlement. Palestine and the Jewish organizational structures there played a special role.

Emigration trends among the Jewish population were determined to a considerable extent by two groups of factors: 1) the internal situation and events in Poland; and 2) the development in the Middle East and the international diplomatic scene relating to the creation of the Jewish state and the war between the Jews and Arabs.

The UN decision dividing Palestine into Arab and Jewish states on

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36 Kwiek, Żydzi, Łemkowie, Słowacy, p. 95.
37 For instance, from July 1947 to March 1948, the Kraków branch received 35 French visas. Izrael Gurwicz, Motel Lastingson, Sabina Mirowska, Kalman Neiger, and Henryk Mandel were among those who left for France (ibid.).
39 Tomaszewski, Najnowsze dzieje Żydów, p. 415.
40 This organization was active primarily during the Holocaust, when it managed to save about 625 Orthodox rabbis from Poland, among others. After the war, the Vaad ha-Hatzala helped Orthodox Jews get out of the so-called Eastern Bloc. See Efraim Zuroff, The Response of Orthodox Jewry in the United States to the Holocaust. The Activities of the Vaad ha-Hatzala Rescue Committee 1939–1945 (Hoboken, NJ: The Michael Scharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press, Inc., 2000).
November 29, 1947, and the proclamation of Israel’s independence on May 14, 1948, were of great importance for the internal situation of the Jewish community in Poland. The war in Palestine spurred the mobilization of Zionist organizations in Poland, with the aim of preparing their members to participate in combat. The opening of the first Israeli Diplomatic Mission in Warsaw in October 1948 was another important event. The presence of Israeli diplomats provided enormous logistical as well as ideological support for Jews preparing to emigrate. Through their representatives, the Israeli authorities helped to organize rail and maritime transport. They also helped to collect and distribute funds to emigrants from Europe and other parts of the world. Emigrants already in the Land of Israel were also given assistance. Immigrants were provided with comprehensive support, depending on the local circumstances.

In early 1948, the number of Jews in Poland was estimated at about 113,400. In the months that followed, until September 1948, about 15,000 left, their departures made possible through documents issued by the MSZ.

The Jewish population anxiously kept abreast of the developments in Poland. The closing down of the national funds Keren Hayesod and Keren Kayemet LeIsrael gave reason for further alarm. The official reason was the transfer by these organizations of resources to “Marshallized” Israel (i.e., dependent on the USA). However, a search of the premises, confiscation of files, closing the Emigration Office, and arrest of its employees in January 1949 foreshadowed liquidation of the Joint.

In early summer 1949, the Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza — PZPR) activists set about liquidating the Zionist movement in Poland, since its aims were deemed detrimental to state interests. Emigration was only permitted to high- and middle-ranking Zionist activists, private entrepreneurs, the elderly, invalids, rabbis, and religious Jews, and not to workers, rank-and-file Zionist party members, the politically unaffiliated, and children and youth. The press, controlled by the

41 AŻIH, Organizacje Syjonistyczne, Ichud, file no. 333/90, Odezwa, z 3 VI (1948). Mobilization of all party members aged between 17 and 35 and fit for military service was announced. Future soldiers for the Israeli army were trained in Bolków, Lower Silesia, among other places.

42 For more information on the circumstances around the creation of the first Israeli diplomatic post in Poland, see Bożena Szaynok, Z historią i Moskwą w tle. Polska a Izrael 1944–1968 (Warsaw: IPN, 2007), pp. 136–139.


44 AAN, KC PZPR, Notatka Zachariasza z 17 X 1949, p. 476.
PPR activists, mainly *Folks-Shtime* and *Dos Naye Lebn*, launched a vociferous anti-Zionist campaign. The Zionists defended themselves by demonstrating that Zionism did not contradict the official ideology in Poland.

Pal-Amt, which arranged the immigration of Jews to Palestine and Israel on behalf of the Jewish Agency, was forced to cease operations by November 30, 1948. Liquidation of Hebrew education in Poland began in the 1948/1949 school year. In view of these developments, more Jews approached the Jewish committees for certificates to enable them to apply for emigration passports. This phenomenon increased in the second half of March 1949. During that period, it was reported that Zionist parties applied to the PZPR Central Committee for 40,000 emigration passports. At the same time, Zionist groups intensified their campaign to convince Jews of the necessity of emigrating from Poland. The United Poalei Zion and its youth wing, Dror, and Hashomer Hatsair, were the most active.

In March 1949, the Israeli press reported that the Israeli Diplomatic Mission in Warsaw approached the Polish government with a request to permit about 20,000 Jews to leave Poland. By the summer of 1949, two or three different solutions to the problem of emigration of these Jews were put forward by various groups and institutions: the aforementioned Jewish Agency, Polish Zionists, and a PZPR group attached to the CKŻP. Only the intentions of the first two concurred, supporting the idea of allowing all Jews who wished to live in their own state to leave Poland.

In early September 1949, the government issued a press release about the possibility of immigration to Israel for Polish citizens of Jewish origin. It was very terse: The MAP Office would issue emigration documents, but not passports, which could be obtained by verification of the applicant’s identity. This announcement triggered an increase in the number of applications for

46 “Pismo sekretarza PZPR przy PKŻ w Dzierżoniowie,” AAN, KC PZPR, z 25 IV (1949), 237/V/98. This information was also published in the Jewish press.
47 AMSZ, Samodzielny Wydział Wschodni, Pismo KG w Tel Awiwie, z 24 III 1949, 11/279/15. This information was not confirmed by other sources.
48 Szaynok presents the first references to MAP’s decision on Israel and Poland. She gives September 2 as the publication date of the release in the Jewish press. This is supposed to be the date on which the internal Ministry Order was issued. Two other announcement dates of the MAP Order are indicated in the literature on the subject: September 4 and 13. See Szaynok, *Z historią i Moskwą*, pp. 186–187; Stankowski, “Nowe spojrzenie na statystyki,” p. 115.
49 *Rzeczpospolita*, September 4, 1949, no. 243. The date of the decision to permit emigration is not known.
legal emigration permits. However, mass departures began slightly later, only after completion of all requisite formalities. The emigrants did not receive passports but so-called “travel documents” enabling them to leave Poland. To receive these permits, emigrants had to sign the following declaration:

I request the documents required to leave for the country of Israel, where I wish to settle down permanently and become a citizen, thereby ceasing to be a Polish citizen.50

Bureaucratic procedures also applied to apartments vacated by the emigrants. The People’s Council Presidium usually received individual notice about the planned issue of identity documents for emigration to Israel from the Ministry of Public Security’s (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego — MBP) Foreign Passport Office. The notices included first name (or names), family name, address, as well as the date of issue.51 Subsequently, the Housing Management Department (Oddział Gospodarki Mieszkaniowej) issued an order to “recognize” the housing situation at the addresses indicated in the notices. The employees of the Housing Office (Referat Kwarterunkowy) checked individual flats, interviewing their administrators and main tenants. Reports on these measures confirm departures of the people in question, but also record situations in which they chose to remain in the country for various reasons. In such cases, they had to submit another application requesting permission to stay in Poland.

From September to December 1950, about 300 cases were checked in Kraków. This list of cases may be considered an indicator of the number of emigration permits issued during that period. Only two of the submitted applications did not request emigration to Israel, but to Argentina and Great Britain (Scotland). Entire families and individuals emigrated. In several cases, a permit was only granted to a single family member, in which case, families frequently decided to remain together in Poland. Several individuals left to reunite with their relatives already living abroad. Apart

51 APKr, Prezydium Rady Narodowej w Krakowie, PMRN Kr 12. A sample document: Records of the Ministry of Public Security, Foreign Passport Office (confidential), Letter of December 18, 1950, Pas. Z. IV / 20271, refers to vacating a flat, Presidium of the People’s City Council of Kraków: The Ministry reports that Citizen..., resident in Kraków on...Street, is to receive an identity document for emigration to ISRAEL on January...1951..., Head of the Department.
from rejected applications of family members, renouncing emigration was usually due to a change of mind, in some cases, probably influenced by non-Jewish spouses, or illnesses that precluded traveling.52

Applications were examined and emigration permits issued until February 9, 1951, and the last group departure took place on February 12, 1951.53 The journey to Israel did not always begin directly in Kraków. Sometimes the emigrants broke it up into stages, traveling to other cities, usually north of Kraków, to join relatives or acquaintances. The emigrants usually left Poland by rail. For instance, trains from Warsaw left for the Italian city of Bari, from where they continued their journey by sea. The organizational side of the operation was managed by the Orbis state travel agency, commissioned by the Israeli Diplomatic Mission. From August 1950 onward, the Israeli representatives assumed total responsibility for the travelers.

On the national scale, 27,150 applications for emigration permits were submitted between September 13, 1949 and August 31, 1950. There must have been about 40,000 applications altogether, including those submitted before the announcement. However, by October 20, 1950, only 24,351 applications were accepted.54 It is impossible to determine the exact number of Jews who emigrated from Kraków and the Kraków voivodeship. A useful indication in these estimations is the number of passport applications: 1,075 in 1947, 57 in January 1948, 153 in February 1948, 45 in August 1948, 105 in January 1949, and 205 in February 1949. However, these figures do not reflect the scale of emigration that took place in the early post-war years. They are only helpful in assessing the scale of legal emigration but, as already mentioned, there were also larger numbers of illegal emigrants throughout that period.

Not all the Jews leaving Poland after the war headed for Palestine, or, later, Israel. Many, even members of Zionist organizations, immigrated to other countries. Between January 1, 1946 and May 14, 1948, over 17,000 Jews from Poland arrived in Palestine, representing 35.4 percent of all the immigrants. A total of 27,915 immigrants arrived in Israel from Poland between November 1, 1949 and July 15, 1951, including a fairly high proportion of

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52 Ibid.
54 The number of Jews who left Poland between September 13, 1949 and February 1950 is estimated at between 22,000 and 23,000 (28,000, including children), which amounted to about 26–30 percent of Poland’s total Jewish population at that time.
children (about 18 percent) under 13 years of age, which can be explained by the large number of orphans who had lost their parents in the Holocaust and emigrated in groups, as well as the relatively high birth rate after the war. Polish Jews immigrating to Israel at that time were motivated primarily by Zionist ideas, religious considerations, economic factors, as well as family and personal reasons. Most of those of Jewish origin who left Poland in the early 1950s (or stayed temporarily in DP camps in Germany) went to the USA, where about 160,000 Jewish immigrants from Poland settled between 1945 and 1956. At the same time, about 12,000 arrived in Canada, about 15,000 in Australia and New Zealand, and about 30,000 in South America.

Although legal emigration was officially closed in March 1951, Jewish organizations continued their efforts to promote emigration. An estimated 15,000–16,000 had not managed to leave Poland by that time. For this reason, the authorities established a commission to examine individual cases in this group. From June to October 1952, the commission verified the documents and approved the emigration of “above all, separated families, class-alien elements, profiteers, merchants, former Zionists, Jewish congregational employees, and criminals.” They received passports expiring after three months, with the deadline for crossing the border of two months, and gradually left Poland, often assisted by the Israeli Diplomatic Mission. Under pressure from the Polish authorities and due to their involvement, the whole operation proceeded fairly quickly and without any publicity. Only a few hundred applicants were allowed to emigrate.

After June 4, 1952, there was a change in the documents issued. The Foreign Passport Office, which originally, by MSZ order, issued the emigrants with foreign passports, subsequently provided them with identity cards, recording their applications to change their citizenship at the same time. The authorities thus absolved themselves of the responsibility for the emigrants during their journey to their destination countries, thereby making them stateless.

59 In the first round, the commission accepted only 269 applications out of over 16,000, and only 157 left by June 1953, see ibid.
Following a period of deterioration in the situation of Jews in Poland, as well as in most countries in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1940s and early 1950s, things changed after Stalin’s death in 1953. The political thaw and de-Stalinization, which began a few years later, were accompanied by inter-party strife, with one of the factions implicating the Jews as responsible for Stalinist “distortions” in Poland. At the same time, as early as 1956, liberalization of the political system enabled new migrations both into and out of Poland. Along with hundreds of thousands of Poles arriving from the USSR in the “Gomułka repatriation,” there were some Jews. Most of them did not have any intention of remaining in Poland, and joined the large group of Jews who had been living there and were leaving.

By April 1957, there were about 3,500 Jews among the numerous repatriates, most of whom immediately applied for permits to leave for Israel. Initially the permits were granted on the same basis as in 1949–1951. The emigrants received “travel documents” after renouncing their Polish citizenship. However, as of November 1956, the emigrants began to receive passports without having to renounce their Polish citizenship. Once this new policy became known, many Jews who had hesitated until then decided to leave.

The PZPR Central Committee’s resolution, passed on October 19, 1955, recommended extending the categories of Jews granted permits to leave for Israel to include the elderly, single people, children, and separated family members. This was the first signal of liberalization of the government’s policy toward the Jews who had remained in Poland since the end of the war. An increasing proportion of Jews who had assimilated into Polish society, as well as those who had functioned very successfully in the state apparatus, were among those who left. After the personnel changes in the PZPR Cen-
central Committee (e.g., the resignation of Jakub Berman in May 1956) and the arrest of functionaries of Jewish origin who had previously worked in the MBP, there was a revival of antisemitic feeling. Jews who had not participated in political life became concerned that Polish society might apply the principle of collective responsibility for abuse perpetrated by individuals. The following statement is characteristic:

Look, Mister, I am a Jew and a worker, I work in a cooperative. What do I have to do with the fact that there was a Różański or Fejgin somewhere there, that some Jewish scoundrel snatched a high post and harmed people? I hate all criminals, and if Jews who harmed others are alien to me, am I an antisemite too?63

The above-mentioned rise in antisemitic feeling, which continued despite official party assurances about fighting such tendencies, was one of the reasons for emigration. Party activists circulated the so-called “whispered propaganda” inciting anti-Jewish sentiment. After 1956, there were also widespread dismissals in state administration and enterprises, which particularly applied to employees of Jewish origin. Irrespective of the grounds for dismissal, whether due to reorganization or open discrimination, the Jews were less likely to find new jobs, mainly because of their ethnic origin.

A rise in antisemitic feeling, especially vicious in large Jewish population centers in Lower Silesia; the deteriorating economic situation; and, finally, the introduction of Catholic religious instruction in schools, in December 1956, exposing Jewish children to taunting, contributed to increased emigration. Between July 1956 and April 1957, a particularly large number of Jews registered to immigrate to Israel, including a high proportion of university graduates and workers in cooperatives.64

In her memoirs, Eva Hoffman repeats the common view in her parents’ circles: After 1956, the only Jews remaining in Kraków were those involved in cultural life or members of the Communist elite.65 Some Jews who chose to remain were those from mixed marriages, the elderly, and owners of real
estate, or those who, although not Communists, regarded Kraków as their home.

In 1957, the ban on emigration, under which most of the Polish population lives, is lifted for Jews. Anyone who is Jewish can now automatically get permission to leave for Israel — and everyone who is Jewish is confronted with a decision. To leave or not to leave now becomes the main subject of conversation. Most people we know decide immediately, and the exodus begins. The Rotenbergs leave; the Taubes leave; the Leitners leave. Our personal life is changing; it begins to seem less and less possible to be Jewish and our class — that is, definitely Jewish, non-Communist, without a particular stake or significance in the society — and to remain.66

This time, the regulations concerning the movables that emigrants were allowed to take along were less restrictive, but even so, organizing luggage required a great deal of resourcefulness. The country of destination also had to be chosen, since Israel was not the only option available. After 1956, some emigrants left for Canada, the USA, and Great Britain.67

On the scale of the Jewish community of Kraków, the emigration in the mid-1950s was probably the most considerable loss in the context of rebuilding a pre-war Jewish life. This is because most of those emigrants were traditionally associated with Jewishness; many of them, despite gradual assimilation, were still religious Jews. They often had fixed residences, permanent jobs, and stable material situations. In addition, many entire families emigrated, which reduced the likelihood of potential return.

The emigration of Jews from Poland proceeded in parallel with the repatriation of Polish citizens from the USSR, among whom there were significant numbers of Jews. Under a bilateral agreement between Poland and the USSR, over 260,000 people, including 18,743 Jews, were repatriated to Poland between 1955 and 1959.68 Soon after returning to Poland most

66 Idem, Lost in Translation, p. 83.
67 On the basis of tentative estimates, the author assumes that about 250–300 emigrants from Kraków left for these destinations.
Jewish repatriates, i.e., as many as 13,000, migrated further: to Israel or Western Europe, from where, some went on to North America.69

Table 3. Migration of Polish Jews between 1958 and 1960

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1958</th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repatriated from the USSR to Poland</td>
<td>4,075</td>
<td>about 4,000</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>8,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration of repatriates to Israel</td>
<td>1,774</td>
<td>3,323</td>
<td>4,870</td>
<td>9,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration of non-repatriates to Israel</td>
<td>1,993</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>2,813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration to other countries</td>
<td>about 600</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>1,908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total emigration</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,367</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,507</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,814</strong></td>
<td><strong>14,688</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Stankowski, Nowe spojrzenie na statystyki, p. 130.

From 1955 to 1960, while over 51,000 people emigrated from Poland, declaring Israel as their destination, only 42,569 actually arrived in Israel.70 Thus, over 8,500 Jews did not reach their formal destination, probably choosing somewhere else after crossing the Polish border. These figures confirm the assessment that Bernard Mark, member of the Presidium of the governing board of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów – TSKŻ), presented to representatives of the World Jewish Congress in Tel Aviv.71 He divided the Jews considering emigration in the 1950s into three categories: 1) Those who had always wanted to emigrate; 2) Those who were concerned with the threat of antisemitism; and 3) Those who wished to leave Poland, but certainly not for Israel. According to Mark, 80 percent of the would-be emigrants belonged to the first two categories, and the remaining 20 percent to the third.72

Emigration in the second half of the 1950s resulted in a significant decrease in the Jewish population in Poland. Estimates for 1961 vary between

71 Berendt, “Emigracja ludności żydowskiej,” p. 49.
72 Nowiny Izraelskie, no. 8 (January 18, 1957) and no. 40 (May 15, 1957); CZA, C 2, vol. 1701, Sprawozdanie z rozmowy przeprowadzonej z dyrektorem ŻIH, B. Markiem, w Tel Awiwie 15 II 1957.
The first half of the 1960s is frequently described as a stabilization period for the Jewish community in Poland, when TSKŻ branches became more active, but people of Jewish origin did not have many organized activities.

Repatriation from the USSR and immigration to Israel and other countries continued, but on a minor scale. From 1961 to 1967, out of 4,618 people given permission to immigrate to Israel, 4,136 reached their declared destination.

Some of the emigration applications submitted during that period were only accepted after the Six-Day War. Following the Israeli victory, the USSR severed diplomatic relations with Israel, and Poland followed suit, on June 12, 1967. This step was part of the antisemitic campaign, which even affected people who were unaware of their origin. Dismissals from work and a witch hunt on the radio and in the press, and mass rallies left an increasing portion of Jews without any choice. According to research conducted by Julian Ilicki, the most common reasons for leaving Poland among Jews who immigrated to Sweden were:

- Personal attacks on individuals (emigrants) or their families — 40 percent;
- Concern about professional future — 34 percent;
- Dismissal from work or expulsion from the university (of a given individual or family member) — 32 percent;
- Announcement by the Polish Press Agency about deadlines for submitting emigration applications — 25 percent;
- Fear of physical threat — 25 percent;
- “Everybody else is also leaving” — 24 percent;
- Antisemitism in Poland — 13 percent.

Only about 28 percent of the emigrants, after forcibly renouncing Polish citizenship, arrived in Israel. Large numbers, especially young people, left directly for Sweden; and others changed direction and went to countries.

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73 Estimates, e.g., by the Joint and the TSKŻ. See Stankowski, “Nowe spojrzenie na statystykę,” p. 131.
75 Quoted in Stankowski, “Nowe spojrzenie na statystykę,” p. 140.
in Central (e.g., Austria), Southern (e.g., Italy) or Western Europe (e.g., France).  

In accordance with the party’s instructions, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych — MSW) Passport Office set new guidelines for issuing emigration permits, stating, “No difficulties should be made for applicants declaring Israel as their ‘direction’ of emigration and identifying their ethnic background as Jewish.” On the one hand, the expression “immigration to Israel” meant nothing more than the declared “direction,” but did not determine where they finally settled down. On the other hand, “Jewish ethnicity” was not established on the basis of declarations alone, but required genuine Jewish origin. Another necessary condition for emigration was an application to change citizenship, which was tantamount to renouncing PRL (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa — People’s Republic of Poland) citizenship. Thus, the emigrants were no longer regarded as Polish citizens, and were not issued passports but so-called travel documents, which explicitly stated: “The holder of this document is not a Polish citizen.”

The most powerful incentive for emigration proved to be the Political Bureau decision of June 2, 1969, to terminate the departures for Israel and make them subject to the same general regulations as applicable to other capitalist countries. According to data from the MSW Passport Office, there were only 66 applications in March 1968, whereas the number doubled in April. Departures peaked in 1969, when 7,674 people left Poland. Officially stopping departures in autumn 1969 did not put an end to emigration. Emigration again intensified at the beginning of the 1970s. Apart from a liberalization of emigration restrictions, this increase was due to the end of the so-called “suspension period” for applicants previously rejected because they had had access to state secrets, had done military service, etc.

76 Stola, Kraj bez wyjścia, p. 223.
78 There were 134 applications in April, 224 in May, and 577 in July. In 1968, only 26 applications were rejected. That year, 3,437 people left Poland, declaring Israel as the destination of emigration. See Halina Marcinkowska, “Jak pozbyto się Żydów w 1968,” Forum Żydów Polskich, www.fzp.net.pl/marzec-68/jak-pozbyto-sie-zydow-w-1968r (accessed, June 13, 2013).
79 In 1970, the number of emigrants from Poland decreased to 698. In 1971, it rose again to 1,118. In the years that followed, the scale of departures was incomparably smaller (853 persons emigrated by 1975).
After March 1968, the number of emigration applications from inhabitants of Kraków wishing to leave for Israel ranged from one to several dozen or so per month. Records of the applications were compiled for the entire voivodeship, hence the figure of 100 applications per month according to the official statistics. The registered applicants declared themselves Jewish as well as Polish. Some had changed their names and surnames, which may be an indication of earlier attempts to assimilate. They were mostly students — some expelled from universities, but others who theoretically could have continued their studies without any difficulty. The most numerous were students of the Kraków Polytechnical Institute, the Academy of Mining and Metallurgy (now AGH University of Science and Technology), and the Jagiellonian University. Characteristically, the wave of emigration from Kraków consisted mostly of individual emigrants. For several years, only a dozen or so families left, representing a significant change, as compared to the previous wave of emigration after 1956. This was related to the considerably milder “anti-Jewish witch hunt” in Kraków than in Warsaw or Łódź. There was no mass harassment of Jews who belonged to the Kehillah or the TSKŻ, and only a few of them emigrated. Instead, they sent their children abroad, especially if they had relatives there who could offer assistance. In Kraków, the scale of dismissals was relatively limited. The most repressive measures were directed against the owners of private enterprises, implemented under the banner of fighting “prywaciarze” (a pejorative term for small business owners), a ploy to deny that this policy was antisemitic.80

Decisions about emigration and the departures themselves were made rapidly, and not discussed in broader circles. In memoirs from that period, acquaintances would “vanish,” in many cases, revealing their whereabouts and manner of emigration several months or even years later. To many inhabitants of Kraków, the emigration of people they knew from work or social circles, but of whose Jewish origin they had been unaware until then, came as a surprise.

The post-March emigration from Kraków was one of the smallest, as compared to that of other large Jewish centers. Even so, approximately 300 people left, who constituted a considerable proportion of the local Jewish community. Deprived of Polish citizenship and the right to return, they received the so-called travel documents.

Only 25 percent of the emigrants from Poland reached Israel. The most

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popular destinations were Sweden, the USA, Great Britain, Austria, Canada, West Germany, and France. The organized care, provided primarily to young immigrants arriving in Sweden, was a characteristic feature of the post-March emigration. Scandinavian countries offered political asylum and assistance in adjusting to the new environment (accommodation, language courses, and university studies). Those who decided not to stay in Sweden, Denmark or Norway, despite these favorable conditions, moved on, most frequently to the USA, Canada, and Israel.

Of the 11,185 people applying for “permits to leave for Israel” from the passport offices between June 1968 and the end of August 1969, over 30 percent were university graduates, including 492 former academics from universities and research institutes, including 29 university professors.81 According to MSW data, about 13,300 people emigrated from Poland between 1967 and 1971, with about 20,000 remaining in Poland.

Conclusion

Albert Stankowski estimates the number of Jews who left Poland in the period under discussion at about 280,000, which, in the author’s view, is somewhat exaggerated.82 The number of immigrants arriving in Israel directly from Poland between 1949 and 1970 was about 80,000. In approximately the same period, namely, from 1948 to 1972, as many as 162,270 immigrants to Israel named Poland as their native country. What this means is that almost 50 percent of the immigrants arriving in the Land of Israel either stayed in other countries, such as Austria and Italy, on their way south, or left Poland for DP camps in Germany and went to Israel from there, with the help of Zionist organizations. In the context of these statistics, it should be noted that some Polish Jews never returned to Poland after their wartime experiences.

82 Considering there were 216,000 Jews, according to data for June, the figure quoted for Jewish emigrants from Poland does not seem very convincing, even if the natural increase and re-emigration from the USSR are taken into account.
Table 4. The Emigration of Jews from Poland between 1945 and 1972\textsuperscript{83}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total number of emigrants</th>
<th>Departures from Poland to Israel</th>
<th>Immigrants arriving from Poland to Palestine/Israel</th>
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<td>83,543</td>
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<td>1947</td>
<td>15,600</td>
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<td>1948</td>
<td>14,800</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1949</td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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\textsuperscript{83} For a similar presentation, in the form of a chart, see Stankowski, “Nowe spojrzenie na statystyki,” p. 147.
The decreasing number of Jews in Poland in the period covered resulted not only from emigration, but also from assimilation and the progressive ageing of this minority (the average age during certain periods was over 70 in smaller Jewish communities). For Poland, the emigration of Jews was not only a loss demographically, but also in cultural, social, and economic terms.

The re-immigration to Poland after 1989 was incomparably smaller but noteworthy. Such returns were permanent in only a few cases in Kraków, and perhaps several dozen in the whole country. What is known as permanent re-emigration was largely motivated by personal and sentimental considerations. Since 1989, there has been sizeable temporary re-emigration of those of Jewish origin who previously emigrated from Poland. Temporary re-emigration is motivated primarily by family considerations. In most cases, former emigrants returned to visit their families, support elderly or sick relatives, or take care of family graves or belongings and mementos left behind by deceased family members. There are also other reasons for long visits to Poland, such as sentimental attachment, meeting friends, celebrations, anniversaries, or school or university reunions. Sometimes, the only reason was a desire to visit places associated with the emigrant’s childhood or youth. Among Jews who returned to Poland, some went to settle ownership issues of the apartments, houses, and enterprises they left behind when emigrating. For some Jews, it was their first visit since leaving Poland during or immediately after the Second World War.

An increase in awareness of Jewish origins has brought about a revival of Zionist inclinations, albeit on a minor scale. In the early 1990s, along with the establishment of branches of Jewish organizations in Poland — the Jewish Agency and, recently, Shavei Israel — interest in going to Israel grew among young people, especially those who began to learn Hebrew and religious subjects while still in Poland, thanks to the Lauder Foundation. The scale of this emigration, while not large, is fairly significant in the context of the small Jewish community in Poland, especially since it involves young people.
Remembering and Forgetting
Memorial Books As a Remembrance of Collective Trauma

MONIKA ADAMCZYK-GARBOWSKA AND ADAM KOPCIOWSKI

The Holocaust created hundreds of authors, who would not have taken up the pen in other historical circumstances. The Ringelblum Archive alone contains dozens of texts in various languages (primarily Yiddish, Polish, and Hebrew). There are accounts, memoirs, and academic studies for scholars and the general public, as well as literary works concerning the Holocaust from both during and after the war, and some are still being written. However, the most characteristic and unique phenomenon in the literature springing from the Holocaust experience are Jewish memorial (yizker) books.

Historically speaking, modern memorial books have their roots in earlier persecutions and destructions of Jewish communities. The so-called Memorbücher were compiled as early as the Middle Ages, in Western and Southern Germany, as well as in Switzerland. These books commemorating the victims of pogroms and anti-Jewish riots listed names of community members killed. Detailed lists, often including up to several thousand names, were read out in synagogues during prayers for the dead held on the anniversaries of pogroms and often the circumstances of their deaths were recalled.1 In Germany, this tradition survived until the eighteenth century, while among Polish Jews it continued until the inter-war period. Examples of such continuity are memorial books, published in the USA, of two small towns in the Ukraine, commemorating victims of the pogrom there

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The Felsztyn book, published in 1937, may serve as a model example of the transition from traditional _Memorbücher_ to contemporary memorial books. Like older books, it not only includes the list of victims murdered in the pogrom and an account of the event, but also describes the community’s past and fate of its members. Thus, the authors’ intention was not merely to document the pogrom and perpetuate the memory of the victims. Inspired by the tragic event, it attempted to synthesize the pre- and post-pogrom history of Jewish Felsztyn. The idea of expanding the traditional _Memorbuch_ form is evident:

We mourn our loss, and according to ancient Jewish tradition, we congregate on the annual memorial day to pay our respects to our martyred dead. Each memorial day reopened our old wounds. Although 15 years had gone by, the pogrom’s image and the accompanying cruelty was still bright in our eyes. The Felshteener Organization, which arranged the assembly for the memorial days throughout the years, felt duty-bound to create some monument to the memory of the dead.

Therefore, some members suggested erecting a memorial stone in the cemetery inscribed with the names of all those killed in the pogrom. However, the suggestion was not enthusiastically received, and was never implemented.

All the credit for the idea of this book, as a monument to the massacred Jews of Felshteen, is due to Dr. Yehiel Kling. His idea was enthusiastically received. Plans for the proposed book were promptly made, and work on it soon began. Two-and-a-half years entirely devoted to this work were necessary...
The authors and editors primarily intended to commemorate the pogrom victims by including a list of their names and eyewitness reports. In addition, they decided to present the history of the Felsztyń Jewish Community, and the vicissitudes of those who immigrated to the USA. Therefore, the book is set out as follows: The first part, entitled “Di shkhite” (The Slaughter), describes the pogrom; the second part, “In der alter heym” (In the Old Country), outlines the community’s past; and the third part, “In der nayer heym” (In the New Country), consists of immigrants’ stories.

In memorial books written after the war, the order of the first and second parts is usually reversed, but the intention is the same: to erect a memorial to those who were killed. Owing to the scale of the Holocaust, what might have been considered as individual initiatives gradually evolved into a grassroots movement. The survivors feared that the fate of the annihilated communities would be forgotten, especially since the surge of interest in the Holocaust and the related publications after the war clearly flagged after 1948. This happened in Poland, the newly established State of Israel, as well as in the West for various political and ideological reasons. The existence of the Iron Curtain and political censorship in Eastern Europe meant that publication of memorial books was only possible in the “Free World.”

The memorial books devoted to Jewish communities in cities and towns wiped out during the war were compiled after the Second World War on the initiative of individuals, fraternal associations, and various institutions in Israel and the Jewish Diaspora. The titles of these books usually include the name of the city or town and the words yizker-bukh (memorial book), pinkas/pinkes (chronicle), sefer/seyfer (book) or sefer zikkaron (memorial book).

The word pinkas pertains to the old kehillah (community) chronicles, recording information on important people or events. Sometimes memorial books directly refer to the traditional pinkasim by quoting from them or just note that there were no surviving chronicles and, therefore, little is known on the history of the Jewish community in a given area. The expression sefer zikkaron, in turn, carries religious connotations: sefer alludes to a religious book in the holy tongue; zikkaron refers to the sacred memory of the community’s martyrdom. The title may also include the word khurbn — used in Yiddish to refer to the Holocaust (as in the Third Khurbn, with reference to the First and Second Khurban, i.e., destructions of the Jerusalem Temple; the word is also employed in the context of the

6 See also Sylwia Bojczuk, “‘Księgi Pamięci’ — geneza i charakterystyka,” Scriptores — Pamięć — Miejsce — Obecność, no. 1 (2003), pp. 73–75.
Cossack wars in the mid-seventeenth century and the destruction of Jewish communities at the time. In the ongoing discussion about the appropriate word for the Holocaust, this term is often forgotten. It is used especially by the authors of early memorial books (e.g., *Khurbn Levertov*, published in Paris in 1947). Another frequently used Yiddish word to denote the Holocaust is *umkum*, which means mass murder (the term appears in the titles of books about Baranowicze (Baranovichi), Biała Podlaska, Chrzanów, Gąbin, Holszany (Halshany), and Jaworów (Yavoriv). In Hebrew, the words frequently used are *Shoah* and *matzevah* (gravestone), since books are conceived as memorials to those killed.

Establishing the exact number of memorial books published so far is difficult. First of all, it is difficult to determine unambiguously which publications are memorial books and which are not (the authors of critical literature on the subject apply different criteria, sometimes also including historical studies and memoirs in this category). Owing to limited editions and the circulation of certain books — especially those published later on — some of them were not included in the most important and popular catalogs (e.g., the book of Piaski near Lublin).

In the authors’ estimation, 540 memorial books about locations in pre-war Poland had been published by 2005. More than one book was published about certain cities and towns. Sometimes the books were written after a significant time and, in such cases, were intended to complement earlier ones. The motivation behind others was ideological, since they were published by competing or even antagonistic factions. For instance, Bilgoraj has two memorial books written at about the same time: *Bilgoray yizker-bukh* (Bilgoraj Memorial Book) from 1955 by a single author, and *Khurbn Bilgoray* (The Destruction of Bilgoraj) from 1956 written by several people.

For example, in the list of memorial books available in British libraries, among the memorial books on Lublin, there is a book by Robert Kuwałek and Wiesław Wysok, *Lublin: Jerozolima Królestwa Polskiego*, which is a historical account of the Jewish community there. See Cyril Fox and Saul Issroff, *Jewish Memorial (Yizker) Books in the United Kingdom. Destroyed European Jewish Communities* (Tel Aviv: Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain, 2006).

Olga Goldberg-Mulkiewicz provides somewhat different figures, estimating the total number of memorial books at 526, 81 percent of which (that is 428) are about locations within the borders of inter-war Poland (data from 1991). See Goldberg-Mulkiewicz, “Księgi pamięci,” p. 189.


The cities with the largest number of books written about them are: seven each about Wilno and Częstochowa; six about Łódź; and five about Białystok. On the one hand, the total number of 540 volumes significantly exceeds the 413 towns and cities about which there are books. On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that some books describe histories of particular locations as well as the vicinity (hence, titles sometimes include the Hebrew word *ve-hasevivah* or the Yiddish expression *un umgegnt* — “and the surroundings”), or entire regions (*Pinkes Galitsya, Pinkes Zaglembye*), or even countries (*Megilat Polin, Di yidn in Poyln fun di elste tsaytn biz der tsvayter velt-milkhome* — Jews in Poland from the Earliest Times till World War II). That is why the number of 413 “principal” cities and towns should be augmented by 185 locations designated as “vicinities,” specified either in the main title or in subtitles. The Święciany (Švenčionys) memorial book, which includes data on 23 different locations from the Święciany district, is one example.¹¹

The languages used in the memorial books from inter-war Poland are: Hebrew, Yiddish, English, Polish, Spanish, French, German, and Russian. Most books were published in bilingual, trilingual or even quadrilingual versions. Monolingual books constitute only 31 percent of the total. The Hebrew-Yiddish combination, in various proportions, is most common, occurring in 193 books (35.7 percent of the total).¹² A total of 20 books (22.2 percent) include English texts alongside the two Jewish languages. These are usually prefaces or summaries, and more rarely, independent texts not translated from Yiddish or Hebrew, which are meant for younger readers unacquainted with the Jewish languages. The third most numerous category are books written exclusively in Yiddish (88 books — 16.3 percent). The number of books using only Hebrew is 74, i.e., 13.7 percent of the total. Only 26 books employ Yiddish and English, while 15 use English

¹¹ Shimon Kants, ed., *Yizker bukh nokh dray-un-tsvantsik khorev gevorene yidishe kehiles in sventsyaner gegnt; Sventsyan, Nay-Sventsyan, Alt un Nay Dugelishok, Ignaline, Lingo-
myan, Kaltiyan, Duksh, Podbrodz, Lintop, Kimelishok, Haydutsishok, Stayatsishok, Maligon, Dzikevinesh, Polyush, Gaviken, Vidz, Kazyan, Kobilnik, Nyementshin, Postav,
Yodi, Myori* (Tel Aviv: Irgun Yotzei Aizor Sventzian b’Israel, 1965).

¹² According to Michlean Amir, about 24 percent of the books use Yiddish as the main language, while 64 percent employ Hebrew. See Michlean Amir, From Memorials to Invaluable Historical Documentation: Using Yizkor Books As Resources for Studying a Vanished World, Association of Jewish Libraries Annual Convention, La Jolla, CA, June 24–27, 2001. www.jewishlibraries.org/main/Portals/0/AJL_Assets/documents/Publica-
and Hebrew. Other combinations occur in ten or so books, while the Polish language features, usually very insignificantly, in 14.

In the authors’ view, the books in Yiddish deserve special attention, since the text translated into Hebrew often underwent various transformations not only in the process of translating, but also for ideological reasons. The aim of the original was primarily to describe facts with the greatest possible accuracy. However, with time, various interpretations were added, reflecting authors’ or editors’ intentions and views. Abraham Wein gives examples of the oral testimony by Barukh Levin recorded originally in Yiddish and published in two versions in Tel Aviv in the yizker book of Żołudek and Orla (Orlya) of 1967 (emphases and comments added — M.A.-G., A.K.):

Yiddish version: “I left my escorts standing about 100 meters from the railroad track. Mishka and Dimka were covering me. I left Vanka Trubach [Trubacz — Trubatch] to keep a watch on the railway that passed above. I began digging underneath the tracks. At the height of the digging Vanka Trubach turned to me and said, “Baruch, the train is coming closer.” [quoted in Russian: “Baruch, poyezd idiot”]

Hebrew version: “I had my two escorts stand to my right and left, each one watching in one direction that led into the distance. I began digging with much fervor, as if my hands were performing some sacred task. It seemed to me as if not only my heart but my digging hands were reliving, in those minutes, the memory of the town that had been wiped out, the memory of my daughters, my wife, and my father. While I was still in the midst of digging, and meditating on mourning and revenge, I suddenly heard Trubach calling to me: “Baruch, I see that a train’s coming in the distance.”

And thus, from the Hebrew version, we shall not find out how far from the railroad track the author was, what the names of his companions were, or that the conversation was conducted in Russian. What is added and stressed, however, is the interpretation of those events as a sacred act of commemoration of both the closest family and the whole community.

The great majority of memorial books were published in Israel (British Mandate Palestine), the United States, and Argentina. In Israel, 427 of these books were published (over 79 percent of the total), 56 (over ten percent) in the United States, and 27 (five percent) in Argentina. Eleven books were published in Germany, five in France, three in Canada, two each in Australia and Poland, and one each in South Africa, Mexico, and Uruguay.  

The small number of books published in Poland is due primarily to the brief activity of Jewish fraternal associations, for all intents and purposes, until the end of the 1940s. Even if Polish associations started working on publications in Poland, they usually completed the task elsewhere. For example, the Lublin memorial book, on which work was started in Poland, ended up being published in Paris. The political situation after 1950 significantly limited the possibility of both institutional and individual official contacts between Poland and fraternal associations, but did not prevent them altogether. Among the authors of books published outside Poland, some resided in Poland (including professional historians, e.g., Tatiana Brustin-Berenstein). In addition, foreign publishers often had to resort to material collected by Polish research institutions, mainly the Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny — ŻIH). Such editorial cooperation, however, which, according to archival sources, had been fairly intensive before, was suspended.

The earliest memorial books on Pińsk and Łódź were published during the Second World War in the United States. As of 1947, publication of memorial books, mostly by single authors, began in the DP camps in Germany. Altogether, 55 books (over ten percent of the total) were published

14 In four books, more than one country of publication was given.
15 In the Jewish Historical Institute, several letters have been preserved confirming such contacts between particular fraternal associations and the Central Jewish Historical Commission (CZKH). For example, a letter dated April 26, 1947, from the fraternal association of Zamość Jews shows that close contacts were maintained with the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP), and employees were asked for help in obtaining material for the Zamość memorial book and offered participation in the studies prepared for publication by the committee in Poland (AZIH, CKŻP, CZKH, file no. 303/XX/157, sheet 95).
17 Lodzer yizker-bukh (New York: United Emergency Relief Committee for the City of Lodz, 1943).
18 By 1949, in Germany, memorial books on the following towns and cities had been
by 1950; 103 (19 percent) between 1951 and 1960; 177 (over 32 percent) in the 1960s; 127 (over 23 percent) in the 1970s; 44 (eight percent) in the 1980s; and only 29 (over five percent) between 1991 and 2005. Since 2000, six books have been published.

As a rule, books published in the Diaspora used primarily Yiddish, which was the only language in 25 out of 27 books published in Argentina. Also, all the books published in Germany, France, Mexico, Poland, and Uruguay were written exclusively in Yiddish. In Australia, Canada, and South Africa, English was used in addition to Yiddish, and in Argentina the other languages were Spanish (two books) and Hebrew (one book). Yiddish and English prevailed in the books published in the USA (24 books exclusively in Yiddish and 19 with both languages). This clearly contrasted with the lesser role of Hebrew, which only appeared in eight books, and was never the exclusive language.

The books published in Israel are more diversified linguistically, but the predominant combinations are Hebrew-Yiddish (189 books, almost 44 percent) and Hebrew-Yiddish-English (114, over 26 percent).

In time, the importance of Yiddish gradually diminished owing to the shrinking number of users. In Poland, this was due to mass emigration of Jews; in Israel, because of linguistic discrimination in favor of Hebrew; and, in the USA, owing to the ongoing assimilation of Jewish immigrants. While the books written exclusively in Yiddish constituted over 65 percent of the total in 1950, this decreased conspicuously in the following decades. In the 1950s, Yiddish accounted for 34 percent (35 books); in the 1960s, 5.6 percent (ten books); and, in the 1970s, just over two percent (three). Moreover, in the 1980s, only three books were published in Yiddish. The last books written exclusively in Yiddish were about Łaskarzew (published in France in 1985/1986) and Bełchatów (published in Argentina in 1986). The status of Yiddish decreased not only in terms of the number of books in which it was used, but also in occupying less and less space within the publications. It was supplanted principally by Hebrew, seeing that most books were written in Israel, especially in the 1960s, following the Eichmann trial, which aroused great interest in the Holocaust all over the world.

19 Five books were published over two or even three decades.
Similarly, in time, the number of books published in the Diaspora was much diminished. By 1950, 47 books, or 85 percent, were published outside Israel. Later, the ratio fell from 27 percent in the 1950s to over nine percent in the 1970s. (This was probably due to a diminishing numbers of Jews from these cities and towns outside of Israel.)

The expression “memorial book” conjures up the image of a thick volume, which is usually the case. However, some of the books are very modest in length. For instance, the book on Dąbrowa Białostocka is only 38 pages long, the book on Równe (1947) has 43 pages, and the books on Belchatów (1959) and Horodec (Haradzets) (1920) have 44 pages each. The books on Rejowiec, Tarnów (1970), and Złoczów (1947) also have fewer than 50 pages.

However, in most cases, memorial books range from 200 to over 1,000 pages in various formats, e.g., Pinkas Słonim about the Jewish community in the town of Słonim (Slonim) in the former Nowogródek (Novogrudok) voivodeship consists of four volumes compiled between 1961 and 1979. The length of the book does not depend on the size of the given community: longer books were sometimes written about smaller communities of several hundred people, registering almost every resident, than about large urban agglomerations. This is easily explained by the stronger bonds uniting smaller communities and the possibility of more detailed descriptions owing to their limited numbers, e.g., Gliniany (Hlyniany) near Lwów (Lviv) has three memorial books, whereas Wołkowysk (Vawkavysk), Husiatyn (Husyatin), and Ostróg (Ostroh) have four each. By contrast, the capital city of Warsaw has “only” three memorial books, and Lwów one. The vast majority of memorial books were published by Jewish fraternal associations scattered all over the world. Frequently, though not always, the lack of a memorial book devoted to a particular, sometimes sizeable, community was related to the absence of a corresponding organization. Two examples of this are Izbica and Łęczna. However, it should be borne in mind that there are exceptions to this “classical” rule: A significant number of books were published by institutions other than fraternal associations, individuals, or groups of former residents from a given locality. Some books by single authors were self-published, e.g., about Kielmy (Kelmė), and Korzec (Korets); others were published by informal associations or small groups of former residents, called a Committee of Friends (e.g., about Biała Podlaska, in 1953), Group of Friends (Białystok, in 1947), or simply Friends (e.g., Friends of Lubartów). Other publishers, including academic research institutes, such as Yad Vashem and Kibbutz Lohamei ha-Getaot (Ghetto
Fighters’ Kibbutz), often published whole series of memorial books, usually in cooperation with specific fraternal associations; philanthropic institutions (aid committees) active even before 1939, mainly in the USA, engaging in charitable activities for the benefit of their home communities (about Brańsk, Gliniany, Grajewo, and Krynki); political organizations (the Youth Branch of the Zionist Organization — Łódź, in 1947/1948); libraries (Orthodox Library — about Łódź, in 2005, and Workers’ Library — about Kolno); trade institutions (Workers’ Association — about Pińsk, in 1941); women’s organizations (the Women’s Association of Dawidgródek — about Dawidgródek [Davyd-Haradok], in 1981); Israeli schools, usually in cooperation with fraternal associations (Yaacov Krol School in Petah-Tikva — about Skalat, in 1971), and, finally, kibbutzim (e.g., Kibbutz Lohamei ha-Getaot and Kibbutz ha-Meuchad (United Kibbutz, i.e., union of several kibbutzim) — about Klesów (Klesiv).

In many books published by fraternal associations, the publisher was not a single institution, but several in different parts of the world. Owing to the need to coordinate editorial work, one or more fraternal associations would sometimes establish special editorial committees, e.g., the Telechany (Telekhany) Memorial Book Committee, or the Paris Committee for the Monograph on the Jewish Community of Lublin.

Collective memorial books were edited by one or more people, who did not always originate from the eponymous town or city. Often, one editor worked on several publications, which, in time, led to the development of professional memorial book editors. In that respect, the record holder is David Shtokfish, originally from Lublin, who edited as many as 21 memorial books between 1955 and 1987. Shimon Kants edited 16 books, and Nachman Blumenthal, Abraham Samuel Stein, and Yitzhak Zigelman edited seven each.

The prefaces alone tell us a great deal about the authors’ aims. For example, in the Rejowiec memorial book, the author explains his objectives in the Introduction, which is signed “Bergen-Belsen, the month of Nisan 5707 (March/April, 1947)”: I am no writer or poet, nor do I aspire to become one.

I only wish to express my sadness and anger, and describe what befell my home, my people, together with the destruction of six million holy martyrs.

I will empty my heart of the rust that has accumulated inside me,
penetrated my body so deeply..., so deeply...and devours myself, as rust consumes iron...

But how? How can I convey it to you?

May the handful of collected materials, which is merely a blurred reflection of the real destruction of my hometown Rejowiec serve as a memorial to the exterminated holy martyrs. May they rest in peace!

The editorial preface of the Vilnius memorial book, from 1974, reads as follows:

The Wilno chronicle may become an address for any of you, whoever has something to tell (in either of our languages) about the old Wilno, about the nearby towns, about the Holocaust and resistance movement. For texts of documentary value as yet unpublished (memoirs, witnesses’ testimonies, and the like), for artistic pieces by former residents of Wilno, and for those devoted to the city. For everything that means remembrance and continuation.

Even books written from today’s perspective evoke emotions in their authors similar to those recorded directly after the war. In the preface to the English edition of the Zaklików memorial book, the author admits:

To tell the truth, my hands are shaking as I sit to write the author’s preface to the English translation of my book. My heart’s desire and the dream of a lifetime have now come to pass. After the Hebrew edition’s publication over a decade ago, I promised myself, and to all those who don’t read Hebrew, that I would make every effort to ensure the book’s translation into English, the universal language. Now, here it is before you. All the obstacles, the difficulties, the concerns have vanished, and I am filled with satisfaction and pride as I bless the resultant product.

For the publication of the book the author donated reparations he received for being a “graduate” of Nazi labor and concentration camps, as he put

it ironically. He collected the rest of the funds required from his acquaintances, former Zaklików residents.

Most memorial books are arranged according to a similar form. After the foreword (sometimes in the form of several texts by different authors, editors or organizations), there is an article outlining the history of the given locality, followed by detailed texts on the religious, economic, social, political, and cultural life, and various organizations, associations, and groups active in the given area. The next part is frequently devoted to specific streets, buildings, and other topographical details, as well as important and particularly colorful figures. A considerable part of the book consists of accounts related to the Holocaust, reminiscences about the murdered, and survivors’ testimonies. No less important are the accounts of those who returned to their hometowns after the war. At the end, there is information about fraternal associations and other organizations connected with the particular city or town, as well as obituaries, often about entire families, and lists of identified victims or survivors. Many memorial books contain literary sections of prose and poetry devoted to the given localities, which are often amateurish, but also some works of greater literary merit. A very important element is iconography: maps, plans (sometimes professional, at other times amateurish; some, especially those depicting very small localities, represent almost every house), photographs, reproductions of pictures, and documents. The memorial books often quote obscure archival materials or press articles. Many memoirs, especially those concerning contemporary or very recent events, are highly charged emotionally and might sometimes lack objectivity. In spite of this, they provide valuable material for historians and cultural researchers.

Some scholars consider the usefulness of texts included in memorial books as rather limited.24 The authors of this article believe such caution is excessive. Fairly often texts from memorial books provide the only surviving materials for research on the history of the Holocaust in the given locality and the immediate post-war period. The latter texts are no less dramatic than the war-time memoirs. Almost every book includes a selection of such accounts, usually entitled “X without Jews,” “X after the Holocaust,” or with only the name of the town and a date.

All in all, memorial books are an immensely valuable source, but for years they have been neglected and underestimated, and have seldom been

24 The eminent historian Yaakov Shatzki is known for his critical appraisal of most yizker books; see his reviews quoted in footnotes 27 and 33.
MEMORIAL BOOKS AS A REMEMBERANCE OF COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

the subject of scholarly research and university courses, owing largely to language barriers, as well as their extent and scope.

The anthology of texts from memorial books translated into English and edited by Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, although an important step in popularizing the genre, has paradoxically reinforced the belief in the popular and nostalgic character of memorial books. The book consists of about 80 texts from about 60 localities, primarily small towns, while totally overlooking the biggest cities in former Poland. This was partly because the authors, as anthropologists, were particularly interested in the texts describing customs, rites, and superstitions, and moreover, in order to reach a wider range of readers, they selected particularly “colorful” narratives. Thus, there is a need for further selections of texts from memorial books that would do them justice as useful sources for researching specific historical periods, especially the Holocaust and the post-war period.

In Poland, although memorial books, translated, and mostly “second-hand,” are sometimes used by historians inquiring into the past of specific localities, they have been given very scant attention until recent years. In 2009, an anthology comprising about 160 texts from over 80 memorial books was published in Poland. Earlier, the only major Polish study drawing on memorial books were the articles by Olga Goldberg-Mulkiewicz, a Polish ethnographer living in Israel, published, among others, in the volume *Stara i nowa ojczyzna. Ślady kultury Żydów polskich* (Lodz: Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, 2003).

Classic Yiddish-language texts on memorial books were penned by the eminent historian Yaakov Shatzki. Another scholar, Yehoshua Rotenberg, in the article “Yizker-bikher — tsi bloyz a sheyne matseyve?” (Memorial Books: Are They Merely a Beautiful Gravestone?) asks the rhetorical

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question whether memorial books are merely beautiful tombstones. He describes them as a unique phenomenon and suggests they should be treated as a whole rather than considered separately. He perceives them as modern counterparts of ancient lamentations, on the one hand, and epic poems, on the other. He also believes they may sometimes contribute to revisions of certain historical facts. He values them above personal memoirs, since in the latter everyone can write whatever he wishes, whereas in memorial books an informal control mechanism is in place: “...the author knows he is writing for other residents, who would laugh at him, if his descriptions were false; the editorial committee and other residents of the city or town do not permit any distortions or exaggerations.”28 This is a somewhat idealized view, especially since the editors, as mentioned earlier, did not always originate from the given place, but, as shown below, “the control mechanism” does exist.

A good introduction to the memorial-book genre in English is Kugelmass and Boyarin’s preface to their anthology, and an article in which Abraham Wein regards such books as historical sources.29 Also noteworthy are studies in French by Rachel Ertel30 and by Annette Wieviorka and Itzhok Niborski.31

Thanks to various websites, especially www.jewishgen.com, parts of memorial books have been translated into English. However, caution is advisable, since translations are often done by amateur volunteers with a limited knowledge of Yiddish and, more importantly, of the realities described. As a result, various expressions, including names of people, towns, among others, especially the Polish ones or those derived from Polish and other Slavic languages, are liable to distortion.

Despite these deficiencies, translations available on the Internet are a kind of “shortcut” to the contents of particular books, for some researchers, allowing them to overcome their linguistically hermetic nature. These translations also help to popularize yizker books among a wider public. All in all, owing to their complex nature, reliable translations of memorial books into various languages require collective, international efforts.

30 Rachel Ertel, Le shtetl. La bourgade juive de Pologne de la tradition à la modernité (Paris: Payot, 1982).
Considering the heterogeneous character of memorial books, they can be viewed from various perspectives:

1) For the authors, their families, and fraternal associations, they were, and still are, a way of commemorating their relatives and communities. Memorial books are still written, sometimes with entirely new titles, or in the form of extended, supplemented editions or new language versions. Some books were written for more personal motives: to leave something behind for the children and grandchildren. According to many editors, they should be part of the home library of all former residents of the given locality. Other authors and editors, realizing the historical significance of their efforts, expressed the hope they would contribute to greater knowledge, especially about the Holocaust.

2) From the contemporary point of view, memorial books serve as sources of information about the given communities, for scholarly research or personal interest (e.g., genealogical research).

3) In Poland, they acquire an additional dimension, enabling present residents of towns or cities in question to view places and events there from a different perspective, and promoting reflection on shared history.32

4) They are also important from the educational point of view, which applies to readers in different countries. There are probably no comparable sources presenting such a multidimensional picture of Jewish life in Eastern Europe before, during, and after the Holocaust.

In the 1950s, in his review of several memorial books, Yaakov Shatzki wrote:

Perhaps all the material [sent to the editors] should be handed over to professionals, who would use them in their own texts, acknowledging the contributions from all the co-authors. This would make the books shorter, but easier to read and remember. In the form in which they are written today, they are primarily tombstones, not books. As is well known, no one reads tombstones.33

Today, over 50 years after these words were written, we appreciate the fact

that most of the material was published in its original form, especially in the earlier books, while the later ones were often carefully worked on by professional editors. Thanks to this, contemporary researchers can use, interpret, and appropriately refer to them in their own texts, acknowledging the original authors. The fact that *yizker bikher* are “tombstones, not books” is also valuable from today’s point of view.

Returning to Shatzki’s assessment, it should be borne in mind that he personally coauthored a number of memorial books (e.g., the books on Częstochowa, in 1947), and edited the book on Mława (in 1950), which might have made him particularly sensitive to their shortcomings. Despite their amateurish character and carelessness, as manifested in clumsy style, repetitions, and simple spelling errors, which may occasionally irritate or discourage readers, these less carefully or professionally edited books are also more authentic. In professionally edited books, on the one hand, the political beliefs of editors or editorial committees sometimes influenced the content, while, on the other hand, such “biased” approaches are also interesting to investigate. With respect to their historical value, most memorial books may not be particularly valuable sources in the traditional sense. Today, however, when so much importance is attached to oral testimonies, frequently given many years after the war, the accounts in memorial books should also be considered. Sometimes, two types of testimonies can be compared for verification.

Memorial books lend themselves to analysis on a number of different levels. They can obviously be treated as sources of information by researchers from various disciplines. However, it is also interesting to study how memorial books are received, not just among scholars, but also among the residents of the places described — both Jewish and non-Jewish. Even if they present an idealized picture of the past, and emotions prevail over a dispassionate assessment of reality in texts about the Holocaust and, especially, the post-war period, the reactions evoked frequently enable verification, while, at the same time, drawing attention to other complex issues. Sometimes, there are passionate polemics, not free of various biases (the archives of fraternal associations have some extensive correspondence on the subject). Consequently, the ways in which memorial books are received differ greatly. For example, descriptions by Bernard (Ber) Mark, who was a Communist and headed the Jewish Historical Institute from 1949 to 1966, and coauthored several memorial books, which he considered scrupulously faithful to historical truth, can be compared to Chaim Shapiro’s comments, his *landsman* from Łomża, who holds entirely opposed views and refers to
Mark’s past and post-war career in his polemic. This kind of confrontation is reminiscent of post-war contact between fraternal associations abroad and Jews who remained in Poland. Contrary to the popular notion of very limited contact of this type, memorial books provide a more multidimensional picture of the situation. *Dos bukh fun Lublin* is an example of a collaboration of communities based in different countries on a memorial book. The idea of publishing it was conceived in 1947 in Wrocław during a reunion of Jews originating from Lublin. Initially, the editorial committee consisted exclusively of people residing in Poland. Likewise, most of the source material (memoirs, accounts, and documents) came from Poland. However, the book was eventually published in Paris in 1952, as a “coproduction” of fraternal associations from Poland, France, the USA, and Israel. Possibly, if the political circumstances had been different after 1948/1949, some memorial books would have been compiled in Poland, in close cooperation with local communities of survivors.

Another interesting subject for research is the comparison of different books on the same city or town. Taking the example of Warsaw, the book edited by Yitzhak Grünbaum, published in Tel Aviv in 1953 as part of the *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora* series, includes texts by well-known scholars and artists, such as Yakov Lestchinsky, Nachman Blumenthal, Rachela Auerbach, and Zygmunt Turkov. The book published in Buenos Aires in 1955, edited by Pinye Katz, includes some articles written from a clearly Communist perspective, as well as an enthusiastic report on the blossoming Jewish culture in the Polish capital in the early 1950s. These books also...

35 See also the letter, April 12, 1948, from the Jewish Historical Institute to the Central Committee of Jews in Poland concerning contact established between the institute and particular fraternal associations for collaboration on memorial books. Wydział Ziomkostw (Department of Fraternal Associations) AZIH, CKŻP, file no. 303/XIX/1–8, pp. 27–28.
36 The author Tzalel Blitz’s observations reflected the contemporary situation, to a certain extent: patronage of the Yiddish culture by the state. However, such interpretations are sometimes surprising in their extremely ideological approach and naive perception. For instance, as he enthusiastically claims, antisemitism in the People’s Republic of Poland has completely disappeared, and leftist writers’ works, discriminated against by the Jewish circles before the war, are published in thousands of copies. See Tzalel Blitz, “50 varshever yorn inem lebn fun der yidisher literatur,” in Pinye Katz et al., eds., *Pinkes Varshes* (Buenos Aires: Landslayt-Farayn fun Varshe un Umgegnt in Argentine, 1955), cols. 543–544. For more information on Yiddish culture in Poland, see Joanna
bear testimony to the contact between their authors and Jewish organizations in Poland. The Biłgoraj memorial book of 1956, however, gives an entirely different impression: The authors assume they will never return to their hometown, even for a short time, and the memorial book will be their only comfort and link with the past.

It is relatively easy to establish which books were professionally edited and to what extent, sometimes simply by considering such aspects as spelling (e.g., family names), design, and the index of names and places. However, it is difficult to know which, to what extent, and why certain texts were omitted. Finding out this information would require research in the archives of fraternal communities and individuals. This might lead to some very interesting discoveries, e.g., which material was rejected, altered or simply censored, and why.

Shatzki’s ideal was the book on Tarnów, coauthored by the recognized historians, Dr. Rafael Mahler, Dr. Abraham Chomet, Dr. Wilhelm Berkelhammer, and Dr. David Eichenholz. He even calls it a definitive history of Tarnów Jews, claiming it can serve as a model for regional monographs, and is useful and interesting with respect not only to the specific region, but also to the history of Jews, in general. By contrast, his evaluation of the Chełm memorial book of 1954 is definitely negative due to careless editing, and also because, in his view, the parts on the literature and folklore, including the tales about the wise men of Chełm, are out of place in a work about the Holocaust. He also criticizes the book for including extensive sections on fraternal associations. He believes that the folklore should have been discussed in the context of Polish ethnographical studies on the Chełm region, which shows that his evaluation criteria are strictly academic. Finally, in his view, the book should only have been half as long.

In fact, the book on Tarnów has 928 pages, and that on Chełm has over 350 pages in 731 columns, but it is larger in format, so they are actually similar in size. The book on Chełm deals with the Holocaust to a greater extent than that on Tarnów, which devotes fewer than 100 pages to the subject. The editors, who were aware of this, published a second, 443-page book devoted primarily to the Holocaust, in 1968. From the contemporary viewpoint, the Chełm memorial book, although certainly not a regional

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Nalewajko-Kulikov and Magdalena Ruta’s article, “Yiddish Culture in Poland after the Holocaust,” in this volume.

monograph, is closer to the conventional yizker–book genre than that on Tarnów.

In general, Shatzki regards memorial books as historical studies, expecting their authors and editors to be conversant with the relevant literature in at least six languages: Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, Russian, German, and French, which were prerequisite among pre-war historians on Jewish subjects.

However, survivors view memorial books from an entirely different perspective. They are generally interested in details about everyday life rather than the academic standard of the text. As a result, other controversial issues arise:

Now let us examine how the party spectrum is recorded for posterity and history in Łomża: Agudat Yisrael fared with exactly 20 and one half lines; 162 words (in the Hebrew text, 29 lines). The Mizrachi did a little better with three-quarters of a page, plus six photos of its youth organization, Hashomer Hadati, forerunner of Bnei Akiva. General Zionists got eight pages plus 14 photos. Zionists-Revisionists — 23 lines plus one picture. Poalei Zion (Labor Zionists) — 15 pages plus 20 pictures. Bund — 12 pages plus the pictures. The Communists got four pages and three pictures.

Is this my hometown? I don’t recognize it! Was this deliberate falsification or simply lack of material? And look who writes an article on the Social Zionists: a familiar face — how can I forget him? He was a part-time geography teacher in Talmud Torah. Then one day he didn’t show up for class. Rumors had it that he skipped town, charged with a crime unheard of among Jews, namely sexual assault. Somehow he made it to Eretz Yisroel — and now his photo is decorating this book!38

It may be assumed that there were other similar responses. In some prefaces, tension among the survivors can be sensed, e.g., bitterness or resentment because not all the people asked for help responded.

The Holocaust casts a shadow over most texts published in memorial books, even in the chapters that are not about the war period. Recollections from earlier periods are often interspersed with references to the later destruction, even when least expected. For example, the author of the Zaklików book, while extolling pre-war cuisine and describing the region where

he used to live as a place “where you could even get birds’ milk,” realizes in retrospect that the healthy nutrition his parents, especially his mother, gave him in childhood and early youth played an immensely important role in his survival through the camps and other difficult circumstances.39

However, references to the Holocaust are generally made at the end, reflecting sadly how everything belongs to the past, and expressing despair, protest, and hate toward the murderers.

Usually, the elegiac character of these books is striking from the beginning. For example, in the poem “Matzevah of My Town,” opening Khurbn Bilgoray, Yoneh Chaim Kronenberg confesses:

In the wind wafting through the branches I hear my loved ones
In the rustle of leaves on the trees — their secret conversation
And in the mournful singing of birds among the matzevot
The weeping of infants.40

In most cases, the authors emphasize the significance of their city or town for the whole country, or even the world, especially the Jewish Diaspora. For instance, the authors of Khurbn Bilgoray are proud of the local Jewish printing house, claiming it made Bilgoraj famous throughout the world. Piotrków Trybunalski acquired similar fame, even more deservedly, for its contribution to the field of Jewish printing. Thus, the authors of the book about Pulawy stress the city’s literary tradition; in the Siedlce memorial book, Zionist traditions are mentioned; and the Lublin memorial books refer to the city’s image as Ir va-em be-Israel (Jewish Mother City),41 “Little Jerusalem,” or “the Jerusalem of the Kingdom of Poland.”

Authors of memoirs usually devote some space to well-known people originating from, or associated with, the given towns or cities (e.g., in the

41 This description of Lublin comes from a seventeenth century document. The Hebrew term refers to a biblical section, in which a major city is represented as “giving birth” to smaller ones. The fact that Lublin was thus described demonstrates not merely its significance as an independent city, but also its “maternal function” in relation to a dozen or so smaller towns, such as Chełm, Hrubieszów, Izbica, Tyszowce, among others. In the memorial books of Kalisz (in 1979/1980), Kraków (in 1958/1959), Łódź (in 1947/1948), Mińsk (in 1975–1985), Opatów (in 1966), and Vilnius (in 1951 and 1975), the expression Ir va-em be-Israel even appears in the titles.
memorial book of Kutno, there is a selection of short articles on Sholem Asch, who was born there; in the book about Białystok, there is a biographical note on Ludwik Zamenhof; the Sanok book includes a long article on Rabbi Meir Shapiro, the founder and first rector of the famous Lublin Ye-shiva, who was the Rabbi of Sanok from 1921 to 1924; while the Zamość memorial book mentions Rosa Luxemburg, as a “she-eagle that soared from the Zamość nest.” The memoirs also recall events engraved in the residents’ memories — both happy (e.g., a visit from a famous tzaddik [miracle rabbi] and tragic (e.g., murders and accidents). Some texts were also authored by eminent writers, not necessarily Jews, e.g., Sholem Asch contributed to the Kutno book, Isaac Bashevis Singer to the Biłgoraj book in 1956; and Stanisław Vincenz to the Kołomyja (Kolomiya) book.

Memorial books from smaller towns and villages often contain fairly extensive sections devoted to colorful figures, from simple people to scholars. Thus, there are biographical notes on the local rabbis, melamedim (teachers), kehillah activists and philanthropists, alongside those of poor people, or simply beggars. Several books include sections on local meshugeners (“nutcases”). In normal circumstances, they would most likely have slipped into oblivion, but the tragedy of the Holocaust made them worthy of being remembered.

There are numerous texts on both the legendary and documented past of cities and towns. In this context, there are some surprising interpretations of the etymology of proper names — often considerably different from the Polish ones — place names derived from Hebrew in order to substantiate ancient ties of Jews with the given locality.

A great deal of space is devoted to descriptions of fairs and folk rites, e.g., several books describe procedures for exorcising dybbuks, and weddings in cemeteries, as a way of averting epidemics.

Descriptions of everyday life, relations with the Christian

population, and struggling with the requirements of tradition while striving for modernity are extremely interesting. Another extensively discussed topic is religious as well as secular education, with critical or humorous recollections from *chederim* (Jewish elementary religious schools), on the one hand, and secular secondary schools (including Polish schools), on the other.

Since these accounts, evocative of certain scenes in classical Yiddish literature, e.g., depictions of holidays in *A Shtetl* by Asch, contrast dramatically with what followed, it is hardly surprising that they are often idealized. However, this is not always so, and many memorial books describe conflicts and divisions within local communities. There are many depictions of such places as synagogues, *batei midrash* (study houses), and cemeteries. While some provide the few, if not the only, existing representations of buildings destroyed during the war, others are amateurish, and may actually be misleading, with respect to the location, construction, and fittings.

Despite some books drawing on material published earlier in Polish, especially in texts providing historical information, there are few details on contacts with the Christian population, although some books do have separate chapters on mutual relations in particular periods. As in classical Yiddish literature, Christians appear on important occasions, e.g., during visits from a famous *tzaddik* or miracle *rebbe*, universally respected by people of all faiths.

Much space is devoted to political parties, their local activists and members — from religious parties, such as Agudat Yisrael or Mizrachi, to illegal Communist groups. Memorial books also note former residents of towns and cities who made outstanding contributions to the struggle for the State of Israel. The different ways in which young *chalutzim* (pioneers) endeavored to reach Palestine before the war are also described.

In some memorial books, the subject of the Holocaust is dominant, while, in others, it is afforded relatively scant attention. Occasionally, the subject is totally absent, as in the Międzyrzec Podlaski book of 1957, which presents the history of the Jews there from the early settlement until the outbreak of the First World War. Naturally, fraternal associations tried to present the entire history of particular communities, so the same groups frequently published several books in succession (often at considerable intervals), each filling the gaps of the preceding one. Thus, former residents

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of Białystok, living in New York, published their first, two-volume memorial book in 1949–1950. However, like the Międzyrzec memorial book, it only went up to the First World War. The lack of a section devoted to the Holocaust was compensated for by publishing an album of photos with a section on the Holocaust in 1951, and a booklet of fewer than 100 pages commemorating Białystok Holocaust victims in the first half of the 1960s. Ultimately, a full account of the Holocaust was not presented until Der byalistoker yizker-bukh in 1982 in the traditional mode. Yet, there are also memorial books entirely focused on the Holocaust, such as Podlyashe in natsi-klem. Notitsn fun khurbn, which focuses on Biała Podlaska and the vicinity, edited by M. I. Faygenboym and published in Argentina in 1953.

Generally, the sections devoted to the Holocaust in the great majority of books are survivor testimonies. Sometimes such memoirs were expressly written for the memorial books, while others, especially for later books, used existing accounts available in various research institutions. Their authors were usually either former residents of the specific localities or came there during the war. In many cases, the accounts of wartime experiences did not focus exclusively on the particular hometown, but encompassed the authors’ entire wartime odyssey, including other ghettos, the Aryan side, and camps. Many memoirs are in the form of oral reports. Their vocabulary and style often tell a great deal about the writers: Linguistic analysis of memoirs can provide clues as to the authors’ origins, social status, and education.

In the memoirs, two basic styles of writing about the Holocaust may be distinguished: the emotional and the documentary. In the former, authors express their sorrow, anger or desire for revenge and mourn their loved ones; in the latter, their objective is to convey information as accurately as possible, providing the date and sometimes even the hour when events occurred. Naturally, these two perspectives may alternate.

Some material consists mainly of documents from the wartime and

50 I. Shmulevitsch, Der byalistoker yizker bukh (New York: The Białystoker Center, 1982).
post-war sources. These include reprints of documents generated by the German or Jewish administration (such as German directives and announcements, and minutes of Judenrat meetings); texts from the German and Jewish press (both the official paper, Gazeta Żydowska, and underground publications); and the files of cases against German war criminals and collaborators from Polish, Allied, German, and Israeli courts (e.g., the Hrubieszów memorial book includes transcripts of shorthand notes from the examination of two witnesses during the Eichmann trial: Tsvi Fekhter about the “death march” and the Hrubieszów Jews in 1939, and from Jakub Biskupicz about the Sobibór camp). Frequent use of such material in memorial books implies intensive contact between the editors and various research and archival institutions. Numerous memorial books include reprints of documents from Polish archives, principally the Jewish Historical Institute (files of the Jewish Social Mutual Assistance and the Joint, as well as testimonies). Frequently, they were the first and sometimes the only publications in which such documents appeared in print. An example is a handwritten report from the Ringelblum Archive describing the expulsion of Jews from Pruszków, which was included in the town’s memorial book in 1966.52

As far as the Holocaust and the post-war period are concerned, memorial books present a much more diversified picture than might be expected. Abraham Wein, in the above-mentioned article, identifies six thematic groups important for the historiography of that period:

1. Participation of Jews in the armed struggle against Nazis and their collaborators.
2. Fate of Jews in death camps, concentration camps, and forced labor camps.
3. Attitude of the non-Jewish population toward Jews; and the Righteous Gentiles, who helped and saved Jews.
4. Situation of Jews in the cities and towns of western Ukraine and Byelorussia (under Polish administration until 1939 and, then, Soviet rule from September 17, 1939 to June 22, 1941); and fate of Jewish refugees in the USSR during the Second World War.
5. (Legal and illegal) emigration to Palestine and survivors who died fighting for the freedom and independence of Israel.

6. History of the Jewish communities after the Holocaust.

The striking fact about this list is which subjects are included and in which order, and which are not. This is partly due to various trends in Israeli historiography when Wein wrote this (in the early 1970s). The above categories should be supplemented with such subjects as the public’s feelings before the outbreak of the war (memoirs about the atmosphere before the war, especially several days or weeks before its outbreak, and the descriptions of its early days), ghettos, and the Judenrat.

Depictions of the Jewish struggle against Nazis and their collaborators encompass both underground activity (memoirs of resistance movement members in ghettos and camps) and military service in all kinds of Allied units. Some memorial books include memoirs of, or biographical notes on, people from the town in question who distinguished themselves in the struggle against Germans, not only in occupied Poland but also beyond its borders. Such descriptions, especially in the early books, are highly emotional and ideologically slanted. All manifestations of resistance are presented in an exalted and somewhat inflated manner, and the participants are often pictured as indomitable and impeccable heroes. In one of the articles in the Zagłębie memorial book, the following excerpt clearly exemplifies this approach:

Did the Jews of Zagłębie go to their deaths like lambs to the slaughter? No! The Jews of Zagłębie did not allow themselves to be slaughtered so easily. The Jews of Zagłębie — and especially Jewish youth — fought. They fought in all ways available to them and did not give up the fight as long as there were any Jews left in Zagłębie.

It is worth noting there was not a single case of treason among the fighters. They never displayed any signs of weakness. As if forged in iron was their desire to fight the murderers, fight to the last drop of blood. Whenever they had to confront death in action, they did this with dignity. Few fighters remained alive. But those who survived would keep telling us that the Nazis did not manage to break even one of the captured fighters of Zagłębie.53

Whereas relatively few details on contact with the Christian population are given in the sections about the inter-war period (although some books contain separate chapters on mutual relations in particular periods), the parts devoted to the war and the post-war period contain much more of such information, encompassing Polish attitudes, ranging from collaboration with Germans in annihilating Jews, indifference, to selfless aid.

Particularly noteworthy are the descriptions of the rescue of Jews. The Righteous Gentiles and the help they provided are frequently the subject of separate memoirs, unlike the descriptions of hostile attitudes to Jews, which usually appear in texts with more general scope and are seldom the main focus of individual accounts. This does not mean that memorial books have more descriptions of positive attitudes, but rather, according to the authors, the exceptional character of the Righteous Gentiles deserves to be highlighted, and survivors wish to express their gratitude to them.

The memoirs about Poles saving Jews are often highly personal and readers might find them very touching. In the Chmielnik memorial book, for instance, Jędrek, a poor Polish boy who not only made friends with the local Jews before the war, but even learned their language and culture so well that he actually identified with them, found himself in the part of the Ukraine occupied by the Soviets during the war. He voluntarily entered the Simferopol Ghetto, and later joined the Jews transported to a death camp. He managed to escape from the train, joined the Jewish partisans, and remained in the Crimea after the war. He refused to return to his native Chmielnik: “Who shall I return to, when my Jewish brothers and friends are already dead!” Sometimes, such accounts imply individual contact between the survivors living abroad and their Polish acquaintances, as in the case of the Frampol memorial book, where a rescuer’s account is annotated by the editor, as follows:

The author of this memoir, Stanisław Sobczak, a Polish resident of Frampol, did not lose human feelings during the terrible years of the

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54 However, sometimes, the titles might be misleading. For instance, one of the texts entitled “A Peasant’s Hospitality...” ironically refers to an attempted murder of a Jew seeking shelter on a peasant’s farm. See Yekhazkyel Keytlman, “Bay a poyer tsu gast,” in Nekhemya Tsuker, ed., Gedenkbukh Galitsye (Buenos Aires: Farlag Zikhroynes, 1964), pp. 67–71.

occupation. Risking his own and his family’s lives, he sheltered 12 Jews from Goraj and Frampol at his place. To this day, he corresponds with a number of former Frampol residents in Israel. When he found out about the town’s memorial book, he sent his short account of those days to Shmuel Mahler in Haifa, who comes from our town.56

From the Polish point of view, the sensitive issues are: information about collaborators, relations of Poles and Jews with the Soviets and Germans, the post-war period, as well as characterization of the Polish post-war resistance movement (“AK [Home Army] bands”) as antisemitic, and the belief that their main or even sole purpose was to murder Jews. For Jewish authors, the Judenrat and Jewish police, especially evaluating their activity, is a particularly sensitive topic frequently omitted in memorial books.

For example, Wein mentions the controversy around the Tarnogród memorial book, which includes criticism of a former Judenrat chairman, who was an active member of a fraternal organization in New York when the book was published. After intervention, additions were made to the book, including the rabbinical court’s verdict of the case. Mostly, if the Judenrat and Jewish police were mentioned at all, they were depicted in a bad light. This accorded with the negative perception of the Jewish administration’s activities in the ghettos and the state of research on the subject, which was still at an early stage at the time. However, the authors were able to separate the critique of the institution itself from evaluation of individual functionaries. Some authors were aware of the internal dilemmas of the Judenrat and Jewish police, and their actual powerlessness. Several books describe resistance, usually passive, by Judenrat and police functionaries in the face of approaching destruction. For example, in the Belz (Belz) book, Leon Taube, Chairman of the local Judenrat, chose to commit suicide rather than contribute to dispatching a transport of local Jews to a death camp; in the Szcebrzeszyn book, Hersh Getzel Hochbaum hanged himself on hearing the news of the actual fate of the Jews sent away from the town; the Szydlowiec book mentions the Jewish policeman Glat, who, while trying to save several Jews, was shot by an SS man.

However, the authors more often presented members of the ghetto administration as demoralized, corrupt, and servile towards the Germans. In many accounts, the Judenrat are perceived as sources of all evil befalling

particular communities and blamed for the active participation in the Holocaust.

Less space is devoted to the post-war period; nevertheless, almost every book includes articles on the subject. Sometimes, it is a single page by one author; in others, such as Pinkas Zhirardov, there are accounts by many different authors, covering a dozen or so years and about 40 pages. Most of them were intended for the former residents who did not have an opportunity to visit their hometowns after the war. Even when written from an ideological viewpoint (e.g., to justify aliya to Israel or emigration to the West), they aptly convey the authors’ moods and feelings, while often providing accurate information about the condition of Jewish property, landmarks, and the like.

Among the authors of these accounts, there are many Jews who lived through the war in the Soviet Union or arrived in Poland with the Red Army or the First Polish Army. Less numerous are those who survived in camps or found shelter in the vicinity of their homes. Some wrote their accounts several or more years after they had settled in Israel or elsewhere, and others while in DP camps in Germany. Some memorial books also include accounts of Jews who settled in Poland after the war, but decided to visit their hometowns again after many years, e.g., at the request of editorial committees (such interesting and extensive accounts are found in the Włodawa and Ostrołęka books).

There are usually descriptions of train trips, or other means of transportation: on foot, in rented cars, or even service cars, e.g., a trip by an officer assisted by his aide-de-camp in the Krasnystaw book. Some authors even provide exact train arrival and departure times, descriptions of various security measures for the trip, comments from non-Jewish travellers, reports on encounters with Jews who, like the narrators, tried to conceal their ethnic background, and descriptions of train stations and the towns after the war. In some accounts, like that of Avrum Zimler from Żyrardów, where each paragraph closes with the refrain “haynt iz keyner fun zey nish-to...” (“today none of them is there...”), exact information is given about

57 For more information on this topic, see Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, “Patterns of Return: Survivors’ Post-war Journeys to Poland,” Ina Levine Annual Lecture, February 15, 2007 (Washington, DC: USHMM, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, 2007).

what became of almost every Jewish home and shop in town. The authors also comment on the condition of monuments and kehillah buildings, especially synagogues and cemeteries, and write about tombstones used for paving the streets or other purposes.

Those who lived through the war in the Soviet Union constantly express astonishment at the extent of the destruction, which is easily explainable in view of the fragmentary information they had before. Different methods of obtaining information on the fate of relatives (letters to the municipal councils, parishes, local priests, monks, and various individuals) are also described.

The images in their accounts resemble well-known scenes from the works of such accomplished Polish and Yiddish writers as Adolf Rudnicki, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Henryk Grynberg, and Stanisław Benski: incredulity at being in their hometown, and feeling they must have gone the wrong way. As Yakov Handshtok from Ryki recalled:

I could not believe I was really in Ryki.... Perhaps it is not Ryki? Could I have come to the wrong town by mistake?59

Some perceive their towns as impoverished, deserted, lifeless; others as bustling with life, more attractive, but devoid of “Jewish soul” and unfriendly. For instance, in Zamość, the city seemingly untouched by the war:

[Everything] was enveloped in a profound silence..., “unnatural” — an almost palpable silence. Houses, streets, the market square with the town hall in the middle — everything is still there as before, but seems petrified. Zamość did not suffer from military activities or during “actions;” but I found the dead silence so paralyzing and stifling, as if all the air had been sucked out of there.60

The encounters with local Poles, acquaintances, and strangers, and their diverse reactions are also interesting. The question “You’re alive?” was repeated constantly in different tones of voice. Some authors carefully record

each meeting, quoting snippets of conversations, providing interlocutors’ names and other details. On the one hand, they record certain hostile attitudes of Poles, including blackmail attempts and armed attacks, accusations of supporting Communism; and, on the other hand, a sense of guilt. For example, in Ryki, a Pole who personally helped Jews during the war reproached himself for not having done more and stated with a look of horror on his face:

We have sinned against Jews, against God. Do you think people don’t know that? Many a Christian told me he was terrified at the thought of the punishment that might befall us...

The same book contains information about angry ghosts haunting the town in search of vengeance. There are similar accounts in the Ostrołęka memorial book. At the end of 1957 and the beginning of 1958, nine fires broke out in the town within three months, and many residents believed this to be the revenge of Jewish martyrs who had been robbed by Christian wagon drivers when they were being deported to the death camp. These rumors also spread to nearby towns. Only some time later, a local adolescent, who engaged in arson for purely personal reasons, was found to have started the fires.

Some accounts shed new light on well-known events. For example, in the Łomża memorial book, while visiting the town, the narrator overheard a conversation between young women from Jedwabne, who were complaining that after the annihilation of the local Jews there was no social life, or opportunities for employment or profit, and also, there was not enough light, since the local Jewish miller had provided the electricity.

Reports of encounters with Jews who decided to remain in Poland and those who continued living there “behind an Aryan mask” are also interesting. Especially soon after the war, such encounters were sometimes dramatic and fraught with mutual accusations. Another leitmotif in some texts is the desire for vengeance, and some survivors describe the process of seeking justice in detail. For example, in the Rejowiec memorial book, there is the poem “Nekome” (Revenge), expressing the author’s sorrow.

64 Handshtok, “Oyf di shpurn,” p. 556.
65 Drelikhman, Shtil vi in Reyvits, p. 11.
and thirst for revenge after losing his loved ones; in the Biłgoraj book from 1956, there is a detailed description of bringing to justice a Polish collaborator, who is responsible for the deaths of several local Jews. This becomes the author’s personal justification for his own survival, hence the title: “I Have Survived to Take Revenge.”66 The Częstochowa book from 1947 contains a report on exposing and incarcerating one of the murderers from the so-called little Częstochowa ghetto.67

What strikes the contemporary reader is the lack of references to the political situation in Poland. It confirms the conclusions of many researchers, such as Natalia Aleksiun, Bożena Szaynok, and Daniel Blatman, who claim that, contrary to the widely held opinion, most Jewish survivors avoided political involvement, remaining indifferent to various ideologies. Preoccupied with finding their own place after traumatic experiences, they were usually not interested in the surrounding Polish society.68 Whenever their own safety was concerned, they were susceptible to Communist propaganda, hence the frequently recurring expression, “AK bands,” in memorial books. It follows that most authors did not realize the complexity of the situation in Poland after the Soviets moved in, and under the influence of ubiquitous propaganda, characterized the whole underground movement in a collective fashion, all the more so, as often only the new authorities could provide them with protection from antisemitism or simple banditry. A number of such sensitive and immensely complex issues, which constantly recur in studies on Polish-Jewish relations, are reflected in the accounts in the early post-war memorial books.

Later accounts, from the end of the 1950s until the mid-1960s, are frequently diametrically different. Two good examples: On the one hand, in Żyrardów, life was described as more or less normal and carefree,69 while the author of the account about Jedwabne believes it is still dangerous to travel around there, since armed bands lurk along the roads.70 In both cases,

70 Hersh Tsinovitz, “Yedwabne after the War, April 1958,” in Julius L. Baker and Jacob
the authors came to Poland for the commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, but since the author of the Jedwabne account was Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz’s guest, special security measures were taken. This particular account suggests that the authorities at that time knew about the Jedwabne Pogrom in July 1941.

In addition, the accounts by the second-generation authors offer some interesting insights. In the English version of the Szydłowiec book, there is a text by Michael Pomeranz about visiting his father’s hometown twice, in 1984 and 1986, while his father probably never returned to Szydłowiec after the war. The reason for those visits was his participation in the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants, held in Washington in 1983. Both visits were memorable experiences for him, but his visit to the local cemetery was particularly noteworthy:

My first visit in 1984 to the cemetery was one of mixed emotions. As I looked at the rows and rows of headstones, I was extremely saddened that here lay people, Jews, maybe even my own grandparents, where, because of the immense pain, hardly anyone comes to pay respect. I thought of how in a period of over 40 years that virtually no one had come to lie a rock down on the headstone of a loved one. I knew I would return. And in 1986, I did.... As I walked about the cemetery, young children did so as well, taking a shortcut home from school. Some walked straight through and still others were curious at my presence there and they loitered nearby or hid behind headstones peeking out from time to time to see what this man wearing a yarmulke was doing. I wondered, what did they know of where they lived. When they arrived home surely they would tell their parents of their experience in the old Jewish cemetery. Their parents would have to tell them something. I wondered what it would be. I can’t help but think that someday one of these children will have been positively and deeply affected by what he saw and what he possibly learned that day.71

What is particularly important in this account is the yearning of the sur-

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vivors and their descendants for a continuation (if only a symbolic one) and a strong wish to perpetuate the memory of the past Jewish presence in Poland.

As most scholars agree, memorial books present a rather idealized picture of pre-war Jewish life, since writing negatively about kdoyshim (holy martyrs) seemed inappropriate. However, texts about the Holocaust, especially the early ones in Yiddish, are usually full of concrete details (exact dates, places, numbers of victims), since their authors aimed at providing the most faithful testimonies possible. This raises the question as to whether the narratives concerning the post-war period are not considerably overdramatized, to become almost the opposite of those presenting pre-war existence. It would have been understandable in the context in which they were created. Survivors frequently saw themselves as the only living representatives of the whole community — modern Jobs, ghosts, and human wrecks — and endeavored to convey their situation and express their feelings by referring to classic religious texts. Sometimes, they would go as far as claiming that their feelings immediately after the war were worse than those experienced while it was still in progress, even under the most extreme camp conditions. Some authors were aware of their oversensitive perception, but this would usually come with time. Thus, visiting Ostrołęka after 40 years, Mark Rakowski actually rhetorically states that he is driven by a kind of megalomania:

I am the sole Jewish wanderer who treads on the ashes of his martyrs and cannot find peace. I am a modern Job bewailing my bitter fate, the destruction of my nation, my family, relatives, and friends. I am a burning bush that is on fire but is not consumed by the flames.72

To some survivors, the very fact that their hometowns still exist and life goes on there despite the absence of Jews is a source of trauma. As Shimon Redlich aptly puts it in his book about Brzeżany (Berezhany), the survivors feel “simultaneously attracted to and repelled by their birthplaces in Eastern Europe.73

Iconography plays an important role in memorial books, but where

pictures have not been preserved, images of loved ones recreated from memory have to suffice, as in the Biłgoraj memorial book from 1956, in the obituaries section:

Our beloved father, Reb Israel Yakov Bron; our beloved mother Bashele, our beloved sisters Rakhele and Surele, and our beloved youngest brother, little Khaim — murdered at 11 years of age. We put up a matzevah in the Bilgoray memorial book.

A matzevah on paper, with a photograph of five faces — our sole memento to you. Only you, our beloved little Khaim, came into the world like a fleeting shadow and left it without a trace.

Not a trace, not a memory, not even a faint likeness on a piece of paper has survived. Sometimes, when our gaze, beloved parents and sisters, wanders among the four images, we search our memory and imagination for the fifth face.

We search for the youngest image, so full of life, our late little Khaim, our little brother, and we do not find it. We want to remember your little face, your body, certainly no larger than one step. Your little head, colorful hair, ungainly hands, feet, your eyes that were probably light blue, your tiny voice was soft and musical like unplayed sounds, but everything flies, slips away, gets blurred under the curtain of passing years, and we are losing your image even in our memory.

Perhaps that is what you looked like in the last moment of your life as you were going to your death...74

Memorial books also play an inspirational role. The first books they inspired appeared in the West a dozen or so years ago. Written mostly by second-generation authors, they sprang from the need to search for roots and from a surge of interest in the Holocaust. Such titles include Konin: A Quest by Theo Richmond (1995); There Was Once a World: A Nine-Hundred-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok by Yaffa Eliach about the little town of Ejszyszki (Eišiškės) (1998); and Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews by Eva Hoffman (1997), largely devoted to Brańsk. Among the sources these authors drew on are the memorial books of their respective towns, and Richmond even learned Yiddish for this purpose.

For some time now, in Poland, there has been a phenomenon that may

74 Kronenberg, Khurbn Bilgoray, p. 334.
be described as “late Polish memorial books.” They are the result of research by individual authors or groups of people, mostly young or middle-aged, who have begun to discover multidimensional, undistorted, and more authentic history of their hometowns and cities, and their altogether different pre-war character. Sometimes, they use the original Jewish memorial books, but they are also inspired by new books written in English. Like the latter, their works serve to complement, and sometimes actually to recreate memory. The initiator of the volume Ścieżki pamięci (Paths of Memory) explains the aim of that publication as follows:

As residents of Lublin, we must not forget that here — in Wieniawa, Podzamcze, Kalinowszczyzna, and Piaski [quarters of Lublin — M.A.-G., A.K.] — a huge Jewish community with its culture, religion, and customs lived. Even though Szeroka, Krawiecka, and Jateczna Streets are no longer there, it is our duty to recall the Jewish town.76

Thus, on the one hand, his approach has similar aspirations to those of the authors of Jewish memorial books (the duty of remembrance), while, on the other hand, to those of authors such as Richmond (the search for the relics of the past). However, in the latter case, the situation is reversed: Richmond, although he had never lived in Konin, through residing in London, he mingled with the people whose memory of the Jewish community there was still very much alive. The authors of Ścieżki pamięci were born or lived in the city where there had been a flourishing Jewish life for many years and yet they knew nothing about it, since memories of it had been largely obliterated. These books written by contemporary, often non-Jewish authors, sometimes in encyclopaedic form, are just as generically syncretic as their prototypes, frequently carrying an equally potent emotional charge. In this different historical context, they are a delayed response to the aspirations of survivors who published their yizker bikher, usually at their own expense, in a spontaneous and amateurish way, out of the need to give testimony, fulfill their duty to the dead, erect symbolic tombstones, and preserve the traces of their rich life before the Holocaust.

75 Ścieżki pamięci, published in Poland in 2001 and edited by Jerzy Jacek Bojarski, and two issues of the educational journal Scriptores from 2003 devoted to Polish-Jewish Lublin may serve as illustrations of this trend.

A similar search may lead to a more individual reflection, such as Arkadiusz Pacholski’s moving essay about the Jewish residents of Kalisz, inspired by photographs from the town’s memorial book.77

A growing interest in this genre in Poland is evidenced by the publication of the Polish editions of *Sefer kekhilat Ostrolenka,*78 one of the memorial books on Biłgoraj,79 book on Szczekociny,80 and selections of texts from memorial books of Lublin81 and Sochaczew.82 All three were translated from their original languages, while two books, on Sierpc and Zgierz, were second-hand translations from English. Marian Skwara’s book about Pruszków presents a large selection of texts from the town’s memorial book, which constitute the core of his narrative.83

Recapitulating on the discussion in this article, in an attempt to assess the significance of memorial books, both in the context of the Holocaust and the periods preceding and following it, here is a quotation from Elias Schulman, from the late 1960s. Despite numerous studies conducted since then, the skepticism about memorial books persists, and thus his words remain as relevant as when he wrote them:

*Yizker* books vary in quality. Some are better edited by specialists and contain important information; others by amateurs who are incapable of handling the material adequately. Some have analytical essays or studies; in others there is a lack of analysis of the sources. However,

78 Icchak Iwri, ed., *Księga pamięci Żydów ostrółęckich* (Ostrołęka-Tel Aviv: Ostrółęckie Towarzystwo Naukowe im. Adama Chętnika; Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Ostrółęki; Ziomekstwo Ostróleckie w Izraelu, 2002).
80 Isroel Szwajcer (Ben-Awrom), ed., *Pinkes Szczekocin* (Szczekociny: ReBorn Roots, 2010).
even the poorly edited and weakly written works add to our knowledge about the Holocaust and about the daily life in the shtetl.

It is astonishing that this immense source about Jewish life on the eve of the Holocaust and about the Holocaust has for the most part been ignored by writers, researchers, and historians who have written about it in the Western languages. Some authors have ignored it out of lack of knowledge, others out of snobbishness. Whatever the reason, the loss is theirs, and that of Jewish historiography.84

In the authors’ view, it is not only a loss for the Jewish historiography, but also for both Polish and twentieth century historiography. Fortunately, memorial books are now attracting greater interest, through translations of part or the full texts into various languages and digitalized forms, made available thanks to the joint initiative of the New York Public Library85 and the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst (reprints can also be purchased from the center and English translations can be viewed on the JewishGen website).86 It is hoped that they will be increasingly used to assess the collective trauma of the Holocaust, fulfilling the need for remembrance like much older texts constituting the foundation of Jewish culture.

Memorial books are a type of monument, a matzevah of pictures and words, a unique epic form giving some idea of the wealth of Jewish life before the Holocaust. They give the idea of the greatest and unimaginable catastrophe that ever befell the Jewish people. They also describe the difficult post-war attempts to rebuild Jewish life, and the great effort to preserve memories of what constituted the essence of life for Polish Jews for many centuries.

Traces of Jewish Presence: Synagogues and Cemeteries from 1944 to 1997

ELEONORA BERGMAN AND JAN JAGIELSKI

What remains of the former Jewish communities in the country that had the largest population of Jews in Europe until the outbreak of the Second World War, and the second-largest in the world after the United States? Aside from the residential infrastructure, factories, hospitals, schools, libraries, and community social-welfare buildings left by the almost 3.5-million-strong community, synagogues and cemeteries were the other main categories of vestiges.

As Emil Sommerstein (1883–1957), a long-time Zionist activist and leader, deputy to the Sejm (the Polish Parliament) in the years 1922–1939, Soviet prisoner during the Second World War, and the first Chairman of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP), which was founded in Lublin in November 1944, said in an interview in 1945:

We have lost some splendid monuments of Jewish culture and art, some superb libraries including many rarae aves. Ancient houses of prayer, synagogues, and batei midrash [houses of learning] have been reduced to ruins, there are no Jewish schools, hospitals, orphanages, children’s homes, cooperatives, community or economic institutions. Even the Jewish cemeteries are gone, plowed over, overgrown with grass and bushes, the gravestones shattered and used by the Germans to pave

1 This study presents the situation before the Act of February 20, 1997, on the state’s relations with Jewish religious communities came into force.
2 Sommerstein was Head of the Ministry of War Compensation in the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN), the quasi-government established by the Communists in Lublin in July 1944; and, later, Head of the Office of War Compensation under the Presidium of the Council of Ministers.
roads or build death camps. Finally, the most terrible of all — the wartime human losses of the Jewish community in Poland.³

Several attempts have been made to sum up the material losses to Jewish culture in Poland resulting from the Holocaust and the German occupation of Polish lands, and also of later post-war damage and destruction of traces of the historical Jewish presence in Poland. To grasp the extent of these losses, it is instructive to compare the situation at present and before 1939. Due to a lack of data encompassing the whole country, and given the post-war territorial shifts, only an estimate is possible. Before the Holocaust, there were over 1,500 Jewish communities of more than 100 people in Poland. Around 850 of these were on territory that remained within Poland’s borders after 1945, while a further 100 or so communities were in the areas annexed to Poland after 1945. On the basis of these figures, it is reasonable to assume that there were around 10,000 synagogues and houses of prayer of various types in pre-war Poland (approximately 60 percent of which would have been in present-day Polish territory). In addition, there were about 190 synagogues and houses of prayer in communities that were in Germany before the war, on territory that is now in Poland — only 23 of these survived the pillaging and destruction of Kristallnacht and the war.⁴ As an estimate, we may also assume that the pre-war communities had a total of around

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⁴ Führer durch die jüdische Gemeindeverwaltung und Wohlfahrtspflege in Deutschland 1932–33, Herausgegeben von der Zentralwohlfahrtstelle der deutschen Juden, pp. 15–30, 69–111 (place and year of publication not available), contains information on 163 Jewish communities in the cities and towns of Eastern Prussia, Pomerania, Western Prussia, and Upper and Lower Silesia, which came within Poland’s borders after 1945. In addition to data on the numbers of Jews in particular communities, each entry includes the addresses of community organizations and usually also the address of at least one synagogue or house of prayer. The information about cemeteries does not take into account that there are two or more cemeteries in former communities in large cities, such as Wrocław, Gliwice, Bytom, Koszalin, and Szczecin. It is also important to note that, by 1933, there was no longer a Jewish population in many cities and towns in these areas, but that cemeteries and/or synagogue buildings remained there that are not listed in this book, in places including: Banie, Biały, Bledzew, Bolesławiec, Brójce, Brzeg Dolny, Cedyń, Cieszowa, Gogolin, Krapkowice, Krasków, Leśnica, Lubliniec, Miechów, Miroślów, Otomak, Rybnik, Strzegom, Sulęcin, Szprotawa, Świebodzin, Świętojańsko, Torzym, Trzemeszno Lubuskie, Ujazd, Wałbrzych, Wiślo, Witsina, and Żary; see also Maciej Borkowski, Andrzej Kirmiel
2,000–2,500 cemeteries (approximately 60 percent of them in present-day Polish territory, and around 200 in the annexed Western Territories).

In the post-war territory of Poland, the repertoire of forms and locations of buildings representing traditional Polish synagogue architecture was significantly reduced. This new Poland included areas with German Jewish culture, which was reflected to a great extent in the architecture of houses of worship.

The hierarchy of religious institutions in Judaism differs from that of Christianity. Cemeteries are the most important (Hebrew: *beth olam*, *beth kevarot* — eternal home, house of graves; Yiddish: *dos gute ort* — the good place). Judaism rejects the term “former cemetery” for Jewish cemeteries bereft of headstones, unless the deceased have been exhumed and removed entirely from the site. In the Jewish tradition, the peace of the dead should not be disturbed. The ritual bath, or *mikveh*, which enables people to live according to the religious rules of purity of the body and utensils, is in second place. The synagogue, which is only considered sacred if at least ten men gather regularly there for prayers and it has at least one Torah scroll, is third in importance.

Other places connected to a greater or lesser extent with religious activities, such as schools, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the elderly, funeral homes, and libraries, have always been highly significant for the functioning of Jewish communities. The authors were unable to estimate even approximately the numbers of such facilities in former communities; a few dozen are believed to be extant. Until the Holocaust, all these facilities were administered by religious community organizations, foundations of various types (e.g., charities), associations, and private individuals.

The Historical Monuments Documentation Center (Dział Dokumentacji Zabytków — DDZ) at the Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny — ŻIH), established in 1991, is the only institution collecting data on both extant and non-extant material heritage of Jewish communities throughout Poland in the current borders. To date, the documents in this collection have not been fully processed, and exist only for preserved sites. The most difficult task is to obtain information on sites that survived


the Second World War, only to be destroyed subsequently. References to such sites surface in conversations and sometimes in publications. The CKŻP files would doubtless be the most important source for information about them, but they have not yet been systematically searched. Kazimierz Urban’s book contains invaluable information in this respect. Urban has done pioneering work, and in spite of all its limitations and reservations, to which he admits, it is a good starting point for further research.

The fate of real estate owned by Jewish communities after the Holocaust was affected by the absence of community organizations and new ownership legislation. The successive waves of post-war emigration of the Jewish population from Poland also should be taken into consideration. In addition, after the late 1970s, the increasingly active public opinion in Western Europe and the United States for the return of Jewish property to the rightful owners or their successors was met with indifference, and often hostility, from the local populations, coupled with unwillingness at various levels of government. Conflict within the Jewish community itself is another significant aspect, as reflected in a statement made by Michał Szuldenfrei, a Bund representative, on behalf of the Press Bureau of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego — PKWN) on November 16, 1944. For example, he stated: “The field of religion must be eliminated from Jewish community organizations,” as well as the contradictory view that “believers may create faith-based associations.” The CKŻP aimed, among other things, to divide secular and religious Jews, who were linked through community organizations. The CKŻP and Jewish religious associations made uncoordinated attempts to reclaim property of the former Jewish communities appropriated by the State Treasury. Some of these attempts were abandoned as Jews emigrated after the war, which intensified considerably after the Kielce Pogrom on July 4, 1946, and also as many Jews relocated to the bigger towns for greater safety and to establish community organizations.

How many and what kind of sites left behind by Jewish religious community organizations immediately after the expulsion of German troops

7 The legal issues related to this matter have been discussed in more detail in Monika Krawczyk’s article, “The Effect of the Legal Status of Jewish Property in Post-War Poland on Polish-Jewish Relations” and Grzegorz Berendt’s article, “A New Life: Jewish Institutions and Organizations in Poland from 1944 to 1950,” in this volume.
8 Urban, Cmentarze żydowskie, p. 64.
from Poland, between July 1944 and May 1945, is not known. Initially, these sites were only registered for practical purposes, though keeping historical records began relatively quickly. Sites that first belonged to the religious congregations created after the war and subsequently to the Jewish religious communities and the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith (Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego w Polsce — ZRWM) — founded in August 1949 and renamed the Union of Jewish Religious Communities (Związek Gmin Wyznaniowych Żydowskich — ZGWŻ) in 1992 — constituted only part of the surviving real estate that once belonged to the Jewish communities. The present state of research, although incomplete, certainly indicates that there were significantly more surviving synagogue buildings and cemeteries with headstones intact shortly after the war than when attempts were first made to assess their state of preservation in the 1980s. These attempts did not take into account the ownership status or artistic value of the sites, only assessing their historical and cultural value (as testimony), irrespective of their function at the time. Yet, while their original function as sites belonging to Jews was often the reason for their destruction or changed use after the war, only in rare cases was it the reason for their preservation.  

Some of these sites owe their survival to recognition in the register of historical landmarks, thanks to efforts by art historians and conservators. Preservation documentation was compiled for these sites, and they have been reconstructed to the highest professional standards. The State Enterprise of Monument Conservation Workshops (Przedsiębiorstwo Państwowe Pracownie Konserwacji Zabytków — PP PKZ) was the main driving force behind such conservational action, with designation of the reconstructed buildings for cultural purposes as the guiding principle. The PP PKZ rebuilt and designed museum interiors and installed fixtures and fittings, such as candelabras, candleholders, and display cabinets, in synagogues in Jarosław, Konin, Kraków (the Izaaka, Poppera, Stara, and Remuh synagogues), Łańcut, Lesko, Rzeszów, Szydłów, Tykocin, Warsaw and Zamość, and other places. Among these, only the Nożyk Synagogue in Warsaw and the Remuh in Kraków serve religious purposes today.

Polish Jews who settled in the Western and Northern territories wished to take over facilities left behind by the previous German Jewish communities. Most of the synagogues in these areas had been destroyed by Nazi German hoodlums on Kristallnacht in November 1938. Paradoxically, many of the cemeteries that once belonged to the German Jews survived. This was due to adherence by municipal authorities to relevant regulations, above all, the police order to the Association of Jews in Germany, issued on December 10, 1942, requiring them to sell their cemeteries to the municipal authorities. This permitted the authorities to take possession of the land occupied by the cemeteries and the gravestones there.11 Most of these cemeteries were destroyed after 1945.

On June 10, 1949, Rabbi Dr. Dawid Kahane, on behalf of the chief rabbinate of the Jews in Poland, wrote the following letter to the Minister of Public Administration:

There are Jewish cemeteries and synagogues in many towns across the Republic of Poland, where the resident population was exterminated by the fascist occupation forces. In many cases, these are the only monuments that serve as historical documents testifying to the exterminated Jewish population. Aside from their historical value as monuments, these sites serve as places of religious worship and pilgrimage for the handful of surviving Jews here in Poland and for visitors from abroad. The municipal authorities often build on cemetery land and use synagogues as offices, or adapt them for workshops or cinemas. We strongly appeal to you, Citizen Minister, to issue a memorandum without delay on caring for abandoned Jewish cemeteries and synagogues (which we know has already been drawn up by the Ministry’s Religious Affairs Department) in order to prevent the loss of their historical and religious value.12

12 A draft memorandum on this issue by the Minister for Public Utilities, dated as late as 1966, is included in Urban, Cmentarze żydowskie, pp. 783–785. It is not known whether it was ever circulated. According to Point 14 of this draft document, “Letters sent from abroad concerning particular cemeteries and other matters should be forwarded within two weeks, together with an opinion statement from the relevant National Council Presidium, to the Office for the Care of Foreigners’ Graves.” Rabbi Dawid Kahane immigrated to Israel in 1949.
In 1947, when there were still some 100,000 Jews living in Poland, 38 synagogues and houses of prayer were in use. It is not known how many of these were in pre-war buildings.

In 1974, the ZRWM, with 1,323 members across Poland at the time, had ownership of 19 cemeteries, four mikvot, and 24 synagogues and houses of prayer in 12 towns. The situation was similar in 1992, when there were only around 2,000 officially registered believers, despite the rise in number after 1989.

Before the enactment of the 1997 Act on the state’s relations with Jewish religious communities in the Republic of Poland, the ZGWŻ owned 47 cemeteries (including 14 listed in the landmark register) and 24 synagogues and houses of prayer (including nine listed buildings).

Cemeteries

The German occupier, fighting even with the dead, demolished [cemetery] walls, desecrated our ancestors’ bodies, took sand and clay from the cemetery for construction use and for sale. Those times are gone, they cannot be pursued, this must be stopped, even the shack erected by the Germans for their convenience should be removed...13

Already in the first year of the occupation, following a directive issued by the German authorities, headstones from Jewish cemeteries were used to pave roads and sidewalks as well as to regulate river courses. In most cases, local Jews had to carry out this work. After the extermination of the Jews, the Jewish cemeteries became free quarries for the Polish population. Even before the end of the war, in March 1945, in the town of Będzin, a firm called Eltes began removing limestone headstones from the surviving Jewish cemetery. Following protests by Jewish organizations, the work was halted, but only temporarily.14 After the war, nothing changed in this respect, and the situation deteriorated further after March 8, 1946, when the decree regarding

13 Urban, *Cmentarze żydowskie*, p. 255; regarding the Mielec cemetery, see the letter from Leib Sussel Feuer, Chairman of the Jewish congregation in Mielec, to the Presidium of the Voivodeship National Council in Rzeszów, after July 29, 1947.
14 Urban, *Cmentarze żydowskie*, pp. 76–78; see also Monika Krawczyk’s article, “The Effect of the Legal Status of Jewish Property in Post-War Poland on Polish-Jewish Relations,” in this volume.
abandoned, former German property was issued, including both communal and private Jewish property.\(^{15}\)

One example of this is described in a letter from the Jewish Committee in Lublin to the Central Urban Planning Office in Warsaw, stating that:

The municipal board in the town of Zamość, ignoring our protest of April 29, [19]47, continues to lay out the so-called Dr. Jordan garden [recreational park for children] at [the site of] the old Jewish cemetery.... The new Jewish cemetery has also been desecrated — it was turned into a pasture following release for rental under certain conditions by public notice. As a result..., human bones...[have been seen] lying around there, and even on the streets.\(^{16}\) On April 30, 1947, the same committee submitted a request to the Hrubieszów municipal board for a permit to retrieve the Jewish headstones, which the Germans had used to pave the town's streets. In response, after a short discussion, the Municipal National Council passed a resolution “permitting the retrieval of the memorial [headstones], on condition that after they are removed, the sidewalks are immediately returned to the appropriate state, with hard surfaces.” The Voivodeship Jewish Committee wrote back: “Since we believe that paving the streets [with Jewish gravestones] by the Germans was a crime, perpetuated to this day, the Hrubieszów MRN’s [Municipal National Council] demand that we pave the streets at our own expense is misplaced.” In response, the Voivodeship National Council notified [the Jewish committee] that “the courts should address the above matter.”\(^{17}\)

The Lublin Jewish Committee was apparently unable to take care of all the cemeteries in the region, as the letter from the superintendent of the District Citizens’ Militia (Milicja Obywatelska — MO) in Biłgoraj, dated August 8, 1947, in the CKŻP files, indicated the Jewish committee is notified that:


\(^{16}\) AŻIH, CKŻP, unit no. 355: Voivodeship Jewish Committee in Lublin (without date and pagination). In 1950, fragments of recovered headstones were used to make a monument bearing the inscription: “‘Thou shalt not kill.’ To the Jews of Zamość — the victims of Nazi fascism. May their memory be revered. 1950. Countrymen.”

\(^{17}\) AŻIH, CKŻP, file no. 355, August 12, 1947 (without pagination). The headstones were not returned to the cemetery until 1990.
The courtyard, i.e., the square outside the district MO station (formerly the German police station) is paved with cemetery stones from Jewish cemeteries, some of which retain clear inscriptions in the Jewish language. The Biłgoraj district MO station gives notification of this, and requests the Jewish committee to take an interest in these sacred items, otherwise [it]...will not accept any further liability.18

The Lublin MO station, in a letter dated January 26, 1948, stated the following:

[The investigation] into the destruction of the cemetery and house of prayer in Kazimierz Dolny found out that, during the German occupation, the former Jewish cemetery was destroyed because the Germans took all the gravestones, which they used for [paving] sidewalks and making steps..., etc.... They leveled out another part of the cemetery and made it into a vegetable plot for themselves and, in...[another] section, near the public school, they planted flowers...19

The 1946 decree was in force for decades. In 1962, when the Congregation of the Mosaic Faith in Kraków applied for restitution of a cemetery to the Jewish Community in Kozienice, after the case was examined, it was found that neither the Community of the Israelite Faith...

...nor its inheritors, nor other legal substitutes had interrupted the ten-year period set down in Article 34.... [Thus,] the State Treasury acquired the ownership rights to the real estate in question by adverse possession.20

Headstones were removed from the Olsztyn Jewish cemetery following a

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18 AŻIH, CKŻP, file no. 355, August 8, 1947 (without pagination). The surviving headstones were not returned to the cemetery until November 5, 1986; and a memorial to the Jews of Biłgoraj was erected, thanks to Art Lumerman of the USA.
19 AŻIH, CKŻP, file no. 355, February 10, 1948 (without pagination). The headstones were not removed from the streets of Kazimierz until 1984; and a memorial was erected in the new Jewish cemetery in Czerniawy. The old sixteenth century cemetery was grassed over and made into a school sports field. To this day, water washes bones down from the adjacent hill in spite of a wall, which is made of limestone and headstone fragments.
20 Resolution of the Kozienice District Court, June 20, 1962; copy in the DDZ ŻIH Collections.
resolution passed by the Municipal National Council in July 1962 regarding the liquidation of cemeteries there (also applicable to Protestant cemeteries):

Owing to the advanced state of damage, these cemeteries cannot be renovated, but...[should be made into] green spaces and municipal parks.

All the headstones were removed between 1968 and 1970. Apparently, there was no better material with which to reinforce the escarpment near the former Castle Garrison Club. To this day, around 80 matzevot (gravestones) are still there. Lucjan Czubiels, voivodeship landmark conservator between 1960 and 1990, was unable to determine when the cemetery was liquidated. Neither is there any documentation regarding the cemetery; not a single photograph of it was taken. The following note, dated May 21, 1972, has survived among the documents of the Olsztyn District National Council’s Presidium:

Particular caution is required when taking decisions regarding the designation of Jewish cemeteries for other purposes. It must be remembered that [all such acts are]...exploited by hostile circles as deliberately malevolent policy on the part of the state toward adherents of the Mosaic faith. Disused Jewish cemeteries are state property and may be closed, but, until such time as these sites are designated for other purposes, they should be upkept by local council Presidiums according to the general principles for maintenance of disused cemeteries.21

Following the law in force in Poland since 1945, a cemetery that has been closed, and where burials are no longer carried out, may be used for other purposes after 40 years. This is in fundamental opposition to the Jewish religious tradition, in accordance with which cemeteries should remain untouched until the coming of the Messiah. In the 1970s, Jewish delegations and rabbinical committees from the World Jewish Congress began visiting Poland, and demanded the state authorities honor this requirement.22

This forced the Office for Religious Affairs, directly answerable to the

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21 Based on Magdalena Bartnik, “Ciche pieśni. O likwidacji cmentarza żydowskiego w Olsztynie,” unpublished, undated text, written as part of a program run by the Borussia association and fund, and passed on to ŻIH on August 31, 2007. Borussia intends to recover the surviving matzevot. The cemetery in Olsztyn was opened in 1818, and the last burial carried out there was in 1940.

Council of Ministers, to establish how many such cemeteries there were. They compiled a list, dated July 1974, with information about 522 cemeteries, in the following categories:

- Cemeteries in use: well maintained, perimeter fence/wall and headstones in good condition — 9.
- Cemeteries in use: some damage, in need of renovation — 8.
- Disused cemeteries: well maintained, perimeter fence/wall and headstones in good condition — 24.
- Disused cemeteries: up to 50-percent damage to perimeter fence/wall, headstones standing across burial space — 61.
- Disused cemeteries: up to 90-percent damage to perimeter fence/wall, few headstones — 207.
- Disused cemeteries, absence of perimeter fence/wall and headstones — 180.
- Cemeteries used for other purposes without administrative decisions — 23.

This list was the official document used in talks with foreign Jewish organizations. In 1976, Kazimierz Kąkol, Director of the Office for Religious Affairs, sent a letter to the Rabbinical Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries, giving his assurances that Jewish cemeteries would not be adapted for other purposes and would remain in their unaltered state. This was merely an internal letter, however, and never released to the public. Since it did not provide any penal sanctions, it was devoid of any force.23

Toward the end of the 1970s, a civic movement to protect abandoned Jewish, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox cemeteries emerged, chiefly in Catholic intellectual club circles. This spawned cemetery protection committees affiliated with the Monument Protection Society. One of the first tasks of the Citizens’ Committee for Care of Jewish Cemeteries and Cultural Monuments in Poland, established in March 1981, was to collect reliable information on surviving Jewish material culture sites. An appeal published in the Tygodnik Solidarność weekly led to scores of responses with information on some 800 cemeteries.24 The Office for Religious Affairs ruled that the inventory compiled on this basis was hostile to the state since it was

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23 Copy in DDZ ŻIH Collections.
24 Archived in DDZ ŻIH Collections, in files concerning specific localities and the Jewish communities that used to be there.
undermining the credibility of government data. Meanwhile, however, the charter committee, with the assistance of the conservators’ offices and the Polish lottery monopoly, as well as with funds raised by street collections, started renovating the cemeteries in Warsaw and other towns. In October 1986 in Śródborów, the committee organized a meeting of people from all over Poland involved in the protection of Jewish cemeteries and other landmarks of Jewish material culture.25

In 1985, the private Nissenbaum Foundation commenced operation. Taking care of Jewish cemeteries in Poland was among the foundation’s aims. Its own funds and money raised among foreign associations of former town residents were used to carry out partial renovation work on cemeteries, including those in the Warsaw district of Bródno, Kielce, and Gąbin.

After the political changes in 1989, Jacek Ambroziak, Director of the Office for Denominational Affairs in the Office of the Council of Ministers, and then Marek Pernal, who succeeded him in this capacity in 1991, compiled official letters to the voivodes, in which they explained:

The Jewish religion holds places of burial to be particularly sacred. Cemeteries are afforded the greatest respect, irrespective of their condition and what remains of them on the surface. Thus, even if they are not fenced off and are bereft of headstones, they do not cease to be holy. In this sense, the word “cemetery” has a much broader significance than in its colloquial and statutory meaning. Judaism does not have a concept of cemetery liquidation; the laws of this religion do not permit any other use of land once it has been designated for burial, apart from

25 At the initiative of American attorney Michael Traison, since 1998 active supporters of this initiative nominated by the ZiH received honorary diplomas from the Israeli ambassador. First to receive this recognition were: Tomasz Wiśniewski (Białystok), Ewa Wrochysińska (Tykocin), Zbigniew Romaniuk (Brańsk), Krzysztof Czyżewski (Sejny), Wojciech Henrykowski (Maków Mazowiecki), Mariusz Bondarczuk (Przasnysz), Adam Penkalla (Radom), Dariusz Waleriański (Zabrze), Jacek Proszyk (Bielsko), Dariusz Czwojdrak (Wschowa), Adam Bartosz (Tarnów), Łucja Nowak (Konin), Hanna Domańska (Sopot), Ireneusz Slipek (Warta), Jerzy Fornalik (Koźmin), Andrzej Trzciński (Lublin), Paweł Sygowski (Lublin), Jerzy Znojek (Pińczów), Paweł Worończak (Wrocław), Maciej Łagiewski (Wrocław), Jan Jagielski (Warsaw), Mieczysław Jędruszczak (Warsaw), Hanna Szmalenberg (Warsaw), Andrzej Szczerbicki (Ustrzyki Dolne), Tomasz Pietrasiewicz (Lublin), Andrzej Pietrasik (Płońsk), Marek Bem (Włodawa), and Eugeniusz Duda (Kraków). Ten years on, over 100 people have been presented with such diplomas. In 2008, the Polish state awarded orders and distinctions to “Custodians of the Memory of Polish Jewry” for the first time.
further burials. The Polish state, on the grounds of showing regard for the convictions and traditions of all religious communities, also wishes to respect the special place of cemeteries in the Jewish religion.26

On July 18, 1991, the Sejm amended the Act on cemeteries and burial of the dead. In Paragraph 2, the following text was added:

If the cemetery premises are or were formerly property of the Catholic Church or other churches or religious unions, issuing a decision for use of the cemetery premises for other purposes requires consent from the relevant authority of those churches or religious unions.27

At the request of then Chief Rabbi of Poland Pinchas Menachem Joskowicz, a member of the International Committee for the Protection of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland, in 1995, Jan Jagielski and Urszula Kalińska compiled a list of cemeteries based on materials collected by the ZGWZ, the Religious Affairs Department of the Office of the Council of Ministers, the Citizens’ Committee for the Care of Jewish Cemeteries and Cultural Monuments in Poland, and the Jewish Heritage Council of the World Monuments Fund in New York. This list remains one of the main documents on which the Regulatory Committee’s work is based.28

In May 1992, the Jewish Historical Institute, together with the board for the Protection and Conservation of Palace and Garden Complexes, held a national conference devoted to the protection and conservation of Jewish cemeteries in Poland, attended by employees of the Voivodeship Monument Conservation Office and community activists. The conference materials were published, together with an appendix of legal documents relating to Jewish cemeteries. Also included was information on how to make an inventory of cemeteries and to read dates recorded in the Hebrew alphabet on headstones, as well as a list of the 153 cemeteries in the landmark register.29

26 Letter dated August 10, 1990, sent to all voivodes. Copy in DDZ ŻIH Collections.
28 See Monika Krawczyk’s article, “The Effect of the Legal Status of Jewish Property in Post-War Poland on Polish-Jewish Relations,” in this volume.
In 1993, the Polish government established the Eternal Remembrance Foundation, allocating a fixed sum for this work. The foundation’s objectives and tasks included: maintaining and renovating Jewish cemeteries; restoring and commemorating synagogues and other Jewish monuments; commemorating sites and events connected with the history of the Jews in Poland; and conducting cultural and educational work in the field of Polish-Jewish relations. Over the four years that followed, the foundation cofinanced various types of work on ten cemeteries, including those in Mirosławiec, Gorlice (the entrance gate and information board), Radomyśl Wielki, and Podwilk, and funded the granite plaques mounted on 25 synagogue buildings. It also contributed to the renovation of two very important synagogues, in Kraków and Pińczów.30 The foundation stopped doing this work in 2007 due to a lack of funds.

In the last few years, the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego — FODŻ), founded in 2001 by an agreement between the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) and the ZGWŻ, is the most important institution in Poland in terms of protecting cemeteries and other historical Jewish cultural sites. This foundation is active in 27 of the 49 former voivodeships in Poland, which do not include any of today’s nine Jewish communities.


The foundation’s work involves clearing the trees, restabilizing gravestones, carrying out conservation work on gravestones, and erecting permanent fences or walls around cemetery perimeters. Work to safeguard or rebuild synagogues takes years of preparation; at present, renovation of the synagogues in Kolno, Kraśnik, Rymanów, Zamość, and Ziębice is at an advanced stage.31

31 The authors are grateful to the Director General of the foundation, Ms. Monika Krawczyk, for information regarding its work.
The ZRWM also showed concern for the cemeteries. The 1987 ZRWM report included a note pointing out that due to limited funds, operations had been restricted to the upkeep of cemeteries still in use, writing letters to local authorities, and inspecting reported vandalism, as necessary. The ZRWM took an interest in documentation and work commissioned and financed by the Voivodeship Monument Conservators. It also gratefully accepted work done by former residents’ associations in the Jewish Diaspora, and by private individuals (e.g., in Lublin and the Warsaw Bródno district).32

The particular significance of cemeteries in Judaism explains the special and constant interest in their fate by Jewish religious institutions, but not the lesser care for the increasingly dilapidated disused mikvaot and synagogues.

In the official report published in the Kalendarz Żydowski — Almanach for 1989/1990, Michał Białkowicz and Paweł Wildstein noted that:

With the aid of financial resources and organized action, chiefly on the part of the state authorities, between 1980 and 1988, over 100 cemeteries were completely or partially renovated and, in several dozen cases, short-term safeguarding work was undertaken or documentation for renovation work prepared.33

The legal conditions at the time were such that every individual action by community groups or foreigners required the permission of the state authorities and the ZRWM.

For several years, between 1987 and 1991, the annual Kalendarz Żydowski (Jewish Calendar) kept a record of unveiling ceremonies and memorial boards/plaques. Reports on ceremonies at 35 such sites were submitted. Most of the monuments, plaques, and other forms of commemoration were proposed and sponsored by former residents who survived the Holocaust and subsequently settled outside Poland, or by associations of former residents or their descendants. These activities also received support from local heritage societies, the Nissenbaum Foundation, the Landmark Preser-


vation Society, the ZRWM (subsequently the ZGWŻ), and the Council for the Preservation of the Memory of Combat and Martyrdom.

As of December 31, 1994, there were 1,056 identified Jewish cemeteries, accounting for most of the pre-war cemeteries in various states. In many cases, they were only identifiable as cemeteries by the remaining few, or few dozen, scattered and overturned matzevot there; rarely do such sites still have any kind of perimeter fence. Well-maintained Jewish cemeteries in Poland are scarce. Fifty-one cemeteries were ZGWŻ property; and 999 were owned by the State Treasury. Some headstones survived in 396 cemeteries, while there were none at 283 sites. While there are 165 on the list of protected landmarks, the criteria for listing are not defined: Is survival of tombstones sufficient, or should they be of high artistic value? A total of 376 cemeteries have been built upon, adapted as green spaces, or plowed over.

Documentation kept by the ŻIH includes a list of surviving burial memorials dating from between 1203 and 1800. Around 2,100 such monuments have been identified in 63 localities. Some are now stored in museums, including those in Łańcut and Krotoszyn. In many places, fragments of tombstones were salvaged between 1945 and 1960 and relocated to cemeteries, where they were used to create memorials commemorating the local Jewish residents who perished (e.g., in Sandomierz and Łuków).

The case of the cemeteries is probably crucial, not only in its quantity of sites potentially eligible for restitution to Jewish communities. The matter of their boundaries is also relevant; they have religious significance above all, but there is also the prosaic administrative question, in view of adjacent buildings, roads, etc. The blurring of boundaries (most often preceded by destruction or removal of the headstones) was not restricted to the war and the occupation, but continued as a result of post-war damage, sometimes out of ignorance, but much more frequently due to vandalism. A vast number of cemeteries have disappeared from local maps, not only printed maps or maps displayed on tourist information boards, but also contemporary survey maps of registered land.

One example of the consequences of such actions is the case of the cemetery in Kalisz. Kalisz has the oldest identified Jewish cemetery in Poland, dating from the thirteenth century. It was already disused before the Second World War, yet it had always been treated with due respect, chiefly because it was the burial place of seventeenth-century Rabbi Abraham Gombiner.

34 Jan Jagielski and Urszula Kalińska, eds., Spis cmentarzy żydowskich w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej wg stanu na dzień 31 grudnia, 1994 (unpublished, for internal use).
The cemetery was demolished during the German occupation (1939–1945). Following the decree of March 8, 1946, on abandoned and former German assets, it passed into the hands of the State Treasury. In the 1950s, a residential school for children with special needs (paradoxically named the Janusz Korczak Memorial School) was built on the land, along with an ambulance station and four residential buildings. The sites of the buildings themselves were exhumed; the remaining land was leveled. In 1988, after a permit issued by the municipal offices, construction began of a central heating main pipe there, and human remains were unearthed, which were provisionally secured in situ. Construction work was halted in mid-1990. The issue of a construction permit was explained by lack of awareness of its having been a burial site. This is a weak argument, since the cemetery was clearly marked on pre-war maps of the town, such as the 1931 edition. To date, no workable resolution of the problem has been reached: The rabbis want the school moved, the entire site vacated, and Rabbi Gombiner’s tomb recreated. The town would like to see a compromise: a memorial to the Kalisz Jewish community, but with the school left where it is, perhaps relocating the sports field.

There are similar problems in other cities. In 1956, the chief architect of the City of Warsaw proposed a plan for the extension of Anielewicza Street from the district of Muranów into the Wola district, running through the oldest section of the surviving Jewish cemetery. This would have necessitated the destruction of some 5,000 graves and removal of as many headstones. In the face of protests from Jewish organizations, the plan was abandoned. Inventory numbers remain on the gravestones to this day. It should be noted that the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw, founded in 1806, is one of the few still in use in Poland, and the second largest (after the one in Łódź), covering an area of approximately 33 hectares and containing about 200,000 gravestones. Preservation work is financed by the Voivodeship Monument Conservators, the Landmark Preservation Society, other foundations, and private individuals, but the needs far exceed the available funds so far.  

The key to proper management of Jewish cemeteries on a national scale would undoubtedly be their inclusion in zoning plans (which would ensure their protection under local law), demarcation of their boundaries or their reestablishment in their grounds, and the display of appropriate signs at

35 Archive of the Towarzystwo Opieki nad Zabytkami (Society for the Preservation of Historical Monuments).
these sites. This should also be reflected in published maps and on tourist information boards. These measures would require the least funding, in relative terms, as they would be covered by the costs of drawing up the zoning plan and regulating ownership issues. All further action requiring financing — erection of perimeter fencing, clearing of the site, documentation of gravestones, construction of memorials, and display of commemorative plaques — could be undertaken gradually over time by various interested parties, appropriately protecting the sites from further vandalism or “disappearance.” Other issues related to the administration of Jewish cemeteries are the local authorities’ responsibility, and the question of the costs of cemetery maintenance, which are addressed in separate calculations, have yet to be undertaken.

Today, 70 years after the outbreak of the Second World War, when there are barely 10,000 Jews living in Poland, few Jewish cemeteries receive the appropriate level of care, i.e., identification on town maps; permanent, solid perimeter fencing along historical boundaries; permanent custodians; at least 50 percent of gravestones surviving; and vegetation tended. Fewer than 30 cemeteries meet any of these conditions, and those that do are in places where there are Jewish communities, or where there are active voluntary custodians: Bielsko, Bochnia, Dobrodzień, Jeleniewo, Katowice, Kraków, Legnica, Lubaczów, Łódź, Mszczonów, Olesno, Piotrków Trybunalski, Sopot, Koźmin, Szlichtyngowa, Wadowice, Warsaw, Wielowieś, Wrocław, Zduńska Wola, Żabno, and Żyrardów.

The “renewed existence” of these cemeteries at a formal level would be of immense significance: It would pave the way for their restitution to local Jewish communities or the FODŻ 36 in compliance with the act of 1997; preclude poor decision-making, and hence unnecessary conflicts; broaden the local residents’ historical awareness; and enable descendants of former residents from abroad to find the cemetery. Such visits are often followed up by offers to finance maintenance and restoration work. A good example here is the cemetery in Wyszków, where the United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad became involved in maintenance and repairs.

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36 See Monika Krawczyk’s article, “The Effect of the Legal Status of Jewish Property in Post-War Poland on Polish-Jewish Relations,” in this volume.
The few Jews who returned after the end of the Second World War to the towns and cities where they had lived before the Holocaust made it one of their priorities to secure and display identification of the sites of mass graves where their loved ones had died. They had to take the decision as to whether to exhume their remains and transfer them to a Jewish cemetery or to leave them where they had been murdered, often several kilometers outside the town, somewhere on the edge of a wood or by a ravine. These sites are untended and at constant risk of profanation. However, there are scores of known cases where Jewish cemeteries themselves were the sites of mass executions of local Jews in later campaigns during the Holocaust. This was the case in Izbica, Radomsko, and many other towns, large and small, across occupied Poland.37

In scores of Jewish cemeteries where there were unmarked graves of murdered Jews, returning survivors erected commemorative monuments. These were modest stones with epitaphs usually written in Polish, or Polish and Yiddish. Below are a few translations:

**Miechów**: “Here lie approximately 36 Jewish victims murdered by Nazi criminals on November 23, 1942, among them Rachela Strosberg and her daughters Lola and Dora of Brzesko Nowe.”


**Radomsko**: “To honor the memory of 8,000 Jewish citizens of the town of Radomsko murdered in TREBLINKA on October 15, 1942, by Nazi criminals. On this site, 1,700 Jews were shot dead by German gendarmes in the year[s] 1939–1943. Committee of Radomsko Emigrants in Israel.”

**Skierniewice**: “Here lie the bodies of 47 martyrs with whom the Nazi barbarians sowed the lands of Poland. Most of those buried here are

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Jews, former residents of the town of Skierniewice. May this hallowed place be afforded the protection of every noble man, for this is the only memorial on the remains of Skierniewice’s Jews. Exhumation, burial, and construction of [this] memorial [was made] by Chaim, son of Nechemiasz Frenkl, with the help of members of the Jewish committee in the year 1947.”

Often, especially in the initial post-war years, memorials erected to commemorate those murdered fell prey to acts of antisemitic vandalism “by unknown perpetrators.” In Biała Podlaska, the memorial erected on June 20, 1946, in the Jewish cemetery on Nowa Street was soon blown up; a new, more modest one was put up in 1947 and remains standing to this day.38

In the 1950s and 1960s, the erection of memorials at execution sites and in cemeteries became a matter for the state authorities and the council for the Preservation of Memory of Combat and Martyrdom, created in 1960. In the foreword of the guide to sites of battle and martyrdom, published by the council in 1964, its Chairman, Janusz Wieczorek, declared the Council’s objectives to be “the permanent commemoration and ardent care of all the thousands of places in our country where the best sons of our nation fought and fell,” and to lead young people to “all the places where Poles paid the ultimate price — the price of their lives — for their love of their homeland.”39 Yet, it mentions not a word about the Jews, even though among the more than 2,000 entries in the guide there is information about Jewish execution sites and about the scores of memorials erected at such sites. In the fourth and most recent edition of the guide, published in 1988, of the approximately 10,000 entries about sites of martyrdom from the time of the German occupation, some 300 mention sites commemorating murdered Jews.40

On September 27, 1964, to conclude ceremonies marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War, a memorial by the sculptor Józef Stasiński and the architect Jerzy Buszkiewicz was unveiled on the site of the death camp in Chełmno nad Nerem. Words from a scrap of paper found in 1945 at the execution site, undoubtedly written

40 Ibid.
by one of the Jews murdered as the Nazis attempted to eradicate traces of the camp, were displayed on its front face. Part of the text was damaged and impossible to recreate. Someone from the local post-war administrative authorities, however, had evidently resolved to mutilate it still further. Several dozen words were removed from the message originally found, which blurred its import but was in keeping with the spirit of official “historical policy.” Not until 1994 was the full text displayed, on a poorly visible plinth near the memorial. We quote it below. The words previously deleted are shown in bold type:

Appeal to our Future Nation
I describe to you the life of the Jew[ish] nation
from the year 1939 September until 1 December 1944
how they tortured us. We were taken,
from the elderly to the infant, between
the towns of Koło and Dąbie we were taken
to the woods there we were gassed...
shot and burned. So we ask
that our future brothers...
...on our murderers Germans
Witnesses to our tribulations
are Poles, who live
in this area. Once again we ask
that this murder be reported
all over the world to every
editorial office. This was written by the last Jews
who perished here. We lived until
December 1 1944
We perished, Friends.\textsuperscript{41}

In 1989, the Warsaw-based Yiddish newspaper \textit{Folks-Shtime} printed a letter by Edward Kisler, a fighter in the Białystok Ghetto, referring to the cemetery on the site of the Białystok Ghetto, on Żabia Street, where:

There was the only grave (I repeat: grave) in Europe of fighters from the Białystok Ghetto, with a monumental obelisk.... This memorial was

erected on August 16, 1947. Two years earlier — on August 16, 1945, on the second anniversary of the liquidation of the ghetto — a memorial matzevah was placed there, with inscriptions in Yiddish and Polish, dedicated to the memory of the 60,000 exterminated Białystok Jews. At last, in 1948..., a monumental mausoleum was erected.... These memorials remained on this site until 1971, when, after a thoughtless and irresponsible decision, they were demolished, in spite of protests from Dr. Szymon Datner, doyen [senior member] of the Białystok Jewish resistance movement (nicknamed “Talk”). The memorials were destroyed by bulldozers.42

Most of the cemetery was converted into a small square, where a small plaque was placed, with the inscription:

In this place lie the ashes of some 3,500 Jews murdered by the Nazis in extermination campaigns, and killed in action during the Białystok Ghetto Uprising in August 1943.

In 1993, the obelisk was recovered and, following restoration, was replaced at the cemetery site. The mausoleum was not rebuilt.

Synagogues

Anna Kubiakowa compiled the first partial inventory of synagogues that survived the Second World War in the early 1950s.43 It included only 25 buildings, all dating from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, most of them in ruins. The official Spis zabytków architektury i budownictwa (Inventory of Historical Architectural Monuments), published in 1964, included eight Jewish cemeteries (only one of which, in Lublin, belonged to the local

Jewish congregation) and 72 synagogues (only seven of which were the property of Jewish communities: five in Kraków, one in Wrocław, and one in Krzepice), among the approximately 35,000 sites listed. The first inventory taking into account synagogue buildings adapted for new functions was made by Carol Herselle Krinsky in the early 1980s. This list included some 70 buildings,\textsuperscript{44} eight of which are no longer extant and the function of most of the others has changed.

In the 1980s, the present authors succeeded in identifying 245 synagogue buildings.\textsuperscript{45} Subsequent research and help from readers enabled compilation of a list of 321 buildings in 240 localities, which was published in their book in 1996.\textsuperscript{46} Almost all these synagogues are bereft of their fittings,\textsuperscript{47} such as artworks and items of high-quality craftsmanship. These include sculpted wooden frames on the arks where the Torah scrolls (handwritten copy of the Pentateuch on parchment) were kept, the vaulting above the bimah (elevated platform for the cantor or reader), pulpits, pews, silver candlesticks, markers for the Torah, cups, and brass light fittings and chandeliers. Other lost inventory items include synagogue libraries, comprising old prayer books and early editions of the Hebrew Bible, Megillat Esther (the Book of Esther on parchment), and possibly also community annals. Synagogues would often have had several Torah scrolls, sometimes even more than a dozen, almost all of which have been lost. Very few synagogues still feature their original wall paintings, in various states of decay.\textsuperscript{48}

The Union of Jewish Communities, and the individual communities within it, of course, take an interest in the upkeep of the buildings serving their congregations.\textsuperscript{49} Only six of the surviving synagogues are used for worship: in Warsaw, Kraków (Remuh and Tempel), Łódź, Lublin, and

\textsuperscript{46} Bergman and Jagielski, \textit{Zachowane synagogi}, pp. 17–153. This number may yet rise, but probably not by more than 10–15 buildings.
\textsuperscript{47} Most of the surviving sites are probably included in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews’ database.
\textsuperscript{49} The idea to use the recently renovated seventeenth-century Kupa synagogue in the Kazimierz district of Kraków as a home for the elderly does not seem ideal, although the Jewish community is entitled to use the building as it sees fit.
Oświęcim; the White Stork Synagogue (Synagoga pod Białym Bocianem) in Wrocław has recently become the seventh one.

At present, around 50 percent of extant synagogues have official landmark status. It is hard to discern that the preservation authorities have any distinct policy with regard to Jewish historical monuments. Their policy is probably created on a case-by-case basis, depending on various factors, including the personal areas of interest of particular Voivodeship Monument Conservators. If abandoned synagogues and cemeteries acquired by the State Treasury have features of historic value — according to the criteria established in the 1950s, this only applies to structures built before the mid-nineteenth century — they were included in the overall national body of cultural assets. They were examined and studied, and preservation work was carried out on around a dozen of them. Immediately after the war, it would have been impossible to save many synagogues admired today, such as those in Łańcut and Włodawa, without the assistance of art historians and the conservation services. With the development of a general attitude to nineteenth- and twentieth-century architecture, some synagogues from these periods have become the foci of interest and protection.

The synagogue in Tykocin is an example of one that has been put to excellent use. It was reconstructed in the 1970s, and has housed a branch of the Białystok Regional Museum since 1976. The professionalism with which it is run has enabled it to become a lively cultural center attracting both local residents and some 30,000 tourists annually. Thanks to constant vigilance with respect to its décor, fittings, conservation, and layout, although it is only a museum, the interior seems ready to receive worshippers.50 It is unlikely that any of the Jewish communities active in Poland today are able to maintain their places of worship in such good condition.

Those abandoned synagogue buildings taken over by the State Treasury after 1945 that are not in complete ruins, in spite of their often considerable historical value (e.g., in Łaszczyów and Działoszyce), are used in various ways. In 1990, relatively few (about eight percent) were being used as museums, galleries, archives, and libraries. Most of them housed movie theaters, cultural centers, clubs, shops, warehouses, production plants, and residential units, and some even served as fire stations and restaurants. It is difficult to assess the impropriety of such uses objectively. In some cases, the current

function may have educational or informational value, for example, with museums, such as the synagogue in Łańcut. However, this may be restricted to part of the space occupied, as in certain libraries or archives, e.g., those in Piotrków Trybunalski and Sandomierz, where the original paintings are obscured by shelves; or may be entirely blocked out, as in most cases, in which the interior and often even the outer shell have been extensively altered. Preservation guidelines only theoretically influence how the physical structure of these buildings is treated.

The political changes since 1989 have not improved the synagogues’ lot. Those restored long ago for use as museums, in Kraków (Stara, Izaaka, and Wysoka), Łańcut, Łęczna, Nowy Sącz, Pińczów, Tykocin, and Włodawa, are in the best condition. The synagogues and prayer rooms in present-day Jewish communities are also in good condition: in Warsaw and its Poznań, Gdańsk, and Lublin branches; in Łódź, Kraków, Wroclaw and its Wałbrzych and Dzierżoniów branches; in Katowice and its Bytom and Gliwice branches; in Bialsk-Biała, Legnica, and Szczecin. Synagogues were rebuilt as libraries in Biecz, Chęciny, Konin (two), Niebylec, Piotrków Trybunalski, Przemyśl, Sopolno, Strzyżów, Szczerszyn, Tarnogród, and Zamość. Their new function is conducive to taking care of the buildings.

But there are many synagogues in ruins or in a state of serious dilapidation, which the current owners are keen to demolish: in Bychawa, Ciepielów, Cieszanów, Dąbrowa Tarnowska, Dąbrówno, Dęblin, Dukla, two in Działoszyce, Dzierżoniów, Gliwice, Izbica Kujawska, Kępno, Kośycze, Kraśnik, Krynik, Krzepice, Łaszczów, Medyka, Nowy Korczyn, Przysucha, Stary Dzików, Tarłów, Wodzisław and Żychlin. Since the catalog was published in 1996, synagogue buildings in Czerwińsk, Otwock, Rembertów, Siedlce, and Szadek have been demolished.

While there is a clearly defined approach for ensuring optimum preservation of cemeteries, and the extent of work is dependent on resources, goodwill and funding, in the case of synagogues and other community buildings, such as hospitals, schools, and ritual baths, which have barely been touched upon here, it is above all vital to define the function of these buildings. It is the major determinant in the way they are renovated, how much the process costs, and the upkeep required. Neither the Jewish communities nor the FODŻ has a clear concept of how to do this. However, this is not solely a Polish problem, as reflected in the book Synagogues without

51 The renovation of the synagogue in Dąbrowa Tarnowska started in the summer of 2011 and was completed in 2012, after submission of this article.
Jews,\textsuperscript{52} published in 2000. In the face of the destruction of a vast part of Jewish material heritage, every building preserved constitutes a silent testimony to history. Thus, their aesthetic or artistic value is secondary to their documentary importance. Assessment of the historical value of such buildings should be based on universally applied criteria, keeping in mind their significance for the history and culture of the Jews in Poland, the history of Poland, the broader history of the Jews, and memorializing them.

\textsuperscript{52} Rivka and Ben-Zion Dorfman, \textit{Synagogues without Jews and the Communities That Built and Used Them} (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2000/5761). Unfortunately, these authors did not visit Poland on their tour of Europe.
Concentration Camps and Death Camps As Memorial Sites to Jewish Victims or Mutual Polish-Jewish Martyrdom Sites

ROBERT KUWAŁEK

A mere description of the most important Holocaust-related memorial sites in Poland merits an extensive monograph, which has not been written as yet. This article should be considered an attempt to highlight certain problems that historians, as well as art historians, and those dealing with educational aspects at memorial sites, may encounter. Each site deserves a separate study, because it has its own unique and individual story.

The attitude to memorial sites in Poland changed according to the political situation. In the early post-war years, places related to Jewish martyrdom alone were treated very differently from the most well-known concentration camps, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek, where Poles and people of other nationalities, in addition to Jews, were victims.¹ These two camps were used to symbolize the memory of the atrocious German Occupation, with special emphasis on consequences for the Poles. However, at the same time, death camps where the vast majority of Polish Jews and some Jews from other countries perished were slipping into oblivion. The general public was not aware of such places as Chełmno nad Nerem (Kulmhof), and Belżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka, the three camps associated with the “Reinhardt” action.

Memorializing non-camp mass execution sites of both Jews and Poles is an even more complex question, which has not yet been discussed in a separate monograph. At several places where Germans carried out mass executions of Jews, there are still no appropriate signs of remembrance or they are completely unmarked.

¹ The history of remembrance at the former KL Stutthof and KL Gross-Rosen camps began much later. Until the 1990s, they were not even generally associated with the Nazi policy of exterminating Jews. This topic is developed further in the article.
From 1944 to 1949

In the early post-war years, the former Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps became national symbols of martyrdom. Memories of the crimes committed by the German invaders in Poland were still very fresh and widespread at the time. As Jolanta Adamska points out, memories of martyrdom have a truly national character, manifested in grassroots initiatives originating primarily among former inmates or victims’ families, to erect modest memorials or build cemeteries. Majdanek was the main memorial site in Poland in 1945 and 1946, popularized in the press and literature. This was because Majdanek was the first major concentration camp liberated by the Red Army, in July 1944, and was then used as both Soviet and Polish propaganda as proof of the Nazi occupation’s genocidal character. Very soon after, on October 19, 1944, the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego — PKWN) decided to make it into the first museum of martyrdom in Poland. In practice, the Soviet and Polish armies used most of the former camp grounds for their own purposes. The camp was subject to devastation and degradation, which was not attributable to the military. The Communist authorities established the


3 The liberation of Lublin and the Majdanek concentration camp by the Soviet Army in July 1944 also marked a turning point in the Allies’ flow of information on crimes committed by Germans in occupied Europe. The surviving traces of crime were excellent proof of the Third Reich’s policy toward the occupied nations, and, thanks to the media, influenced the Allies’ position toward Germany. However, the reports that reached the coalition governments in 1944 did not significantly affect their strategy. See Tomasz Kranz, “Majdanek w świetle prasy amerykańskiej w 1944 r.,” *Zeszyty Majdanka*, vol. 17 (1996), pp. 51–52.

4 Tajne pismo z 26 X 1944 ppłk Eugeniuzsa Szyra, Szefa Wydziału Organizacyjnego Głównego Zarządu Polityczno-Wychowawczego Wojska Polskiego do Prezydium PKWN w sprawie niszczenia obiektów i kradzieży obuwia z terenu Majdanka (A secret letter, dated October 26, 1944, from Colonel Eugeniusz Szyr, Head of the Organizational Department of the Central Political and Educational Executive Body of the Polish Army, to the Presidium of the PKWN, about the destruction of facilities and the theft of shoes from the Majdanek camp grounds); APMM, *Archiwum Zakładowe*, vol I/1, p. 14, in Janina Kiełboń and Edward Balawięder, eds., *Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku w latach 1944–1947. Wybór dokumentów* (Lublin: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, 2004), p. 64. This is the first report on the theft of camp and prisoner property at Majdanek. A “special camp of the NKVD” was also established on the grounds of the former concentration camp, initially for arrested Home Army (AK) and Peasant
State Museum at Majdanek (Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku — PMM, known in contemporary documents as the National Museum or Memorial Museum to German Crimes at Majdanek) as an official memorial of the Second World War. In March 1945, the Department of Museums and Monuments to Polish Martyrdom within the Ministry of Culture and Art, took over this function. Until 1947, the department, which first came under the General Head Office of Museums and Conservation, and then the Central Administration of Museums, mainly dealt with the official remembrance of the martyrdom of Poles and other nationalities within the new borders of Poland. On July 2, 1947, the Sejm passed two acts to establish state museums at Majdanek and Oświęcim (where the Auschwitz camp was situated) as “Memorials to the Martyrdom of the Polish Nation and Other Nations.” On the same day, another act of parliament established the Council for the Protection of Monuments to Martyrdom, which took over the functions of the Department of Museums and Monuments.

Those were the only museums in Poland established on the grounds of former concentration camps immediately after the Second World War. At the time, no mention was made of commemorating other camps, including the Gross-Rosen and Stutthof concentration camps, or the extermination centers for Jews set up as part of the “Reinhardt” action. Commemorating the death camp at Treblinka, which was already under discussion as of 1945, was an exception. The Committee for Commemorating the Victims of Treblinka, formed in 1947, announced a competition for creating

Battalion (BCh) soldiers, who were subsequently deported to Soviet forced labor camps. Majdanek also served as a prison for German POWs and people accused of collaboration with German invaders.

5 Adamska, “Pamięć,” pp. 5–6. The martyrdom of the “Polish nation” was given precedence over suffering of “other nations.” This principle was also applied in the press.

6 Ibid., p. 6; Ustawa z 2 VII 1947 o upamiętnieniu męczeństwa Narodu Polskiego i innych Narodów na Majdanku, in Kielboń and Balawejder, Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, p. 198; Jacek Lachendro, Zburzyć i zaorać...? Idea założenia Państwowego Muzeum-Auschwitz Birkenau w świetle prasy polskiej w latach 1945–1948 (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau [PMAB], 2007), pp. 71–72. The acts establishing the two museums and regulating their activities were developed in both cases after the museums had actually been opened to the public. The names and wording of the legal acts emphasized “the martyrdom of the Polish nation,” above all. For the former KL Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Polish name, i.e., Oświęcim, was adopted, which was very popular at the time. However, a perception in which the historical name of the town of Oświęcim became a symbol of the concentration camp began to take shape. For Majdanek, the adopted name of the camp was never employed in official German documents. The official German name of the camp was KGL Lublin or KL Lublin.
a memorial on the grounds of the former death camp. Only Jewish representatives demanded that the grounds of the former camp be tidied up and a monument erected. This came as a reaction to the progressive devastation of the grounds and, above all, to the profanation of the site by local people who had dug up mass graves in search of valuables. The latter practice was so widespread that practically all official reports of successive on-site inspections describe the problem extensively and call for its resolution. Investigations led to the arrest of some grave robbers, but these short-term measures did not prevent further digging up there. These investigations and on-site inspections also provided a great deal of information about how the camp functioned during the occupation. It was probably the most well-documented death camp during the early post-war years, with the most publications and debates over its future. The separate Committee for Commemorating the Victims of Treblinka testifies to the importance attached by the Jewish community to commemorating the camp. Despite advanced work and many discussions on a memorial at Treblinka, the camp grounds were not completely cleaned up until the early 1960s. Fencing off the grounds was the only result of activities there from 1944 to 1948. After 1948, the state authorities practically ignored this issue altogether. The Jewish institutions also did not finalize their project for a monument, and the Committee for Commemorating the Victims of Treblinka ceased functioning in 1948.

The other camps were exclusively mentioned in the context of investigations carried out by the Central Commission for Investigating German Crimes in Poland. Their published results remained the only historical

9 Zdzisław Łukaszkiewicz, Obóz straceń w Treblince (Warsaw: PIW, 1946); Rachela Auerbach, Afn di felder fun Treblinke (Warsaw: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna [CŻKH], 1947); “Ogładziny obozu zagłady w Treblince,” BŻAP, no. 34/282 (1947), col. 3; “Przedstawiciele społeczeństwa żydowskiego na terenie byłego obozu zagłady w Treblince,” BŻAP, no. 69/317 (1947), col. 2. These are only a few examples of publications on Treblinka. A great deal of material relating to debates on the camp is stored in the Jewish Historical Institute Archive (AŻIH), see Rusiniak, Obóz zagłady Treblinka II.
findings in Polish scholarly discourse as well as in public consciousness for a long time. However, this activity did not lead to the commemoration of former death camps, while their findings usually did not reach the public at large. The results of investigations into crimes committed at Belżec and Sobibór were only published in Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce (The Bulletin of the Central Commission for Investigating German Crimes in Poland — BGKBZNP). This also applied to the Treblinka and Chelmno nad Nerem Camps, which were described in two different BGKBZNP articles. 11 Immediately after the war, investigations in these camps revolved around the search for “Polish victims,” even though the camps were designated specifically for exterminating Jews. This was particularly clear in Belżec and Sobibór. As for the Belżec death camp, according to Judge Eugeniusz Szrojt’s conclusions, between 1,000 and 1,500 Poles were deported there as a punishment for having assisted Jews or for underground political activities. 12 Later publications, mainly intended for the general public, only mentioned the upper limit. With Sobibór, Judge Zdzisław Łukaszkiewicz was much more cautious, only stating that, according to witnesses, “a certain number of Gypsies and Poles were liquidated in the camp.” 13 Later, a figure of 1,000 Poles, who had allegedly been killed in Sobibór, cropped up, but its source is unknown, and was not provided by Łukaszkiewicz. 14 Judge Władysław Bednarz, in the first study on the Chelmno nad Nerem death camp, wrote a great deal about Poles, Czech children from the razed village of Lidice, and Soviet POWs as alleged camp victims, invoking testimonies of witnesses questioned during the investigation. Only the local Poles mentioned Poles murdered in Chelmno, while the few surviving Jewish prisoners did not recall any such victims. Devotional items found there were considered as proof of the murder of Catholic clergy in that camp. 15 Attempts in the early post-war years were already under way

14 The information on approximately 1,000 alleged Polish victims of the Sobibór death camp has remained to this day on the memorial plaques installed on the grounds of the museum of the former Nazi death camp in Sobibór.
15 Bednarz, Obóz straceń, pp. 30–31, 50–51. This publication also included Andrzej Miszczak’s testimony, which mentioned transports of Poles to the camp. Although Miszczak had not seen them personally, he invoked testimonies of other Polish
to “Polonize” the mass murder sites of Jews by investing them with a character in keeping with “the martyrdom of the Polish nation,” without mentioning that this category also included Jews. Similarly, with respect to the Bełżec camp, the testimony of the witness who gave the highest number of Polish victims of the camp was probably coerced. The information provided in this case by Judge Szrojt is based exclusively on this particular testimony, since none of the other witnesses who testified between 1945 and 1946 gave any exact details concerning Poles or other non-Jewish victims of the death camp there.16

Apart from Treblinka, none of the other investigations at the camps led to a cleanup of the grounds. Moreover, commissions of inquiry members saw with their own eyes local inhabitants digging up the grounds of former camps in search of valuables and gold. The unpublished conclusions of the investigations explicitly mentioned dug-up camp grounds, bones, and other human remains scattered on the surface torn up by “ghouls” scavenging on mass graves. The text published in BGKBZNP does not mention these facts at all. The practice of digging up the camp grounds occurred not only in former death camps, but also at the Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau witnesses. Later, efforts were made to investigate the question of non-Jewish victims of the Chelmno camp more thoroughly. While the execution of Polish prisoners from the camp’s Sonderkommando and groups of mentally handicapped patients of a clinic in Kochanówka was confirmed, there was no evidence to support claims that camp victims in Chelmno included children brought from the Zamość region or other groups of Poles. The murder of Catholic clergymen in the camp also proved impossible to confirm. However, there is still some evidence that may confirm the deportation of children from the Czech village of Lidice to the camp. See Marek Budziarek, “Polacy, dzieci czeskie i jeńcy radzieccy zamordowani w Chelmnie nad Nerem,” in Łucja Pawlicka-Nowak, ed., Ośrodek zagłady w Chełmnie nad Nerem i jego rola w hitlerowskiej polityce eksterminacyjnej. Materiały z sesji naukowej (Konin: Muzeum Okręgowe w Koninie, 1995), pp. 69–71.

16 Stefan Kirsz, who worked as a railwayman in Rawa Ruska and Bełżec during the German occupation, was the witness who testified that between 1,000 and 1,500 Christians had been murdered in Bełżec. He claimed that railway cars with Poles and Ukrainians, and not only Poles alone, were coupled to the Jewish transports, and that he actually spoke to one of those people while the train was standing at the Bełżec station. The witness testified twice within a few months, in late 1945 and early 1946; in the 1946 testimony, he mentioned an even higher number of non-Jewish victims deported to Bełżec. APMM, photocopies, no. XIX–1284; Akta Okręgowej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Lublinie (OKBL), 1604/45; Akta śledztwa w sprawie zbrodni popełnionych w obozie zagłady w Bełżcu, Zeznania Stefana Kirsa z 15 X 1945 oraz z 20 II 1946; Robert Kuwałek, Obóz zagłady w Bełżcu (Lublin-Bełżec: Muzeum — Miejsce Pamięci w Bełżcu. Oddział Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku, 2005), pp. 55–57.
museums. In both places, guard units were formed with the primary task of watching over and protecting former camp grounds from pillage and devastation. “Ghouls” also dug up mass execution sites, for example, in Poniatowa near Lublin, where 14,000 Jews from the local labor camp were murdered in a single huge execution on November 4, 1943. On the one hand, the “epidemic” of digging for valuable objects continued in spite of special articles published in the national and local press, arrests and trials of some offenders, and local campaigns denouncing these practices. On the other hand, information on the widespread digging up of the grounds of former camps was included in reports from the investigations and directly in witness testimonies. The report from the investigation in Bełżec states explicitly:

At the moment, the camp grounds have been totally dug up by the local people, who are searching for valuables. As a result, the ashes from human corpses and wood, as well as burned or partly burned fragments of bones, have been brought to the surface.

Although the local press, at least in the Lublin region, did not report on the digging up of the grounds of the former Bełżec and Sobibór Camps, the situation was well known. In the case of Bełżec, it even had tragic consequences. Szmul Pelz, Chairman of the Jewish Committee of Tomaszów Lubelski, who protested to the voivodeship authorities against the digging up of the Bełżec camp, was murdered in the Bełżec vicinity in autumn 1945. The murderers were reportedly local peasants who repeatedly dug up graves on the camp grounds.

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17 Reports on the “gold rush” on the grounds of the former Auschwitz-Birkenau Camp appeared in the Kraków press. A similar phenomenon at Majdanek and on the grounds of former camps in Lublin was also mentioned on numerous occasions in the local newspapers. However, there were almost no press reports on “ghouls” in Bełżec and Sobibór, despite the fact that the digging up of these two former camps was practiced on a much wider scale and lasted considerably longer. See Lachendro, Zburzyć i zaorać...?, pp. 41–43; Kiełboń and Balawejder, Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, p. 136, 156; Rusiniak, Obóz zagłady, pp. 29–33.

18 “Akta śledztwa w sprawie zbrodni popełnionych w obozie zagłady w Bełżcu, Sprawozdanie z wyników dochodzenia w sprawie Obozu Śmierci w Bełżcu,” APMM, photocopies, no. XIX–1284, OKBL, 1604/45.

This phenomenon occurred on a smaller scale in the former Chelmno camp, but, in this case, the camp or victims’ property was stolen and vandalized. No one took care to secure the objects discovered during surface research conducted on the grounds of former camps, even though these objects were mentioned in reports on the investigations. In the case of Chelmno, many of these objects were even taken to the district court in Lodz as evidence. Such valuable material, which could have later been used as a basis for museum exhibitions, has been lost.20 This seems to indicate that fitting commemorations of former death camps, except for Treblinka, were not even contemplated at the time.

First of all, the group of camp survivors was not numerous enough to exert sufficient pressure either on the Central Committee of Jews in Poland or on the state authorities to clean up and duly mark those places. Jews who survived the war and lived in various parts of the country, even if they had lost their whole families in death camps, may not have known in which specific camp their relatives died, in addition to wrestling with their own trauma and other everyday problems. Perhaps the absence of such plans can apparently be explained because the museums at Majdanek and in Oswiecim, where joint Polish-Jewish commemorations took place, as well as separate Jewish ones, served as the official vehicles for memorialization. In August 1945, the Voivodeship Jewish Committee co-organized the first “Majdanek Week,” including additional religious events especially for the local Jewish community.21 In 1947, the Jewish community of Lublin

20 Fragments of books in Hebrew and various objects brought by deportees, which were found on the grounds of the former camp in Belzec, are mentioned in investigative records. In Sobibór, human remains intermingled with various objects, including women's hairpieces, were found. For instance, after his emigration to the USA, Tomasz Blatt, a survivor of Sobibór, handed over to a museum in Seattle a braid and a mess tin, which he had found in the camp immediately after the war. In photographs taken in Chelmno nad Nerem in 1945, the grates used for incinerating the bodies of the victims are clearly visible, and records from investigations report over 20,000 spoons and more than 4,000 scissors, found in the palace and granary ruins in Chelmno, which were handed over to the municipal court in Kolo. The same source reports that visitors to the camp grounds took various objects, and parts of the crematorium grate were lost in this way. To this day, no one knows what happened to the objects found in the camp grounds, which were given to the Kolo and Lodz courts as evidence. From the author’s conversation with Blatt, September 2008; Bednarz, Oboz straceń, p. 9; Janusz Gulczyński, “Ośrodek zagłady w Chelmnie nad Nerem (przegląd i metodologia badań, aspekty muzealne),” in Pawlicka-Nowak, ed., Ośrodek zagłady w Chelmnie nad Nerem, pp. 32–34.

also funded a monument in honor of the Lublin Holocaust victims, which was erected in the Jewish cemetery. All commemorative events were arranged in Lublin, and there were no signs of interest in Bełżec or Sobibór at the time. Owing to lack of knowledge about the sites where thousands of Jews from particular localities perished, these victims were not commemorated. By unwritten agreement, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland and the Central Jewish Historical Commission were responsible for the remembrance of sites associated with the Holocaust, mainly former death camps. Neither of these institutions took care to provide those places with even basic protection. Until 1949, aside from declarations about the need to commemorate the death camps, Jewish institutions did not put up any memorial signs at these sites, and their activities focused mainly on plans to erect a monument at Treblinka.

Among the inscriptions on the monuments honoring Jewish communities from the area at the Jewish cemetery in Miodowa Street in Kraków, the fact that most of the Jews from the neighboring towns were murdered in the Bełżec death camp is not mentioned. The inscriptions only mention executions that took place in the towns themselves in the summer of 1942. Immediately after the war, survivors made efforts to place memorial signs in many areas, mostly at the Jewish cemeteries, but there were no corresponding initiatives in the former death camps and large forced labor camps, such as those in Trawniki or Poniatowa in the Lublin voivodeship.

22 In the case of Lublin, there should have been interest in the remembrance of the former Bełżec camp, where most of the Lublin Jews were exterminated. The failure to commemorate seems to be because Majdanek symbolized the Holocaust to Lublin Jews at that time. Very few of the handful of survivors in Lublin and in Poland as a whole, and even fewer of those who lived through the war in the Soviet Union, knew that about 26,000 Lublin Jews had been deported to the Bełżec camp in March and April 1942. Almost all Jews spoke of Majdanek as the place where some of their relatives were killed. Most of the first post-war generation of Lublin Jews and their children lived with this conviction for many years. This is from the author’s conversation with Yosef Dakar, President of the Association of the Jews of Lublin, in June 2004.


24 Examples are the monuments erected on Miodowa Street in honor of the Jewish communities of Tymbark and Skawina. There are also symbolic tombstones in honor of individual Jewish families whose members were murdered at different places, including the Bełżec death camp (which is acknowledged in the inscription), but it seems that these gravestones were put up later, in the 1980s, e.g., tombstones of the Liebeskind-Bross, Pfeffer, and Krischer families. Photographs of them are in the author’s collection.
or Szebnie and Zasław in the Podkarpackie voivodeship, where monuments were not built for a very long time, despite the thousands of Jews who had perished there. Perhaps commemoration in hometowns was more convenient, since the local cemeteries could be more easily protected from devastation than those in places where there were no longer major Jewish communities. Visiting the provinces where Jews were unwelcome was probably becoming too dangerous. 25 Erecting monuments in hometowns was also meant to bring back memories and resacralize Jewish cemeteries devastated during the German occupation. Monuments were often made of Jewish tombstones found in various towns, not necessarily in the cemetery but also in the streets, where they served as paving stones. Several of those early monuments did not survive after Jewish survivors left Poland, when many cemeteries, along with the monuments, were vandalized again, especially following the antisemitic campaign of 1968. 26

Initiatives to commemorate millions of Polish Jews, mostly killed in mass extermination centers and concentration camps, were implemented at the museums in Majdanek in 1945 and Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1947. In the former, such initiatives were undertaken by the Voivodeship Jewish Committee in Lublin and, in the latter, negotiations were conducted by the Central Committee of Jews in Poland. At both museums, exhibitions devoted to Jewish victims were set up in separate barracks. They were developed and maintained with the funds from Jewish organizations. 27 A photograph

25 On the forms of commemoration chosen by survivors from various localities, see Gabriel N. Finder and Judith R. Cohen, "Photographs from the Grave," Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry, vol. 20; Gabriel N. Finder, Natalia Aleksijn, Antony Polonsky, and Jack Schwarz, eds., Making Holocaust Memory (Portland: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), pp. 55–73. There are reports confirming that survivors visited former camps, such as Rudolf Reder, who survived the Belżec camp, and Leon Feldhendler, co-leader of the prisoner rebellion in Sobibór.

26 James E. Young, The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 189–195. The author gives the example of a monument, consisting of fragments of matzevot from the Jewish cemetery in Śedlice, made shortly after the war, which was damaged by local Polish vandals 20 years later. A monument, with traces of devastation, can also be found at the Krasnik Jewish cemetery. It was erected soon after the war, when there was still a Jewish community of 200 people in the town. For more information, see Eleonora Bergman and Jan Jagielski’s article, “Traces of Jewish Presence: Synagogues and Cemeteries from 1944 to 1997,” in this volume.

27 Małgorzata Socha, Head of the Jewish Pavilion at the Majdanek Museum, received her salary from the Voivodeship Jewish Committee, in which she was a member. See Kopciowski, “Żydzi w Lublinie,” pp. 166–167; Lachendro, Zburzyć i zaorać...?, p. 67.
album, kept at the Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny — ŻIH), is the only remaining item from the “Jewish exhibition,” displayed at the Majdanek museum until 1949. No material of this type has been preserved in the museum itself.\(^{28}\) The “Jewish barracks” were incorporated into general exhibitions at both museums. The Central Committee of Jews in Poland treated the Jewish exhibition in the former camp’s Block 4 at the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum as a temporary arrangement. At that time, there were already plans to create a “Museum of Jewish Martyrdom” in Auschwitz-Birkenau, which would be devoted to the annihilation of Jews from Poland and other countries in all the camps, not only Auschwitz, but also in Chelmno, Belżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka. These plans did not apply to Majdanek, probably because it already had an exhibition devoted to Jewish martyrdom. This constitutes further proof that, at the time, there must have been a great deal of indecision as to what should be done with the former death camps.

Former death camps could not be part of the heroic portrayal of occupation history propagated by the authorities, not only among Poles but also among Jews. This is not to say that Jewish organizations had altogether forgotten about those places. According to archival material, the committee made repeated attempts to interest the state authorities in safeguarding the camps from devastation.\(^{29}\) The “Museum of Jewish Martyrdom” never materialized, and was replaced by the so-called “Jewish” exhibition in Block 27, which opened briefly in 1968.\(^{30}\) At the time when the “Museum of Jewish Martyrdom” was being planned as a section of the Auschwitz museum, the Jewish theme was downplayed in other parts of the permanent exhibit. Among other things, it was assumed that:

The proportion of Jewish exhibits depends on the contribution of work made by the Central Jewish Commission, but they should not create the impression that Auschwitz was a place of exclusively Jewish martyrdom.\(^{31}\)

Press publications on Auschwitz included relatively few references to the

\(^{28}\) AŻIH, album entitled *Muzeum Żydowskie na Majdanku*, file no. 1946/15.
\(^{30}\) Lachendro, *Zburzyć i zaorać...?*, pp. 68–69.
\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 69.
extermination of Jews. Instead, emphasis was placed on the martyrdom of Poles and prisoners of other nationalities incarcerated at the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. The museum was described in press articles as the “Museum of Polish Martyrdom in Oświęcim.”

In the case of Majdanek, almost nothing, except for some photographs, related to the exhibition has survived. In press publications on Majdanek, the predominant tone was similar to that about Auschwitz. The camp’s Polish and international character was underscored. In some publications, especially the earliest ones, the press did not speak explicitly of Jewish victims, even when describing events in which only Jews lost their lives. The execution of over 18,000 Jews at Majdanek on November 3, 1943, is an example of this. Jews were mentioned as victims, but only when “other nationalities” were enumerated. Although the Voivodeship Jewish Committee always participated in the celebrations of the “Majdanek Week” until 1949, press reports on these events consistently stressed their Polish, and even Catholic, character. A memorial to the Jews murdered in Birkenau was erected on the grounds of the former camp in 1948. There was no similar commemoration at the time for the Jews murdered at Majdanek. Instead, there were plans, which were eventually abandoned, to commemorate Soviet POW concentration camp victims.

While the authorities took measures to preserve the camp grounds in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek, the fate of camps such as Sztutowo (Stutthof) and Rogoźnica (Gross-Rosen) remained unresolved. Initially, former KL Stutthof was used to intern German refugees from East Prussia. Later, part of the camp was abandoned and gradually devastated, whereas the quarters of the SS garrison were converted into a holiday center for the functionaries first from the Ministry of Public Security and then from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Former camp prisoners wished to take care

32 Ibid.
33 “Fabryka śmierci na Majdanku,” Rzeczpospolita, vol. 6 (1944).
34 Between 1945 and 1949, “Majdanek Week” was held, which included an open-air church service near the crematorium or in Field 5. Press articles on these events never mentioned Jewish religious ceremonies, even though speeches by representatives of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland or the Voivodeship Jewish Committee were reported. “Uroczystości na Majdanku,” Sztandar Ludu, no. 153 (1945); “Majdanek staje się symbolem,” Wolni Ludzie, no. 11 (1947); Życie Lubelskie, no. 175 (1947); Życie Lubelskie, no. 250 (1948).
of the place and duly commemorate the victims, but the authorities succeeded in discouraging them. The authorities, especially the security office, who intimidated the more active camp survivors, claimed it served as a place of confinement for Kashubians, i.e., Reichsdeutsche or Germans, and Volksdeutsche, i.e., collaborators. The Jewish prisoners of KL Stutthof were utterly ignored, and the Ministry of Culture and Art did not plan to create a museum there. The attempts by former prisoners, members of the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners, to preserve the camp’s remains were unsuccessful not only because of the authorities’ unfavorable attitude, but also because the survivors lacked sufficient resources either to erect a monument or to clean up the grounds of the former camp, where many camp remnants as well as prisoners’ and victims’ belongings could be found as late as 1949. When the first exhibition pavilion on the former camp grounds was opened in late 1959 in the reconstructed crematorium, where a commemorative plaque was placed, much of the former prison camp had already been dismantled, and the grounds had been torn up by “ghouls.” Indeed, a cross put up by former prisoners near the crematorium in 1945 was the first, and for more than ten years, the only form of remembrance. From that same time until 1956, former prisoners were effectively “discouraged” from undertaking any initiatives.

Former prisoners also made efforts to commemorate the Gross-Rosen camp. Attempts to protect the grounds began relatively late, only in 1947, when most of the camp buildings had already been dismantled. As with the Stutthof camp, the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners, the main organization looking after the place, planned to build a mausoleum. This initiative received scant attention from the central authorities, including the Ministry of Culture and Art, which had no plans to create a separate museum for the Gross-Rosen Camp. They assumed that the museums at Majdanek and Auschwitz were more than sufficient as a remembrance of

36 Wóycicka, Przerwana żałoba, pp. 260–266. The association intended to establish a holiday center on the former Stutthof concentration camp grounds to serve former prisoners. However bizarre that idea might appear today, it was part of the association’s statutory activities at that time, whose task was to provide assistance and attend to the needs of the survivors of concentration camps.

37 Later, commemoration and establishment of a museum in Sztutowo were possible also because some former camp prisoners were Władysław Gomułka’s close political allies. The author thanks Marcin Owsiński, who works at the Stutthof State Museum, for information on the post-war history of the former Stutthof camp.
the martyrdom of the Polish nation and other peoples. As late as 1953, a modest memorial in Gross-Rosen was unveiled.\footnote{Wóycicka, \textit{Przerwana żałoba}, pp. 266–269.}

Compared with the early post-war years, when there was much discussion about remembering the invaders’ crimes, the victims, and the related places, and long-term plans were put forward, such as establishing the Central Museum of Polish Martyrdom, after 1949, there was rapidly decreasing interest in the subject,\footnote{The plan for the Central Museum of Polish Martyrdom was mentioned in the press in 1947. It was supposed to present the martyrdom of the Polish nation as above the sufferings of all other peoples. The debates over the museum continued from 1947 to 1949, and one of the suggested locations for it was the former Warsaw Ghetto, or, more specifically, the former “Gęsiówka” camp where most of the prisoners were Jews. However, that location was rejected due to opposition from the Ministry of Public Security, which administered the former “Gęsiówka” camp. In 1949, the idea of establishing the Central Museum of Polish Martyrdom — renamed the Central Museum of Martyrdom and Struggle against Fascism — was finally abandoned. See “Ku czci ofiar,” \textit{Głos Pracy}, no. 91 (1947); Mazur, \textit{Upamiętnianie w latach 1945–1948}, pp. 139–140.} especially among the authorities, rather than in society, which simply had no say in that matter. Poland was entering the era of harsh Stalinism, which attempted to exploit the memory of the camp victims to “fight imperialism,” while even neglecting the museums previously established at memorial sites.

**From 1950 to 1956**

In 1949, the former Council for the Protection of Monuments to Martyrdom was reorganized as the Council for Protection of Monuments to Struggle and Martyrdom, but rather than caring for the memorial sites, in the 1950s, “exposing German and American imperialism” was its main objective. As far as former camp grounds were concerned, all essential commemoration was considered complete and, thus, resources for further activities were reduced, as were the subsidies for maintenance of already existing institutions, which had a negative impact on their functioning.\footnote{Adamska, “Pamięć,” pp. 6–7.} During the Stalinist era, the anniversaries of the Warsaw and Białystok Ghetto Uprisings, as well as of other ghetto liquidations, were only marked in a very limited manner. Modest and poorly publicized celebrations were held by the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland in places where sizeable Jewish communities existed. The association, which became the main
representative body of Jews in Poland at the time, also arranged exhumations and erected monuments in Jewish cemeteries, but probably had no influence on the situation of memorial sites on the grounds of former camps.\textsuperscript{41} New forms of commemoration — for which the official, state institutions, primarily of the Council for Remembrance (Rada Ochrony Pamięci), were responsible at the time — were out of the question, except for monuments in honor of the Red Army. The same obviously applied to separate memorials in places associated with the Holocaust.

This had extensive negative effects on existing institutions, for example, the Majdanek museum. The implementation of a land development plan for the museum grounds began even before 1949. According to this plan, an oak grove was to be planted in four former prisoner fields, in accordance with the Slavic tradition for commemorating the dead. Only the residential barracks in the third prisoner field would be left of the former camp. The crematoria and gas chambers would be preserved as evidence of the crimes, and some of the workshop barracks would house the museum exhibition. Implementation of the plan required substantial financial resources.\textsuperscript{42} After 1949, funding to the museum was reduced, justified by “diminished interest in occupation issues, and in camps, in particular.” Renovations to historical buildings were only carried out within the modest means available. “Majdanek Week” events, attended by thousands of people in the second half of the 1940s, were discontinued. However, work on completion of the permanent museum exhibition continued, which was supplemented with propaganda elements in the spirit of the time, such as “The Struggle for Peace” display.\textsuperscript{43} After 1949, there was no longer any talk of a separate Jewish pavilion. Its closure might have been due not only to dissolution of the Voivodeship Jewish Committee in Lublin, which paid the Jewish exhibition’s curator, but also to a general tendency, due to political considerations, to avoid


mentioning national or ethnic aspects of the policy of the invaders, who were described as Nazis (“Hitlerites”) rather than Germans. Concentration camps were regarded as symbols of internationalism and the international struggle against the Nazi invaders. The fact that most of the Jews who lived in Lublin immediately left the city after the war, and those who remained were no longer interested in shaping the national memory might also have contributed to closure of the museum’s Jewish exhibition. Emphasizing the fate of the Jews was not viewed favorably by the Communist authorities at the time. Not only was the Jewish exhibition at Majdanek closed, but also the original idea of so-called national exhibitions, in particular, in prisoner barracks in Field 3 was never put into effect.

The allegedly diminished interest in the subject of camps can safely be considered as a myth circulated by the authorities since, as museum statistics show, the number of visitors continued to rise in the 1950s, at least at the Majdanek Museum.44

The situation was similar at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, where a permanent exhibition universalizing the victims’ narrative was being developed. The victims’ ethnic origin was seldom — or never — mentioned. The victims were impersonally described as “people,” “masses,” and “millions.” The only clues to the victims’ identities in the exhibition were in the photographs and names on the suitcases. In Block 4, a nine-branch menorah (candelabrum used on the Jewish Hanukkah holiday), with the inscription “Yizker” (Memory), representing the Jewish camp victims, remained. This internationalization of the victims was evident both in the exhibitions in 1950–1951 and 1955, which survived with certain modifications until 1989.45 Almost completely abandoning plans to clean up the former Birkenau camp grounds was a sign of the disregard for Jewish martyrdom. Despite the plans for land development and commemoration, heralded by the 1955 unveiling of the first monument honoring the victims of Birkenau, as a result of lack of resources for maintenance, several buildings and installations were destroyed. Birkenau had vast grounds at a considerable distance from the main museum, located in the brick buildings of the former Auschwitz I camp, where control and supervision were much more easily

44 Ibid. The total of about 28,000 visitors in 1949 was the lowest after the Second World War. In 1950, there were over 40,000 visitors, and, in 1951, over 66,000. There was a decrease to 35,000 in 1952, but this was followed by an increase to 69,000 in 1953.
maintained. The location of the infamous Block 11 there, which symbolized Polish martyrdom and heroism in Auschwitz-Birkenau, according to the formula adopted for commemorating the victims of that concentration camp, was another factor underlying this situation. Lack of investment in and neglect of Birkenau after 1949 led to the marginalization of the Holocaust. As early as 1947–1948, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland stressed the importance of Birkenau, as Auschwitz II, in symbolizing Jewish martyrdom.46

Whereas the authorities concentrated mainly on the situation at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, Majdanek was almost completely neglected. There were even plans to close the museum there.47 Majdanek lost the “competition” for the preeminence in martyrdom to Auschwitz. The authorities treated it as a “cheaper copy of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.”48 Although Majdanek should have been directly under the Ministry of Culture and Art, in practice, the Municipal People’s Council and local party authorities made decisions about the museum. This resulted in complete lack of concern about administration of the camp grounds. In the preserved barracks in Field III3, instead of a museum exhibition, the local authorities arranged storehouses for the Domestic Trade Enterprises (Przedsiębiorstwo Handlu Wewnętrznego), Motozbyt (a state-owned enterprise trading in automotive parts and accessories — translator’s note), and the Lublin Regional Meat Traders’ Associations (Lubelskie Okręgowe Przedsiębiorstwo Obrotu Zwierzętami Rzeźnymi). This situation persisted despite the large number of visitors.49

From 1956 to 1968

The debate on the continuing devastation of the camp grounds only began as late as 1956, during a wave of political liberalization. The local press in Lublin began publishing alarmist articles accusing the local authorities of gross negligence at Majdanek. The devastation of the camp grounds and installations, including the gas chambers, in particular, was described explicitly.

46 Wóycicka, Przerwana żaloba, p. 248.
47 Ibid., p. 249.
48 Ibid.
49 There were over 260,000 visitors to the Majdanek State Museum in 1954. Balawejder, "Kronika," p. 132.
The authors also pointed out the absence of a monument commemorating all Majdanek victims. A burial mound with ashes of the victims, built as far back as 1946, was the only form of remembrance there. Wiera Korneluk, a journalist for Sztandar Ludu, described her impressions from a visit to Majdanek, in 1956, as follows:

No monument, no inscription or sign instructs us to lower our voices or take off our hats, as we do in funeral processions, confronting the dignity of death at ordinary cemeteries.50

The debate on the form of the Majdanek Museum continued for several years, resulting in decisions to cut down the “holy grove,” which by then had already run wild and turned into an ordinary wood, and to find and preserve all the remaining original objects from the former camp. The Citizens’ Committee for the Construction of a Monument was also established, with officials from the municipal and voivodeship administration in Lublin, as well as representatives of the Voivodeship Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, at its core. The Citizens’ Committee included Mieczysław Moczar and Grzegorz Wajskop, the latter a member of Lublin’s Jewish Community and Chairman of the Lublin branch of the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy, among others.51 The committee’s activities were ineffective and, therefore, the Society for the Preservation of Majdanek, previously closed in 1951, was reactivated in 1958 and began cooperating with the Museum administrators to clean up the grounds and erect a monument. At the same time, the debate on forms of remembrance was extended to other sites of martyrdom in the Lublin region, mainly the former Bełżec and Sobibór camps. Edward Gryń, Head of the Majdanek Museum at the time, advocated cleaning up all the sites and intervened with the authorities about this matter. This is how he presented the condition of former camps at a meeting with the authorities:

50 Wiera Korneluk, “Zabytek martyrologii czy pomnik naszej bezmyślności,” Sztandar Ludu, no. 156 (1956). The journalist devoted an extensive paragraph to the devastation of the former camp grounds shortly after the war. She reproved the destruction of many objects remaining in the camp grounds, such as original German signs on the barracks or many prisoners’ clogs, which were used as fuel in the museum offices’ stoves. However, she reserved her strongest criticism for the situation in the 1950s.

51 “Pomnik bohaterów dla uczczenia pamięci umęczonych,” Sztandar Ludu, no. 228 (1956); ibid., no. 246 (1956).
I have recently visited Zamość, Belżec, and Sobibór. I cannot speak calmly about what I saw. The grounds of the Belżec camp were supposed to be fenced a long time ago, but this has not been done. The Tomaszów branch of the State Forests National Forest Holding makes use of the loading ramp (in the camp grounds), where the transports would arrive. Stones, human bones, and skulls lie scattered around in the yard.... The situation in other localities is no better.\textsuperscript{52}

These animated debates continued until 1960, when a decision was made to change the land development plan for the Majdanek Museum, build a memorial, and begin renovation on a wider scale. At the same time, a more serious study of the history of Majdanek and the German occupation in the Lublin region began.\textsuperscript{53} The reactivated Society for the Preservation of Majdanek immediately declared it would also take care of other places of martyrdom in the Lublin voivodeship, including Belżec and Sobibór, but very little was actually done.\textsuperscript{54} In the meantime, both places were still subject to

\textsuperscript{52} “Miejsce kaźni milionów ludzi winniśmy otaczać największą opieką” (We Should Take the Greatest Care of Sites where Millions of People Died), Sztandar Ludu, no. 229 (1956). The “millions” of victims mentioned in the title referred to the numbers of victims of Majdanek given officially since 1944. It was assumed at that time that more than one million people had died or had been murdered there and that Poles constituted a majority among them.

\textsuperscript{53} As a result, the number of victims in the popular historical accounts of the Majdanek Camp was reduced to 360,000. Judge Łukaszkiewicz quoted this figure. The figure of over a million victims of Majdanek continued to appear in the press in the early 1960s. In the 1990s, the estimated number of Majdanek victims was reduced to 235,000, of whom 110,000 were Jews. Based on Tomasz Kranz’s research from 2005, it is assumed that approximately 80,000, including about 60,000 Jews, were killed or died at Majdanek. Research on the number of victims of other nationalities and the overall number of people who went through the camp continues. Zdzisław Łukaszkiewicz, “Obóz koncentracyjny i zagłady Majdanek,” BGKBZNP, vol. 4 (1948), pp. 61–105; Tomasz Kranz, “Ewidencja zgonów i śmiertelność więźniów KL Lublin,” Zeszyty Majdanka, vol. 23 (2005), p. 8.

\textsuperscript{54} Stanisława Gogołowska, “Majdanek nie może dłużej czekać,” Sztandar Ludu, no. 20 (1957); idem., “W obronie Majdanika,” Kultura i Życie, no. 9 (1959), and Kurier Lubelski, no. 132 (1958). The author was one of the few people who publicly demanded the extension of conservation activities to Belżec and Sobibór. Gogołowska, who came from Lwów, lost her son during the war at the forced labor camp in Janowska Street. She was imprisoned at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943 for assisting the camp inmates and for her activities in the Communist underground. Perhaps this made her particularly sensitive to the subject of the camps. In texts on Sobibór, she did not mention that the camp had been built to exterminate Jews. She wrote about the victims as “people of
devastation, and, as late as 1959, the press reported traces of mass graves dug up in search of valuables in Sobibór. There were calls to commemorate those places, and some measures were even taken by the Powiat National Council in Włodawa to erect a modest monument in Sobibór. However, the Lublin voivodeship authorities put a stop to these initiatives, claiming that remembrance was the Ministry of Culture and Art’s responsibility.\textsuperscript{55} The brief suspension of projects commemorating the death camps was due to the tougher policy of the ruling Communist Party compared to the liberalization immediately after October 1956. The authorities did not welcome grassroots citizens’ initiatives.

The renewed interest in building monuments at former death camps could be explained by the first investigations and trials of former SS men, members of camp garrisons, in West Germany, and by the Eichmann trial in Israel, which was widely publicized in the Polish and international press. The Communist authorities in Poland may have been afraid that those investigations and trials would stoke foreign interest in the mass murder sites, as a result of which judges and prosecutors from the West might wish to visit former camps to inspect the crime scenes, and would find them not only uncommemorated, but also neglected and destroyed. In addition, the investigations and trials in Germany led to the initiation of numerous investigations in the 1960s by the Central Commission for Investigating German Crimes in Poland and its regional branches. Although most of the crimes in certain localities were committed against Jews, as of 1968, many investigations focused not on crimes perpetrated as part of the Holocaust, but rather on those committed against Poles, even though, in Germany, their perpetrators were charged with participation in the liquidation of ghettos, deportations to death camps, and crimes committed against Jews in those camps. At the same time, the Polish authorities criticized the Federal Republic of Germany’s government for trying to apply the statute of limitations to Nazi crimes, as evidenced by lenient sentences pronounced by German courts for concentration and death camp garrison members. The erection of memorials at post-camp sites was also a form of protest against war crimes.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55} “Miejsce straceń nie może być żerowiskiem,” Sztandar Ludu, no. 132 (1959).
\textsuperscript{56} Studies on the forms of commemorating the martyrdom during the Second World

various nationalities,” or “men, women, and children,” which was the required “party line.” According to the party’s general recommendations, “Jewish subjects” should not be discussed too extensively, especially in the press. See Robert Kuwałek, “Obóz zagłady w Sobibórze w historiografii polskiej i obcej,” Zeszyty Majdanka, vol. 21 (2001), p. 135.
Throughout Poland, the 1960s saw a wave of unveilings of monuments and plaques commemorating various Second World War events, including those in honor of Nazi crime victims. This phenomenon was related to general state policy, which had anti-German “crusade” elements and, at the same time, was meant to accentuate the authorities’ bond with the nation and its past. As Marcin Zaremba observed:

The rulers monopolized the honorable role of national memory custodian, which they could manipulate almost at will, honoring those events and facts from the past that matched the party’s interpretation of the past.57

The Communist Party authorities did not wish to emphasize Jewish themes and they integrated the Holocaust into the general narrative of Polish martyrdom. There were some bizarre cases, when the press reporting on the anniversaries of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising did not even use the word “Jew.” Anyway, descriptions of the uprising were also very laconic.58 To a large extent this situation was caused by the authorities’ unwillingness to be identified with “Judeo-Bolshevism” and, at the same time, their endeavor to legitimize themselves in society’s eyes by invoking national and nationalist themes.59

Treblinka was a huge project in commemorating mass murder sites,

War in Poland do not provide any information on the influence that the trials of Nazi criminals, and Eichmann in particular, may have had on the question of cleaning up the crime sites. See Halina Taborska, “Polskie znaki pamięci w hitlerowskich obozach natychmiastowej zagłady,” lecture delivered at the conference on “Pamięć Shoah — współczesne reprezentacje.” “FORUM. Żydzi-Chrześcijanie-Muzułmanie,” October 23, 2003, www.znak.org.pl; see also Rusiniak, Obóz zagłady Treblinka II, p. 44. Undoubtedly, however, the German trials had wide repercussions all over the world, triggering a wider interest in the Holocaust. As to decisions on the construction of monuments in former death camps and places of mass executions of Jews, much could be explained by a thorough archival research in the files of the Council for Remembrance of Struggle and Martyrdom, the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy, and the Ministry of Culture and Art from that period of People’s Poland.

59 Zaremba, Komunizm, legitymizacja, pp. 327–329.
where the above-mentioned considerations had a considerable influence on the decision to build a memorial. The debate over the cleaning up of the camp grounds and erecting a monument there reemerged in 1954, but no major clean-up work was done until 1959 for lack of financial resources. Both the former Treblinka II death camp and Treblinka I labor camp were in a lamentable state. The grounds of the death camp continued to be dug up by “ghouls,” which was even noted by the Polish Newsreel (Polska Kronika Filmowa) in 1957. In 1958, the foundation stone was laid for the memorial on the former death camp grounds. The ceremony was part of a major event attended by diplomatic representatives of a dozen or so countries, including a delegate from the Israeli Embassy.

For a large sum of money, which came mostly from government funds and partly from public collections organized by the Honorary Committee for the Construction of a Monument in Treblinka, the memorial complex was built.

The Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland also donated substantial resources to the cause. The construction work was carried out from 1961 to 1964, and although some voices could be heard about the need to preserve original remaining camp elements (the railway ramp where prisoners were unloaded, among other things), these suggestions went unheeded. In the debate taking place during the construction work, it was also recommended that the memorials erected in Treblinka I and Treblinka II vary in character, reflecting different identities of the victims in these camps. It was pointed out that the symbolism of the monument should highlight the fact that the vast majority of the camp’s victims were Jews in Treblinka II. Although such symbols were present in the monument by Franciszek Duszeńko and Adam Haupt, the informative aspects and inscriptions left much to be desired. The inscription on the plaque in front of the memorial was changed. The original inscription clearly indicated the Jewish identity of the victims, but this information was missing in the second version.

At the same time, work was continued on the construction of monuments in Chelmno nad Nerem, Belżec, and the former KL Stutthof camps. The decision was also made to erect memorials at Birkenau, Sobibór, and Majdanek. According to instructions for cleaning up the grounds of all the former camps, the greatest possible amount of original remains was to be preserved.

61 Rusiniak, Obóz zagłady Treblinka II, pp. 44–47.
preserved, mainly for educational purposes. However, in practice, those activities obliterated traces of the crime in some cases. In Chełmno, the clean up work was limited to the Rzuchowski Forest, where mass graves and the remains of open-air crematoria were located. The purpose of the work was to prepare the grounds for the monument to be erected rather than to expose the crimes that had been committed there. The truck used as a gas chamber, which still remained there, was not preserved. Originally, the intention was to display it at an exhibition in Chełmno. However, such an exhibition was not put together at the time. At the same time, in Chełmno, the remains of the so-called “palace,” from which victims were taken to be killed and where Jewish prisoners from the Sonderkommando were kept, were falling into decay. A commemorative stone was placed near these palace building remains, bearing the inscriptions in Polish and Hebrew: “This place is hallowed by the blood of thousands of victims of the Nazi genocide. May they rest in peace.” The inscription did not indicate that the victims were Jews.

A monument was unveiled in Stutthof, in 1962, and in Bełżec, the following year. While various nationalities were represented among the thousands of victims at KL Stutthof, the Jewish identity of the victims was beyond question at the Bełżec death camp. Nevertheless, this fact was not reflected either in the memorial or in the media reports on the unveiling ceremony on December 1, 1963. The short press notices on the event only mentioned the composition of delegations from institutions and organizations attending the unveiling ceremony. Had it not been for a mention of Maurycy Winer, representing the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, nobody would have guessed from the press reports that the event had any connection with the Holocaust. There was no information on the history of the camp in Bełżec; readers could only learn that it was a place where “hundreds of thousands of people died.” The press reported that two survivors of the Bełżec “camps” attended the events. Their Polish names and surnames were given, without mentioning that they were Jewish prisoners of the forced labor camp in Bełżec in 1940, and not of the death

63 Gulczyński, Ośrodek zagłady w Chełmnie, p. 34. The stone was erected thanks to the efforts of the Jewish communities in Łódź and Wloclawek. The whole area, where the palace and a rebuilt granary were situated, remained under the Chełmno nad Nerem’s district cooperative in administration.
camp. The local press published one more great distortion about Bełżec: A Lublin newspaper claimed that “600,000 Poles” had been killed there. Was it a deliberate manipulation or the journalist’s ignorance? Probably the former, since a month earlier the same newspaper reported on the unveiling ceremony of a monument in Lublin honoring the Jews murdered in the Lublin region, in which Bełżec and Sobibór were mentioned in the context of the Jews’ fate. After the memorial event in Bełżec, the press dwelt on “the protest resolution against militarism and war, against the former murderers of Bełżec, who are rearing their heads again in today’s Federal Republic of Germany,” rather than on the camp victims. The list of officials who had taken part in the unveiling ceremony also occupied more space than the information on the camp as such. From the commemorative plaque itself, it was difficult to deduce that Bełżec had once been a death camp for Jews. The plaque stated laconically: “To the memory of the victims of Nazi terror murdered from 1941 to 1943.”

The unveiling of the Lublin monument in honor of Jews from the Lublin region was accompanied by the publication of many press articles on their fate during the German occupation and the Jewish resistance movement

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64 Zygmunt Lewandowski and Adam Drewniak, the “survivors of Bełżec,” were Jewish survivors of the Lublin ghetto, taken for several months in 1940 to the forced labor camp in Bełżec, which operated there before the extermination center was opened. After the war, they both lived in Lublin and changed their Jewish names and surnames to Polish ones. The press referred to them by their new names without providing details of their wartime experiences; “Pomnik — mauzoleum ku czci pomordowanych odsłonięto w Bełżcu,” Sztandar Ludu, no. 284 (1963).

65 “Wczoraj odsłonięto w Bełżcu pomnik — mauzoleum w miejscu straceń około 600 tysięcy Polaków” (Memorial-Mausoleum in Bełżec, Place of Execution of about 600,000 Poles, Unveiled Yesterday), Kurier Lubelski, no. 282 (1963). The information about the murdered Poles was also repeated in the text of the notice itself.


67 Ibid.

68 The authorities were represented mainly by the local party activists from Tomaszów Lubelski. Thus, the event was not regarded as a national event; “Pomnik — mauzoleum ku czci pomordowanych.”

69 Only in the early 1980s was the memorial complex supplemented with a plaque mentioning the putting to death of “600,000 Jews and about 1,500 Poles for assistance offered to Jews.” In the meantime, the memorial was extended by adding a sculpture by Stanisław Strzyżyński, which had symbolic figures of prisoners supporting each other. This sculpture was sometimes, even officially, described as the “Pieta of Bełżec.” It introduced quasi-Christian symbolism at the site of Jewish annihilation. See Halina Taborska, “Art in Places of Death: Polish Signs of Memory in the Nazi Death Camps,” Kultura Współczesna, vol. 38, no. 4 (2003), pp. 50–51.
in the region. It was the first equally extensive press publication devoted to
the martyrdom of the Jewish residents of Lublin. In the speeches of state
officials during the event, the fate of the Jews was treated as part of the gen-
eral martyrdom of the Polish nation, and the manifestations of Jewish re-
stance were included in the all-Polish Communist resistance movement.
Nevertheless, the events had at least one crucial aspect: They publicized the
fact that one of the initiators of the memorial was the Lublin branch of the
Social and Cultural Association of Jews, and demonstrated that a Jewish
community existed in Lublin and made efforts to preserve the memory of
Jewish history there. This was important for the Lublin Jewish community,
which had between 200 and 300 members at that time.70

The unveiling of memorials in Lublin on November 10, 1963, and in
Bełżec a month later, were associated with the commemoration of the twen-
tieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The fact that the Lublin
memorial was unveiled on the twenty-first anniversary of the local ghetto’s
final liquidation was also mentioned.71 Treated as national events, they were
combined with school commemorations and wreath-laying ceremonies at
mass execution sites and former camp grounds.72

The monuments at Treblinka and Chełmno nad Nerem were unveiled
in 1964. Representatives of the Communist party leadership and foreign
delegation attended the Treblinka events, which were organized at the
national level. However, again, an official “anti-Fascist” (or anti-German)
tone, rather than memorialization of the murdered Jews, dominated the
speeches. Salo Fiszgrund, representing the Social and Cultural Association
of Jews, spoke in Yiddish — a very strong reminder of the Treblinka victim’s
identity. Despite the considerable scale of events, there was scant publicity
in the media.73 The memorial at the former Treblinka II camp, which is
still considered as one of the best artistic Holocaust commemorations, did

70 “Męczeństwo i bohaterstwo,” Kurier Lubelski, no. 263 (1963). Information given to the
author in conversations, in summer 2001, with Izydor Sznajdman, who was President
of the Lublin branch of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews until 1968; and, in
2008, with Luba Matraszek, the President of the association in Lublin.
71 The Lublin ghetto in its vestigial form, located in the Lublin suburb of Majdan Tatar-
ski, was ultimately liquidated on November 9, 1942, and the last residents deported to
the Majdanek camp.
73 Rusiniak points this out, giving the example of Życie Warszawy, which did not mention
the events associated with the unveiling of the memorial at Treblinka. See Rusiniak,
Obóz zagłady Treblinka II, pp. 52–53.
not escape manipulation by the Polish authorities. Designed by Franciszek Duszeńko and Adam Haupt, the symbolism is distinctly Jewish. However, the Polish authorities interfered with the inscription text: “Never again!” in six languages, including Yiddish (the Hebrew version was only added in 2004), giving no indication that the mass murder at the site had been perpetrated exclusively on Jews. Nor was such information found on the stones by the symbolic railway ramp, which were inscribed with the countries of origin of the death transports to the camp. Finally, a plaque by the memorial mentioned “800,000 murdered” in general terms without specifying their identity.

Several months later, the memorial in Chełmno nad Nerem was unveiled. Although the artistic design used Holocaust symbols, the inscriptions were manipulated to be in line with the “historical policy” of the authorities of People’s Poland. The text of the inscription was a fragment of a proclamation found at the site of the mass grave, written by the Jews who were killed there: “We were taken all, from old men to newborns, from the towns of Koło to Dąbie, they took us to the forest and gassed, shot, and burnt us there...” The final passage, which clearly identifies the authors and victims, was not included in the inscription: “This was written by the last Jews who died here...” The official name of the monument, “Memorial to the Victims of Fascism,” which gave no indication of the victims’ identities, was also in line with the “historical policy” of the time. Only in the late 1990s, was the full text inscribed on a stone near the memorial, which had been erected in 1964.

There were similar distortions of history at Sobibór, the last mass murder center of Jews commemorated in Poland. The monument in Sobibór was unveiled in 1965. Apart from a burial mound with the ashes of the victims, designed by Romuald Dylewski, there was also a sculpture representing a desolate mother with a child. Mieczysław Welter, the sculptor, originally planned it against the background of a stone cube symbolizing the gas chambers. At the entrance to the former camp, “Sobibór” was inscribed

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74 The use of cobblestones on the path leading to the railway ramp is a symbolic evocation of Jewish history. They are meant to symbolize small Polish-Jewish shtetlekh, from where the victims were brought to the camp. Taborska, “Art in Places of Death,” p. 58.

75 The original version of the inscription stated clearly: “800,000 Jews from Poland and other countries.” However, this version was rejected at the time. See Rusiniak, Obóz zagłady Treblinka II, pp. 46–47.

76 For the full text of the Chełmno victims’ testament, see Pawlicka-Nowak, Dzieje upamiętnienia, p. 32.
on the wall alongside four plaques stating the victims were Soviet POWs, Jews, Poles, and Gypsies. The order implies, contrary to the truth, that Jews were merely one of the groups.\footnote{A few years after the monument’s unveiling, which took place in June 1965 (not in October, on the anniversary of the Sobibór Uprising), the sculpture of a mother with a child was moved away from the cube because the construction was in danger of collapsing. Soviet POWs were victims of the camp in Sobibór, but they were deported there not as POWs but as Jews. In addition, there is still no reliable evidence that Poles were brought to the camp. However, there are some reports that a group of Romani people were deported to Sobibór along with Jews from Chełm. See \textit{Taborska, “Art in Places of Death,”} pp. 53–54. From a conversation with Krzysztof Skwirowski, an employee at the museum of the former nazi death camp in Sobibór, 2006.} There was no statement indicating that the center was created specifically by the Nazis as part of the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.” Through the efforts of Thomas Blatt, a former camp prisoner, the plaques were changed as late as 1993. Until then, Sobibór, like Bełżec, was just another forgotten Holocaust site.\footnote{\textit{Thomas T. Blatt, \textit{Sobibór — zapomniane powstanie} (Włodawa: Muzeum Pojezierza Łęczyńsko-Włocławskiego we Włodawie, 2003), p. 130; Kuwałek, “Obóz zagłady w Sobibórze,” pp. 133–134.}

The plans at the time, when monuments were being constructed at former death camps for Jews from Poland and other European countries, provided for information points rather than museums. Museums were only planned at Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek. A museum exhibition was also planned, but not immediately, at Chełmno nad Nerem. Information booths were proposed to sell publications at Treblinka, Bełżec, and Sobibór. Such plans at Bełżec and Sobibór were suspended during the March 1968 antisemitic campaign,\footnote{The plans to establish such information points were developed by the Voivodeship Committee of the PZPR in Lublin, when the monument in Sobibór had been unveiled. The Department of Culture at the Voivodeship People’s Council in Lublin commissioned Adam Rutkowski, a historian from the Jewish Historical Institute, to write a study entitled \textit{The Death Camp in Sobibór}. Its typescript version was already completed in 1962. At the same time, Sobibór was also the subject of studies by Józef Marszałek, a historian from Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin and the museum at Majdanek. He also prepared in typescript a short monograph, \textit{The Death Camp of Sobibór 1942–1943}. Neither of these works has been published. As one of the first historians, Marszałek critically analyzed the number of the camp’s victims, concluding that the number of Jews who had perished there amounted to about 190,000 (the official findings of the investigation in 1945 spoke of at least 250,000 victims). Nothing is known of a copy of Rutkowski’s work. Marszałek’s study is available as a typescript in the “Pod Zegarem” (Under the Clock) Museum of Martyrdom in Lublin. The same museum also preserves a dossier concerning the construction of the memorial in Sobibór.} launched by the Communist authorities after the
Israeli-Arab Six-Day War. This campaign also interrupted research on the Holocaust by Polish historians for several years.\textsuperscript{80}

**Consequences of the March 1968 Campaign between 1967 and 1981**

The March Campaign had an extremely negative impact on Holocaust commemoration and introducing it into the Poles’ popular historical consciousness. The so-called “case of the encyclopedists,” relating to the camps, preceded this openly antisemitic campaign. The eight-volume *Wielka Encyklopedia Powszechna* (The Great Universal Encyclopedia), published by PWN (Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe — State Scientific Publishers) in 1966, included an entry on “Hitlerowskie Obozy Koncentracyjne” (Nazi Concentration Camps), in which the authors, in accordance with the facts, described the extermination centers established by Germans in occupied Poland as serving their program of total annihilation of the Jews. Their text was considered as downplaying the Poles’ martyrdom and distorting the historical truth. The Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy initiated an attack on the entry’s authors and the encyclopedia’s editors. The encyclopedia’s editorial committee was dissolved and the subscribers were instructed to tear out the pages with the entry and paste in a new text, mailed to them free of charge.\textsuperscript{81} The consequences of the witch hunt were quick in coming. There was no longer any doubt about whether the word “Jew” should be used in the context of anniversary events, especially as in the former Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka camps, where practically nothing happened after the monuments were unveiled, except for the sporadic laying of flowers there. The memorial at Birkenau was unveiled in 1967.\textsuperscript{82}

author thanks Barbara Oratowska, the museum’s director, for allowing him access to the materials. See also Kuwałek, “Obóz zagłady w Sobibórze,” p. 133.

\textsuperscript{80} For more on the events of March 1968, see Feliks Tych’s article, “The ‘March ’68’ Antisemitic Campaign: Onset, Development, and Consequences,” in this volume.

\textsuperscript{81} Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja*, pp. 330–331.

\textsuperscript{82} The significance of the International Memorial to the Victims of Fascism at Birkenau, which was unveiled in April 1967, is also part of the “historical policy” implemented in Poland at the time. During its construction, two other monuments were dismantled, including one devoted exclusively to the Jewish victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The memorial erected differs from the originally designed prototype, representing figures of a man, woman, and child, which was replaced with an outline of a cross surrounded by a prisoner triangle. Kucia, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny*, p. 30.
At the same time, events associated with the unveiling of the Majdanek monument began. The “Majdanek Days,” attended by large crowds, were exploited by the authorities to present their own interpretation of international events. Honoring the Majdanek victims was no longer the point. The press reported on the “anti-war rally,” during which American and Israeli imperialism in the Middle East was condemned. Paweł Dąbek, Chairman of the Voivodeship People’s Council, who was a former prisoner of Majdanek, asserted in his speech, delivered at the 1967 “Majdanek Days” at the former camp grounds, that “American and Israeli crimes [were] not much different from Nazi [ones].”

As of 1968, the daily press presented Majdanek as “a death camp primarily for the Polish population.” This was clearly one outcome of the “encyclopedists’ case.” The press did not write at all — or only seldom — about the Jews imprisoned and murdered at Majdanek, and then only in the context of former prisoners’ memoirs. However, press notices on Belżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka sometimes mentioned that these death camps were created to exterminate Jews. However, these texts completely ignored the Jewish prisoners at Majdanek. As part of the March 1968 campaign, the editors of Encyklopedia Powszechna (Popular Encyclopedia) were officially condemned at a meeting of the Central Executive Committee of the Society for the Preservation of Majdanek, held at the camp on April 19 that year, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. At the same time, the attendees condemned “Zionists,” who allegedly vilified Poland and Poles as antisemites and collaborated with anti-Polish “government circles of the Federal Republic of Germany,” who, according to the participants, were responsible for Nazi crimes. A resolution demanding punishment of the “encyclopedists” was sent by the meeting participants to Władysław Gomułka.

During the unveiling ceremony of the Monument to Struggle and Martyrdom and the Mausoleum at Majdanek, on September 21, 1969, no one

83 “Wielotysięczny wiec na Majdanku,” Kurier Lubelski, no. 252 (1967). During these events, a former prisoner of Majdanek read out a resolution “denouncing the American invasion of Vietnam and the Israeli aggression in the Middle East and exposing the revisionist policy of the Federal Republic of Germany.”
84 “Majdanek oskarża i przestrzega,” Dziennik Ludowy, no. 153 (1969); APMM, AZ, Akta Towarzystwa Opieki nad Majdankiem, Protokoły Zarządu Głównego TOnM, 1968–1969, Protokół z 19 IV 1968 (the complete text of the resolution is attached to the minutes). Władysław Gomułka was the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party in Poland in the years 1956–1970.
referred to the Jewish prisoners. Even the name of the monument reflected the authorities’ commemoration policy, focusing primarily on the struggle, with the victims in second place. The extensive press reports on the monument unveiling mainly referred to Poles and victims of 20 other nationalities who perished at Majdanek, without mentioning Jews. The word “Jew” did not even appear on the plaque near the mausoleum, situated next to the execution ditches, where, on Himmler’s personal order, a mass execution of 18,000 Jewish prisoners from Lublin camps took place in the infamous “Erntefest” (harvest festival) action, carried out by the SS on November 3, 1943. The replaced text only mentioned “18,000 prisoners.”

After 1968, “Jewish issues” no longer featured in the popularized history of the Majdanek concentration camp. Death camps were not mentioned either, contributing to ignorance about the subject, the consequences of which are still felt today. Jewish topics did feature in the studies carried out at the Majdanek Museum, but were not their main focus. Former camp prisoners also wrote about the Jews, victims, and prisoners at Majdanek, but, on the whole, from the Polish perspective. Jewish topics in the permanent exhibit at the Majdanek Museum, which was the third one and was put together as early as 1960–1962 and was on display until the mid-1990s, was a positive note. The persecution and annihilation of the Jewish community was presented as part of the overall narrative of the history of the Majdanek camp. These themes were woven into some parts of the exhibition. A tablet mentioning the killings on November 3, 1943, was placed on the camp grounds next to the execution ditches and near the mausoleum (unveiled in 1969). The inscription engraved in stone mentioned “18,400 Jews” murdered in that massacre. As yet, it has not been possible to establish in which year the small granite obelisk was placed there. What is known is that a tablet originally meant to be near the execution ditches, but could not be installed there after the events of 1967–1969, was kept in the museum store-room in the early 1970s, but was in place in the first half of the 1980s. One may only suppose it was placed there without any publicity and knowledge of the official authorities in the late 1970s for the second time, since the authorities ordered the tablet to be removed the first time. It was not officially described as a monument since that would have required formal approval from the authorities. During the two-day “Erntefest” Aktion (November 3
and 4, 1943), the Germans also shot about 42,000 Jews in other localities in the Lublin region, and the victims of those tragic events were not commemorated by any memorial plaques. Thus, perhaps the biggest mass execution in occupied Europe was entirely absent from the public consciousness in Poland for a very long time. As a result of the absence of monuments or plaques at the execution sites in Trawniki and Poniatowa, where, as well as in Majdanek, SS units massacred Jewish prisoners at that time, these events were largely unknown in Poland.87

Through educational activities in the 1970s and 1980s, the Majdanek Museum strove to disseminate more complete and objective information on the German occupation in the Lublin region and the history of the Majdanek camp.88 Even the “Majdanek Days” in the 1970s and 1980s, attended primarily by students from Lublin schools, were dominated by the official political propaganda.89

After the severance of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1967, Polish museums dealing with the German Occupation did not have any contact with former Jewish prisoners who did not send in their testimonies and they were not invited to museum ceremonies. In official studies on the history of the Majdanek concentration camp, Jewish testimonies and memoirs

79), who frequently discussed the fate of Jews at Majdanek and questions related to the Holocaust in the Lublin region in his publications, promoted the commemoration of the Jewish victims of the “Erntefest” action. These publications are to this day the primary source of information on many subjects relating to the German occupation. The author thanks Anna Wiśniewska and Zofia Murawska-Gryń, retired researchers at the State Museum of Majdanek, and Maria Wiśnioch, who worked at the museum, for their assistance with preliminary queries and oral communications.

87 Mass executions of Jews carried out at Majdanek, Trawniki, Poniatowa, and smaller forced labor camps in the Lublin region are still mostly remembered locally, and have not been the subject of thorough historical studies. The Majdanek Museum recently published a collection of studies on the “Erntefest” operation, which claimed more human lives in two days than the world-renowned mass execution of Jews at Babi Yar near Kiev, which lasted three days. See Wojciech Lenarczyk and Dariusz Libionka, eds., 3–4 listopada 1943. Erntefest zapomniany epizod Zagłady (Lublin: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, 2009).

88 Ibid., p. 53.

89 As a high school student, the author attended those rallies in the 1980s. In those days, students called these outings “cattle drives to Majdanek.” Teachers generally did not take the trouble to explain the purpose of those rallies. Everyone treated their attendance as a chore that had to be done. Jews, as the prisoners and victims of Majdanek, were hardly ever mentioned at official events or discussed by teachers. See APMM, AZ, Sprawozdania z działalności PMM za lata 1972–1975, 1/40.
were only used to a very limited extent, because there were only a few available in the museum collection. Information on the fate of Jewish prisoners, including their extermination at Majdanek, came mostly from the testimonies and memoirs of Polish camp prisoners. Although studies on the history of Majdanek were well researched and dealt with material related to the Holocaust, many publications from that period suffered from lack of sources of Jewish provenance. Many museum publications from that era may give the impression that the majority of the camp inmates were Poles. Limited contact with the former Jewish prisoners, Jewish memoirs and testimonies on the camp, and foreign research institutions resulted in a lack of information, which has as yet not been remedied.\textsuperscript{90}

In the 1970s, there were practically no events in former camps, except for sporadic wreath-laying ceremonies or their use as venues for local events associated with the Second World War, but not necessarily with the history of the camps themselves.\textsuperscript{91} The era of Edward Gierek, First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party, brought attempts to “Polonize” Jewish memorial sites, principally those associated with the Holocaust. This phenomenon did not occur at former camps, where inscriptions distorting the true information already existed. However, the few publications about camps or other commemorative sites were tampered with. The most extreme examples were the entries about the death camps in the encyclopedic guide \textit{Obozy hitlerowskie na ziemiach polskich 1939–1945} (Nazi Camps in Poland 1939–1945), edited by Czesław Pilichowski and published in 1979. In the entries devoted to Bełżec, Sobibór, Chełmno nad Nerem, and Treblinka, the authors attempted to prove that all these camps were also used for the mass extermination of Poles. In the case of the “Reinhardt” action in the camps, it

\textsuperscript{90} Foreign research trips by museum workers, among others, to Israel, became possible only in the 1990s. By then, however, many of the former Jewish prisoners were already dead or could not be contacted. Moreover, the museum’s financial resources were too limited to enable workers to travel, for example, to Israel and stay there long enough to record interviews with some of the former prisoners of Majdanek or other camps from the Lublin region.

\textsuperscript{91} An example was Sobibór, designated as a place where wreaths were laid on the thirtieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, in 1973. That event was intended to improve the image of Poland and Edward Gierek’s government in the international arena, and wreaths would also be laid at Majdanek. The propaganda department of the Central Committee of the PZPR prepared the countrywide program, including the choice of places for memorial ceremonies. See Marcin Żaremba, “Zorganizowane zapominanie o Holokauście w dekadzie Gierka: trwanie i zmiana,” \textit{KHŻ}, no. 2 (210) (2004), p. 220.
was impossible to minimize the number of Jewish victims, and the authors openly wrote that the camps had been specifically built to exterminate Jews, but they still overstated the number of Polish victims. With Chelmno nad Nerem, there is no indication that the camp was created for the mass murder of Jews. The reader learns that the victims there included Poles, Soviet POWs, and German anti-Fascists.92

From 1981 to 1989

A notable change in the amount of attention devoted to the martyrdom of Jews only occurred after 1981. It resulted from a gradual slackening of ideological censorship, as well as from grassroots initiatives of individuals and institutions in the wake of the emergence of the “Solidarity” movement. Certain social initiatives relating to the fate of the Jews suited the governing Communist Party because they improved the image of Poland abroad, as a country which remembered its Jewish citizens and multicultural past. However, open debates on sensitive issues concerning Polish-Jewish relations were not viewed favorably by the authorities, and critical comments on the attitudes of ethnic Poles during the German occupation provoked accusations of “anti-Polonism.”93 Nevertheless, events commemorating the martyrdom of Jews were tolerated. Some examples were the large-scale commemorations of the fortieth and the forty-fifth anniversaries of the mass executions at Majdanek on November 3, 1943, i.e., the “Erntefest” action, which would have been unthinkable before. The events involved not only

92 The author of the entry on Bełżec states that the number of Jews who died there was about 550,000, while the total number of victims was estimated at 600,000. As he also observes, the prisoners included Poles sentenced to death for providing assistance to Jews. Based on these data, the reader would conclude that about 50,000 Poles were killed at the camp for saving Jews. The entry on Majdanek includes a fair amount of information on Jewish transports, but the emphasis is primarily on Polish transports. For Majdanek, the entry mentions prisoners of 51 nationalities (earlier publications quoted 20), but points out that “38 percent of the prisoners were Poles.” However, the percentages of prisoners of other nationalities are not given. See Czesław Pilichowski, ed., Obozy hitlerowskie na ziemiach polskich 1939–1945. Informator encyklopedyczny (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1979), pp. 93–94, 129–130, 302–311, 459–461, 524–528.

93 For example, such reactions were triggered by Claude Lanzmann’s famous documentary Shoah, screened in selected cinemas in Poland, and also on TV in a considerably abridged version.
wreath-laying ceremonies at the execution ditches, but also special scholarly symposia organized with the participation of the Majdanek Museum, the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, and the local Social and Cultural Association of Jews. The commemoration of the “Erntefest” at Majdanek in 1983 was the first event in the history of the Majdanek Museum that related to the annihilation of the Jewish community there. A conference held at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University on this occasion was devoted to the Holocaust in the Lublin region. On November 3, an ecumenical service was held at the mausoleum at Majdanek with the participation of Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Buddhist religious leaders, as well as, most importantly, Jews. Religious ceremonies organized on the grounds of the Majdanek Museum after 1980 also reflected the country’s political liberalization.94 While these events were very significant for the museum, the press only devoted short notices to them, never informing the readers of the nature of the events.

After 1989

The question of remembrance was more systematically dealt with only at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. The establishment of the Museum of the Former Extermination Camp in Chełmno nad Nerem, as a branch of the District Museum in Konin, was the first harbinger of change. At the same time, archaeological research was initiated and has been conducted intermittently to this day on the grounds of the Chełmno camp. Thanks to the initiative and efforts of the long-standing Head of the District Museum in Konin, Łucja Pawlicka-Nowak, the museum was granted the custody of the grounds of the former palace in Chełmno itself, where archaeological work is also under way.95

In 1993, the Museum of the Former Nazi Extermination Camp in Sobibór was established, as a branch of the museum of the Łęczna-Włodawa lake district in Włodawa, at the Sobibór camp. The exhibition is displayed in a building constructed originally as a forester’s lodge in the 1970s and

converted into a village kindergarten in the 1980s. The creation of the museum in Sobibór was connected with the fiftieth anniversary of the uprising there. The plaques presenting Soviet POWs as the most numerous group among the camp victims were also changed for these ceremonies.\textsuperscript{96} In 1987, negotiations began between the Polish authorities and American Jews who sought to clean up the former camp in Belżec. They produced positive results only after the fall of Communism in Poland. In 1993, an agreement was signed between the Polish government and the American Jewish Committee, which provided for archaeological research on the grounds of the Belżec camp and then the construction of a new memorial designed to emphasize that the place is a cemetery for over half-a-million Jews who were gassed there. At the same time, a decision was made to establish a museum in Belżec. A result of these efforts, a new monument (unique among its counterparts in Poland) was unveiled, and a modern museum — a Memorial Site in Belżec, as a branch of the State Museum at Majdanek — was established there. The affiliation of the new museum in Belżec with the Majdanek Museum, under the Ministry of Culture, was not a coincidence. As shown by the experience of other museums established on the grounds of former camps and operating as branches of regional museums, they are still struggling with tremendous financial problems. The budgets of district authorities, which administer regional museums, are insufficient to finance even the basic needs of such important institutions, let alone their wider educational and research activities. This problem has not yet been resolved, although there is ongoing debate over the future of the museums in Sobibór and Treblinka. Despite all the difficulties, these museums do their best to commemorate the Holocaust through their educational activities. However, the central authorities do not appear to be particularly interested in

\textsuperscript{96} The location of a kindergarten on the grounds of the former camp is evidence of “organized oblivion.” During the summer holidays and in autumn, the kindergarten building, formerly a forester’s lodge, was used as accommodation for students brought from Lublin to plant forest trees. These groups were not informed of the nature of the place where they were staying overnight. In 1986, a new chapel was built on the grounds of the camp, which is run by the Capuchin Fathers to this day. The chapel was also meant to commemorate the victims of the camp, but its design actually evokes the Polish and Catholic memory: The low relief on the front door represents Fr. Maksymilian Kolbe, who is inextricably associated with Polish martyrdom. The construction of the chapel caused protests from Jewish circles, and, in particular, from the former prisoners of Sobibór. From a conversation with Tomasz Kranz, Head of the Majdanek State Museum, January 2009; Kuwałek, “Obóz zagłady w Sobibórze,” p. 134.
these efforts, probably assuming that commemoration at these sites should suffice.\textsuperscript{97}

The fall of Communism in Poland resulted, though not immediately, in several initiatives aimed at commemorating the sites related to Jewish martyrdom. This applied to Jewish cemeteries, execution sites, and forced labor camps of various sizes. In most cases, these are grassroots initiatives, originating among survivors or former residents of the given locality, who usually live outside Poland. Increasingly, such initiatives are also launched by the present inhabitants of towns or villages in question. Without such activities, many sites would not have been commemorated or would have been entirely forgotten. Izbica and Poniatowa are examples of such initiatives in the Lublin region. In the former, the Jewish cemetery, where over 1,000 Jews from Poland and abroad were executed, was abandoned and devastated for a long time. In the 1960s, a monument commemorating this was put up for the first time, mainly through the efforts of Rev. Grzegorz Pawłowski, who had survived the Holocaust as a child in Zamość. Thanks to foreign initiatives and the involvement of a local school, since 2004, the cemetery has been systematically cleaned up, boards mentioning the mass graves were installed, and, finally, in 2006, another monument was erected, this time on the initiative of the German Embassy and the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland. High school students tidied up the cemetery and undertook educational initiatives to restore, physically and emotionally, the Jewish cemetery in Izbica, which had been a no-man’s-land and used as a dumping ground in the meantime.

Poniatowa, where there was a labor camp for Soviet POWs in 1942–1943, and subsequently a Jewish forced labor camp, with 14,000 deportees, mainly from the Warsaw Ghetto, is another noteworthy case. On November 4, 1943, all the camp inmates were murdered in a mass execution. In the 1960s, three monuments were erected in Poniatowa: One of them commemorated the Soviet POWs, and the other two were dedicated to the “victims of Nazi terror,” without any mention of the forced labor camp for Jews or their mass execution there. On the initiative of a local volunteer, a campaign was launched to persuade the local authorities to erect a monument

\textsuperscript{97} This applies especially to the latter museum, which has formally been in existence since 1964, as a branch of the Siedlce District Museum. For several years, it was only a museum in name since it had neither exhibits, nor rooms for museum or educational purposes. A modest, amateur exhibition was set up in Treblinka only in 2005, in which secondary school students in Bielefeld, Germany, played a major role.
in memory of the Jewish camp victims. After several years of painstaking efforts and many educational initiatives involving German organizations, the monument was unveiled on November 4, 2008. The local authorities gave the impression that this commemoration was their outstanding achievement, while in fact it would probably have never taken place without the grassroots initiative. The so-called Lublin Umschlagplatz, a railway ramp from which about 26,000 Lublin Jews were deported to Belżec in March and April 1942, is among the sites not yet commemorated. In 2002, there were the first signs of something being done there, again, largely thanks to one person's persistent efforts. Only in 2010 was the decision made to erect a monument in the Lublin Umschlagplatz, partly as a municipal initiative. That place is almost completely forgotten by the city's residents, as the fact that the plot on which the memorial was supposed to stand was sold to a private entrepreneur, while discussions on the appropriate memorialization were in progress.98

Along with restoring remembrance of places related to the Holocaust, many initiatives focus on the commemoration of individual victims. In Sobibór, for example, in recent years, efforts have been made to extend remembrance to individual victims and specific families. This is reflected in the constantly growing “Memory Avenue,” which consists of stones with plaques in honor of individuals, families, and entire communities murdered there. The initiative for this came from two foreign organizations: the Bildungswerk Stanisław Hantz in Kassel and the Sobibór Foundation in Amsterdam (many Jews murdered in Sobibór came from the Netherlands).

Personalized memorialization of the victims includes exhibitions, such as that at the museum memorial site in Belżec, where several themes present victims' individual fates, or the “Primer” exhibition at the Majdanek Museum, devoted to the fate of children in the Lublin concentration camp. Many initiatives that aimed at remembering the Holocaust's fatalities were launched by teachers or schools in specific localities. Educational projects developed by teachers, even in provincial schools, frequently led to permanent caretaking of memorial sites associated with the wartime fate of Jewish communities or even to the erecting of monuments or the placing of

98 There are many other examples of such commemorations on the local level and of grassroots educational initiatives undertaken in various parts of Poland. Currently, there are several institutions that endeavor to coordinate such activities. For example, the “Bringing Memory Back” project, developed by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage, has been adopted by schools all over Poland.
memorial plaques at previously unmarked execution sites. Such activities restore the memory of Jews to the entire local communities. They testify to a sense of responsibility for memory in society, which is undergoing gradual but profound changes as a result of the transformation of the political system. Individuals or institutions, which undertake such activities, expect support from the local and central authorities, which is still not always forthcoming.

Perhaps the grassroots initiatives aimed at restoring Holocaust remembrance are more effective than the top-down approach. Far from being ostentatious or empty platitudes, they promote genuine care about remembering the victims.

99 Information on such initiatives can be found in a book published following a conference held by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum in 2008, especially in part four, which is devoted to teaching methods and projects in Holocaust education. See Piotr Trojański, ed., Auschwitz i Holokaust. Dylematy i wyzwania edukacji (Oswiecim: PMAB, 2008).

100 The response of local and central authorities is different with initiatives aimed at remembrance at the sites or events associated with the history of ethnic Poles, especially the erection of monuments in honor of people or organizations who distinguished themselves in fighting Communism, even if they were accused of antisemitism or common banditry. For example, the monument in honor of Józef Kuraś, alias “Ogień,” who was charged with murdering Jews after the Second World War. Representatives of the highest state authorities, led by the President of Poland Lech Kaczyński, attended the unveiling ceremony.
The current treatment of the perception of Auschwitz-Birkenau as a symbol of the evolving memory of the Holocaust in the public discourse in post-war Poland is based on a synthesis of two traditions of sociological thought. The first originates in Maurice Halbwachs’s sociology of collective memory. The second represents Durkheim’s concept of social fact as applied by Marek Kucia for analyzing the perception of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and supports reference to the area of the former camp as the intersection of three spheres: 1) the material level, constituting the camp area, including the museum exhibits; 2) social phenomena and acts occurring in the camp and; 3) the level of social consciousness, i.e., ways of thinking of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The research area emerging from the synthesis of both perspectives is the history of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum as the tangible carrier of memory, construed in various ways and triggering various reactions depending on how different social groups relate to history and collective identity at various times.

To analyze the above issue, Michael Steinlauf’s chronology was applied. He broke down the post-war history of the Polish memory of the Jews into the following periods: 1) “Wounded Memory” (1944–1948); 2) “Repressed Memory” (1948–1968); 3) “Expelled Memory” (1968–1970); 4) “Reconstructed Memory” (1970–1989); and 5) “Regained Memory” (1989–1995). The author is interested in the nature of the relationship in these
periods between different symbols represented at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and how they corresponded with the prevailing perceptions of the Holocaust in the social consciousness.

The “Wounded Memory” Period (1944–1948) and the Establishment of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

With regard to their attitude toward Jews and their extermination, during the first 45 years after the war, the Polish governments implemented two contradictory policies: On the one hand, the Communist ideology and political practices required them to break with and distance themselves from nationalistic currents in the Polish heritage, including antisemitism; but, on the other hand, from the very outset, there was a burning need to legitimize Communist rule, which led to the emergence of nationalistic attributes in the authorities’ conduct and, more often than not, antisemitism was tolerated, especially at the local level.

As Piotr Osęka writes, “In the early years, the authorities focused, to a much greater extent, on patriotic rather than revolutionary self-creation” and initially strove to achieve control over historical representation in accordance with the motto “That which we don’t commemorate, did not happen,” and with the aim of convincing the nation “that the new state was truly ‘sovereign’ and ‘independent.’”

The Communist rulers invested remembrance sites with universal significance as symbols of the victory of Good over Evil, stressing the need to remember the greatest “crime against humanity,” and the triumph of “the progressive camp” (including the Red Army) over “German barbarism,” in political terms.

These three currents were all evident with respect to Auschwitz-Birkenau, which became a remembrance site and part of the collective memory almost immediately after the liberation of the camp on January 27, 1945.

7 Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, “New Threads on an Old Loom: National Memory and
Transformation of the camp area into a remembrance site resulted from a sequence of spontaneous events involving the participation of former camp inmates, the local population, and the local authorities, as well as deliberate intervention by the central authorities. Discussions and debates in the press played a major role in this. Even before the end of the war, there were government-supported commemorations at the camp and access to visitors. As early as April 1945, the government made decisions aimed at transforming what was left of the camp into a remembrance site and a museum.8

The first remembrance event in the camp was the burial of 450 inmates, on February 28, 1945, attended by approximately 20,000 people: residents of Oświęcim and the vicinity, and representatives of both the Polish and Russian authorities, the clergy, and political organizations. In September that year, the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners and inhabitants of Oświęcim erected a cross on the grave, with the inscription: “In Memory of Martyred Brothers,” which was carried from the Oświęcim church in a solemn procession, and was probably the first symbol of remembrance at the camp.9

More or less at the same time, the Auschwitz area was described in press editorials as “one big burial ground for national heroes” whose ashes “call for uncompromising treatment of the nation of criminals.”10 This style of writing marked a tendency to present death in the camps in heroic terms and to introduce it into the national narrative in order to urge the people to keep on fighting Nazi Germany. In addition, interviews with former camp inmates, along with their memoirs published at the time, emphasized the “martyrdom” aspect of Auschwitz, describing the inmates’ great suffering and the cruelty of Nazi crimes, while omitting the fact that the largest number of Auschwitz-Birkenau victims were Jews. Finally, the themes of struggle and resistance dominated the lectures and publications by former political prisoners who were part of the camp’s underground.11

9 Ibid., pp. 37–38.
10 Dziennik Zachodni, vol. 61, April 15, 1945, quoted in Lachendro, Zburzyć i zaorać...?, p. 32.
11 Lachendro, Zburzyć i zaorać...?, pp. 33–35.
set the stage for a number of political appearances and press comments with the clear tendency of universalizing the symbolism of Auschwitz in the struggle for “the freedom of nations,” “a better world that will not give rise to genocidal forces,” and “progress, peace, and independence.” This had its roots in the prevailing political situation at the time, underlining the political complexion of the Auschwitz symbolism and its exploitation, for anti-German and, generally, “anti-Western” propaganda purposes.

The exhibition on Block 4, dealing with “the annihilation of millions,” commemorated the extermination of the Jews. The Museum management had an ambiguous attitude to this part of the exhibition. On the one hand, it was considered insufficient, but, on the other hand, no attempt was made to create a separate exhibition dealing with the extermination of the Jews in order to avoid creating the impression — as claimed in one of the museum’s projects — that “Auschwitz was solely a place of torment of Jews.” Although the documented reactions of the first-time visitors indicated that sites related to the Holocaust (ruins of gas chambers, crematoria, pits in which corpses were cremated, and “the Death Block”) constituted the most essential and emotionally poignant part of visits to the camp museum, the press reports of the early days of the museum left no room for doubt that it was perceived as a “museum of Polish martyrdom,” “museum of Polish martyrrology,” and, in universal terms, as symbolizing the “martyrdom of nations.”

The “struggling Auschwitz” motif played a prominent role in press debates and its propagators wanted the museum exhibition to stress the resistance of the inmates primarily and to present it not only as a chapter in the history of the Polish-German struggle during the Second World War, but also as a chapter in the history of Polish-German relations, in general, in terms of defense of the Poles against German expansion. However, with both the martyrdom and struggle aspects, the common denominator adopted by the participants in the debate, consciously or unconsciously, was the “Polish” character of Auschwitz: The victims and heroes were presented first of all as Poles. Perhaps this was why the Historical Commission, operating within the framework of the Museum, suggested stressing the international character of the camp, in 1948. At the end of that year, however,

12 Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz’s speech on June 14, 1947, in Lachendro, Zburzyć i zaorać...?, p. 63.
13 Ibid., p. 69.
14 Ibid., pp. 69–70.
15 Ibid., p. 78.
and contrary to the commission’s recommendations, the Jewish part of the exhibition in Block 4\textsuperscript{16} was closed. The so-called national exhibitions were not opened until the 1960s, and “The Struggle and Martyrdom of the Jews” exhibition was first put on display in 1968, i.e., later than those documenting the suffering in the camp of people from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the USSR, East Germany or Belgium. This exhibition, located in Block 27, was not included in the “regular” camp visitors’ tour. However, shortly after opening, it was shut down due to the authorities’ antisemitic and anti-Israel policy at the time, and it was not reopened until 1978.

The early period of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum was characterized by the coexistence of three unevenly presented narratives and their respective commemorative symbolization, which reappeared in various forms throughout the entire history of the museum. The first narrative is the national vision of Auschwitz as the site of the martyrdom of the Polish nation. Within this framework, consistent with the Poles’ everyday historical consciousness, Auschwitz was perceived as a place where Polish political prisoners were persecuted. Furthermore, the Polish prisoner “was not a helpless victim but a resistance fighter, a hero, a martyr suffering and dying for some higher good, like the Polish nation, the Catholic faith, or socialism [emphasis in original].”\textsuperscript{17}

The second narrative is viewing Auschwitz as a site for extermination of the Jews. As Jonathan Huener writes, “Neither the State Museum nor the Polish government ever explicitly denied that the vast majority of victims at Auschwitz were Jews. But this fact was not emphasized.... Jews were...regarded as citizens...of...countries under Nazi occupation.”\textsuperscript{18} Consequently, the Holocaust was not part of the official definition of Auschwitz, and the emphasis was not on commemorating Jews, as the most numerous group of victims, at the museum. It should be borne in mind, however, that this was happening at a time when the discourse about the annihilation of European Jewry — one of the key categories for understanding the Second World War period — was not yet at its peak. We cannot say that there was a complete silence regarding the fate of the Jews in the years immediately following the end of World War II. We shall, nevertheless, agree that, until the 1960s, although the world had information about crimes committed against Jews,

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp. 82–83.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 29.
it was unable or unwilling to transform it into knowledge about the Holocaust, as a key element not just of the war, but also of Western civilization as a whole. Local Polish factors played a considerable role in hushing up the tragedy that had befallen the Jews. Namely, the focus was placed on ethnically Polish Catholics, who were “closer” victims. Other factors were the trauma of the witnesses of the Holocaust, antisemitism and bad conscience, and, finally, the “Marxist-Leninist” authorities promoted an approach to history which did not have any room for the extermination of Jews as one of Hitler’s main war objectives, and as a significant element in the moral corruption of the population inhabiting most of Nazi-occupied Europe. These phenomena contributed to the perception of Auschwitz-Birkenau as a place where Jews were indeed murdered, but this crime did not define Auschwitz as the main extermination site of European Jewry, which was presented by the Museum as just one of many examples of “German barbarism.”

The third narrative is the official and ideological one transforming Auschwitz into a scene of political struggle and deals with the museum instrumentally as a “site for the accumulation of political currency.” Among the elements of this narrative were the advocacy of a new socioeconomic order (an alleged guarantee to prevent war crimes in the future), and anti-German, anti-American or — more broadly — anti-Western propaganda. This narrative was part of the Communist policy, and in the early post-war years, some of its elements were supported by the European anti-Fascist consensus. This narrative also served to emphasize the internationalist aspect of Auschwitz as a site where “citizens of several countries” or “people of many nationalities” were exterminated.

In the context of the significance of the camp museum in terms of Polish society’s awareness of the Holocaust, according to Huener, in post-war Poland, the synthesis of the above-mentioned narratives and symbolism

20 Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., p. 30.
primarily turned the camp into a politicized commemoration site of a Polish national tragedy, and a site of others’ suffering in international terms. Although the extermination of the Jews was present to a certain extent in the narrative and symbolism of Auschwitz, it was not a separate and key element. At the time, Holocaust commemoration was not the Museum’s essential function.25


Whereas between 1948 and 1955 the Stalinist vision of history and politics shaped the symbolism of Auschwitz, from 1954 to 1955, the museum was already reflecting the harbinger of the post-Stalin “thaw,” resulting in relative slackening of political control, making it possible to create a new museum exhibition in 1955. The 1955–1967 period witnessed a certain lessening of political symbolism in the strict sense, with enhanced international, as well as Polish national and state-related, symbolism. In 1967, the latter prevailed as a result of the Communist government’s antisemitic campaign, using antisemitism as a tool in the infighting between Polish Communist elite factions, as well as tension in Polish-German relations.26

The coexistence of different symbols, merged in various commemoration projects, were reflected in the activities of the International Auschwitz Committee, formed in 1952. The committee was entrusted with the task of monitoring and advising the museum on exhibition projects, and mainly consisted of Jewish Holocaust survivors and their families. However, according to James Young, their identity was mostly shaped by their participation in underground and socialist movements, and only to a lesser extent, by their Jewishness.27 The members of the committee stressed the international character of Auschwitz, suggesting the museum space should reflect the differentiated character of commemorating the different categories of victims from different countries. Several Jewish groups viewed this project as an attempt to dilute the memory of this site as a place of suffering and torment for European Jewry.

25 Ibid., p. 3.
26 Ibid., pp. xviii–xix; Kucia, Auschwitz, p. 2.
In 1957, the International Auschwitz Committee announced a competition to design a monument for camp victims. The ensuing difficulties over the choice of project clearly reflect the complexity in determining how the memory of the Holocaust ought to be represented symbolically at the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. Some of the projects were rejected because they would have interfered excessively with the view of the museum’s primary task of preserving the camp premises as unaltered as possible, which was adopted by the vast majority of institutions involved in commemorating Auschwitz. Other projects were inspired by daring, modern, artistic visions which, however, did not present the scope of the crimes committed in Auschwitz, and might have offended the victims’ families and camp survivors’ esthetic sensibilities.28

The selection process was protracted due to these problems and financial constraints. The final version, which also included projects that had been submitted at an earlier stage, was not prepared until 1963–1965. A cubic sculpture suggesting human forms (parents with a child) was the central element. However, shortly before its unveiling, which took place on May 16, 1967, the sculpture was removed from the center of the monument and replaced by a marble plate with the camp triangle in the middle.29

According to James Young, this change was dictated by ideological considerations, reflecting far-reaching politicization of the commemoration symbolism. From the authorities’ point of view, the winning project did not sufficiently emphasize the political nature of the camp victims. Moreover, the “different sizes of stones in the initial sculpture suggested children, who could not have been killed as political prisoners, but only as Jews. In 1967, the discerning critical eye of the authorities apparently caught this subtlety of meaning, which led them to replace human figures with a symbol of political suffering”30 (the triangle was worn by political prisoners).

In addition to the political symbolism in keeping with the Communist authorities, the monument’s final version also included internationalist features, represented by 19 tables with inscriptions commemorating camp victims in their countries’ languages. Furthermore, it featured elements of the Polish commemoration discourse, such as an image of the Order of the Grunwald Cross, which was conferred on camp victims by the State Council of the Polish People’s Republic, bringing Auschwitz into the Polish

28 Ibid., pp. 133–136.
29 Ibid., p. 141.
30 Ibid.
historical narrative. Yet another of these elements was a prominent table with explanations in Polish.\textsuperscript{31}

Auschwitz was present in the Poles’ memory as a source of the deeply rooted Polish mythology of a besieged nation persecuted by its neighbors — in this case, the Germans. Individual remembrance of the suffering, family stories passed on from generation to generation, and also education at school raised children to have the strong conviction that Auschwitz was one of the holy places of national remembrance — perhaps the holiest — for the “martyrology” and the heroic struggle against adversity that had become the cornerstone of Polish identity.

The Communist authorities exploited this private construction of identity, transforming it into an “element of a symbolic ideological construction that conferred legitimacy on the political status quo. The Auschwitz State Museum became a symbol of ‘state nationalism’ which represented Polish national martyrdom, providing an official interpretation of historical Polish-German relations and of Poland’s place in the world.”\textsuperscript{32} Paradoxically, in this way, even though Polish society did not accept Communist rule,\textsuperscript{33} at least verbally, an inverse linkage was created between the nation’s memory and the imposed ideological construction. This became possible because the Communist vision of history was compatible with national tradition — at least with regard to the perception of Auschwitz.

Overlaying private and official memories became possible partly due to the disappearance of other ways of remembering Auschwitz, together with their “carriers” from Poland. As Young puts it, when “Jewish memory...departed, the Poles were left alone with their own, now uncontested, memory of events.”\textsuperscript{34} This resulted in forgetting that most of the camp victims were Jews and a Polonized presentation of the physical camp space. Birkenau — the place where approximately one million Jews from the occupied Polish territory and other European countries were exterminated — was removed from the camp tour. This was equivalent to removing the Jews from the memory space. Perhaps James Young’s statement that Poles did not “deliberately displace Jewish memory of the Holocaust with their own, but that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Kucia, \textit{Auschwitz}, p. 237.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} See, for example, Małgorzata Fidelis, \textit{Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Post-war Poland} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 7–8.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Young, \textit{The Texture}, p. 116.
\end{itemize}
in a country bereft of Jews, the memorials can do little but cultivate Polish memory,” is too understanding of the Polish remembrance policy.\textsuperscript{35}

In reality, efforts aimed at uprooting Jewish remembrance from Auschwitz were quite deliberate in ideological and official public discourse, and were rather successful in private discourse. As Zdzisław Mach correctly noted:

Jews would appear...in the exhibition [at the Museum] as residents of different countries, including Poland, and not as a homogeneous ethnic category, who, as such, were doomed to extermination by the Nazis. The problem of Jewish martyrology was relegated to the background in accordance with the Communist rulers’ interests, who found it important to feature the historical Polish-German conflict, but not the tragedy of the Jews.\textsuperscript{36}

Concealment of the extermination of Jews in the museum’s message was accompanied by publications presenting Auschwitz-Birkenau and the victims there in a manner that suited the interests of the powers-that-be. In this context, school manuals and the notorious 1968 “Annex” to Volume XI of the Great General Encyclopedia, which invalidated the term “Nazi concentration camps” that had been used in Volume VIII two years before, played a certain role. The original text truthfully stated that Nazi death camps were “centers for the sole purpose of mass murder; only existing in occupied Poland, and which were designed for the purpose of mass murder of Jews from all over Europe in the framework of the Nazi...‘final solution of the Jewish question.’” However, the annex correcting this entry presented “the Nazi camps” as places serving the main purpose of “biological destruction of the Polish nation,” and the Poles as the “primary and most numerous group of Auschwitz camp inmates.”\textsuperscript{37} Likewise, in museum publications, a tendency to dilute the importance of Auschwitz as a site of extermination of Jews was clearly discernible. To achieve this purpose, the list of the victims’ nationalities was given in alphabetical order, so that “Jews” (Żydzi in Polish) appears last. In addition, chronology was another tool in this manipulation: Thus, the extermination of Jews at the camp, which was not implemented

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 117.
\textsuperscript{36} Mach, “Czym jest Auschwitz,” p. 21.
until 1942, seemed less important, because it was presented as happening later. The term “Jews” was avoided whenever possible by widespread use of the general description of the Auschwitz-Birkenau victims as “residents of several European countries,” with Poles topping the list. As Marek Kucia sums it up, “In 1970, from the point of view of average Poles and especially those born and raised after the war, this manipulation resulted in Auschwitz becoming a symbol of everything but the extermination of Jews.”


In the 1970s, and primarily the second half of the 1980s, relative liberalization of the power system set in, and Poland gradually opened up to ideas from the “Western world.” This led to unprecedented exposure of the Poles to the Holocaust discourse, which, meanwhile, had become the crucial part of the “Western” concept of history.

These processes were accompanied by gradually increasing interest on the part of Polish intellectuals in those chapters of Polish history that had been erased by Communist remembrance policy, including the history and extermination of Polish Jews. This deepened alongside the emergence of a democratic opposition, who set the liberation of social memory from the Communist ideological constraints as one of the goals. Out of reach of Communist censorship, a number of historical works were published exploring issues connected with the history of Jews and Polish-Jewish relations.

In 1985, the television screening of Claude Lanzmann’s documentary movie Shoah was an important official media event. Although perceived as biased by the majority of the Polish viewers, the movie paved the way for one of the first official confrontations with the Holocaust which, until then, had been almost completely removed from Polish public debate. Two years later, the publication of Jan Błoński’s essay in the weekly Tygodnik Powszechny triggered a stormy debate in intellectual circles about the Poles’ guilt and responsibility as passive witnesses of the Holocaust, who often gladly watched the Nazis persecute the Jews. During the same period, a conflict erupted over the Carmelite Nuns convent, founded in 1984 on land contiguous to the Auschwitz camp. This was the first confrontation among

38 Kucia, Auschwitz, p. 276.
39 Steinlauf, Bondage to the Dead, pp. 110–111.
the Polish remembrance of Auschwitz, the Christian view of commemorating history, and the Jewish memory of Auschwitz in the Holocaust. The issue of religious symbols on the camp premises became an intractable problem and the most disputed issue in the clashing views of the Jewish and Polish memories of Auschwitz. It is important to note that this issue became the meeting point — as Jean-Francois Bouthors put it — “of two ways of perceiving Auschwitz in spiritual categories.”

For religious Jews, Auschwitz is a “place without God,” the site of something “unrepresentable” in the sphere of absolute evil, which cannot be explained by any narrative, including a religious one, especially that originating in Christianity, which played a role in the persecution of the Jews.

However, for Christians “there is...no place where Christ would not be present. Even in Auschwitz... The Christians believe that God, in the figure of Jesus, transcends the mystery of depravity in order to save each human existence regardless of race, gender, origin or religious convictions.” Putting aside the metaphysical proposition in the previous paragraph, the above interpretation was hard to accept for many Jews, not least due to the prevailing reflections on the Holocaust, according to which the Holocaust was a unique event that cannot be compared to any other crime. However, it may, therefore, be very difficult for many Christians to understand why their own actions, often inspired by the noblest of intentions, encounter negative reactions on the part of the Jews, since they were aimed at “redeeming the evil” of Auschwitz and commemorating the victims in terms of their own religion — all the more so since Christians were also among the victims.

In the early 1970s, in the context of Father Maksymilian Kolbe’s beatification, reference was made to the Christian concept of Auschwitz as a site sanctified by the martyrs’ sacrifice and, consequently, part of the Christological redemption paradigm. At the beatification ceremony, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła said:

The Church of Poland since the beginning of the post-war period sees the necessity of such a site of sacrifice, of an altar and a sanctuary, precisely in Auschwitz. The beatification of Fr. Maximilian made this even more necessary. We are all convinced that on this site of his heroic immolation...a church should be erected, as since the first centuries of Christianity churches have been created on the tombs of martyrs and saints.45

Of course, it would be difficult to establish a direct link between the creation of the Carmelite Nuns convent and the future pope's words. Nevertheless, the pope's statement and the establishment of the convent must be seen as expressing the Christian view of Auschwitz as “the Golgotha of the contemporary world.”46 The beatification and subsequent canonization of Father Maksymilian Kolbe, with John Paul II’s holy mass at Birkenau in 1979, the establishment of a church in the so-called “New Headquarters” building next to the Birkenau camp, the founding of the Carmelite Nuns convent in the so-called Old Theater building in the camp grounds (or, depending on interpretation, land contiguous to it), the spontaneous placing of religious symbols (crosses, and later also Stars of David) on the “field of ashes” by a group of Polish youths cleaning up the camp area, and the individual commemoration of Edith Stein, Sister Theresa Benedict of the Cross, in the Birkenau grounds were all part of the Christian symbolism of Auschwitz in the 1970s and the 1980s, which, according to Marek Kucia, held sway in the Polish perception of the camp “by conferring a sacred character on former camp structures and introducing an element of permanent physical presence of the institutional church on the premises of these structures.”47

Another, but equally significant, aspect of the conflict connected with religious symbolism at Auschwitz was its relation to national identity. Catholic symbols had become such an important part of national symbolism that any protest against them at the camp premises and vicinity was perceived as hostile to Polish national identity.

In the case of Auschwitz, this led to superimposition of “the patriotic-national narrative” on the previously dominant “international” and “Communist-nationalist” narratives, which were accompanied by

45 Young, The Texture, p. 145.
46 An expression used by Pope John Paul II at the religious service on June 7, 1979, ibid., p. 145.
memorializing Polish or faith-related martyrlogical sites at the camp. Thus, sites, such as Father Maksymilian Kolbe’s cell, the place where Edith Stein was gassed or the Wall of Death, “attained the status of national shrines, the objects of pilgrimage and prayer by millions of Poles.”48 Insofar as most of these sites had been commemorated earlier, the way they were memorialized changed, increasingly taking on the character of a religious ritual. The institutional aspects of this process, especially the history of the Carmelite convent and the dispute over the cross in front of the building abandoned by the nuns, became the most important stage of the conflict between forms of memory and symbolism at the camp in the history of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum after 1989.49

“Regained Memory”: The Perception of Auschwitz after 1989

A characteristic feature in the Polish perception of Auschwitz after 1989 was intensified revival of Jewish memory, which was partly supported by the authorities at this time. Cultural and educational initiatives, publications, and conferences on Polish-Jewish relations played an important role in this process. Particular emphasis was put on modifying school syllabuses and special programs for teachers focusing on how to teach about the Holocaust.50 The inclusion of Jewish issues in events connected with the Second World War, as well as the emergence of the history of Polish Jews in the media, made public opinion more attentive to these previously hushed-up aspects.

This process also affected the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum which, in cooperation with Jewish institutions, introduced significant changes to the museum exhibition and the descriptions of important camp sites in order to emphasize its role as a symbol of the Holocaust and that it was, first and foremost, a site for the extermination of men, women, and children only because they were Jews. The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’s International Council, formed in 1990, chaired by Władysław Bartoszewski, an ex-Auschwitz prisoner and co-founder of the “Żegota” organization, which helped Jews during the Second World War, played a highly significant role.

48 Steinlauf, Bondage to the Dead, p. 133.
in this process. The council assessed the museum’s exhibition, guides, and educational and other activities. It also played a major role in raising the necessary funds. In 2000, the council was transformed into the Auschwitz Council, an advisory body reporting to the Council of Ministers’ Chairman, with its scope of activities extending beyond the Auschwitz camp to other sites where Jews were exterminated.

In 1990, a conference of Jewish scholars, religious activists, and Holocaust survivors was held in Yarnton Manor at Oxford University, concluding with the so-called “Yarnton Declaration,” which dealt with the future of Auschwitz. This declaration was passed on to the Polish government. It presented the most essential problems Jewish intellectuals had with the character of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, and recommended steps to make the exhibition reflect the historical truth.

Tremendous progress was achieved thanks to institutional changes, the exchange of ideas, and programs (particularly the cooperation between the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Yad Vashem and joint workshops for employees of these institutions, held since 1993). Last but not least, there was a readiness to open up to the outcomes of the international debate about the Holocaust. Yet another reason for this progress was the revision of the number of camp victims as a result of the museum researchers’ work: The officially recognized “political” number of four million victims until then was replaced by a more realistic number ranging between 1.1 and 1.5 million. This revision — that the primary camp victims were Jews — became universal. The overestimated figure stemmed from a propensity to focus on non-Jewish victims. As James Young puts it:

The figure of four million... [was] arrived at by a combination of the camp commandant’s self-aggrandizing exaggerations, Polish perceptions of their great losses, and the Soviet occupiers’ desire to create socialist martyrs. The inflated number may have diminished Stalin’s own crimes.... Ironically, by assenting over the years to this unwarranted claim, Jewish visitors have unwittingly assisted in the Polish nationalization of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

52 Ibid., p. 31.
54 Young, The Texture, p. 141.
Furthermore, various categories of victims would naturally appear in discussions about the number of victims, thereby making it possible to preserve in the social consciousness the fact that the absolute majority of those murdered in Auschwitz were Jews.55

In addition, changes in the museum’s general exhibition, especially the part dealing with the Holocaust, stressed the fact that the Jews were the numerically largest category of victims. In this respect, another contributing factor was incorporating Birkenau more extensively into the standard visitors’ tour. In the late 1980s, approximately 35 percent of the visitors to the museum went to Birkenau, the main site for the extermination of Jews, but, ten years later, this figure increased to almost 80 percent.56 Information boards next to the Birkenau monument to the victims were replaced, and the current inscriptions clearly state that Jews were the numerically largest group of victims at the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp complex. Guide training programs were modified, as well as the information and educational material available on the museum premises.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum often came up in the general context of debates about Polish-Jewish relations in Poland after 1989. Some of them dealt directly with the camp museum area, for example, the debate about the Carmelite Nuns convent, which, literally, became an international issue. Another debate focused on the “Papal cross,” continuing the debate over the convent and religious symbolism in the camp. There were also controversies about the organization and content of the fiftieth anniversary of the camp’s liberation.

In a certain sense, these debates set the background for the most heated dispute in Polish-Jewish relations, which erupted after the publication of Jan T. Gross’s Neighbors in 2000,57 and continued with his Polish edition of Fear.58 This process may be defined as a progressive “threshold of shame,” which is a characteristic feature of such debates. Each debate resulted in increasingly serious charges, making the Poles confront essential aspects of their attitude towards the Jews. Until then, after Lanzmann’s movie, the

55 Recently it has been agreed that the number of Jewish victims of Auschwitz approximated one million, Polish — 75,000, Sinti and Roma — 20,000, Soviet POW’s — 18,000, and other victims constituted about 7,000.
58 Jan T. Gross, Fear.
general impression was that only certain, limited segments of Polish society, the poor and uneducated, brutalized by the war, did not show any empathy for the tragedy of the Jews. Opinions voiced by Błoński and others went further, suggesting that such an attitude was far more widespread and not limited to lack of empathy, but also involved distinct, although passive, support for the persecution of Jews. As the debate over Jedwabne revealed, under certain conditions Poles were not only passive observers but also active perpetrators.

The progressive “threshold of shame” had two contradictory consequences. On one hand, each subsequent stage of the debate became easier to accept, thanks to the “memory work” carried out during previous stages. On the other hand, defensive strategies emerged in response to new challenges posed in view of what has been perceived as the unjust escalation of accusations and the necessity to regard previous memory revisions as insufficient. According to findings based on sociological research, this development was connected with the polarization of Polish society with regard to antisemitism and the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned discussions had a tremendous impact on the revision of stereotypical Polish thinking about this subject.

The debates and conflicts over the area of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum did not touch on such extreme issues as the complicity of some Poles in Holocaust crimes. They were nevertheless important, because they questioned the prevailing approach to camp memory, which did not reflect all its functions, especially that the Nazis considered the extermination of Jews to be its overarching role, as of 1942. Thus, the disputes over the Carmelite convent and the “Papal cross” did not only expose the incompatibility of the Jewish and Catholic approaches to commemorating the tragedy of Auschwitz, but also society’s reluctance to recognize the camp as symbolizing Jewish tragedy, and, consequently, the inappropriateness of Catholic symbols and practices in this context. Denying the propriety of religious commemoration of the victims was a shock for many Poles, leading to a series of defensive reactions, often involving a specific mixture of traditional, religiously motivated anti-Judaism (Jews as “enemies of Christianity”) and

modern-day antisemitism (Jewish “anti-Polish conspiracy” depriving the Poles of the right to commemorate the past in the manner accepted by their culture).

Conflicts over the museum area were given a great deal of media exposure. Moreover, they played out within a quite limited space, which was nonetheless saturated with meanings. They also had a significant behavioral aspect. They were not limited to an exchange of views, but constituted a confrontation among different approaches to commemorating Auschwitz, such as, on the one hand, protest in defense of “the Papal cross” on the camp premises, and, on the other hand, the “March of the Living,” in which Poles were confronted with Jewish remembrance of the Holocaust.

The Conflict over the “Papal Cross”

In 1988, Stanisław Górny, the parish-priest of St. Maksymilian, Martyr of Oświęcim, erected a cross on the grounds of the so-called Żwirowisko (Quarry) site at Auschwitz, next to the building housing the Carmelite convent. Officially, the cross was meant to commemorate the tenth anniversary, due the following year, of the mass held by Pope John Paul II in Brzezinka (Birkenau). Actually, this apparent act of protest against the so-called Geneva Agreement resulted in the Carmelite Nuns moving to new premises outside the camp area. Apparently, certain Catholic circles had no intention of complying with the terms of the agreement. Placing the cross in a disputed area, as Wojciech Markiewicz writes, was a throwback to the efficient methods used “during the era of the Polish People’s Republic” to defend church property, whereby the convent acquired “the status of sacred inviolability.” In 1993, after several conflicts and John Paul II’s direct intervention, the Carmelite Nuns left the building. However, the cross remained and became the object of yet another wave of controversies between Poles and Jews.

John Paul II prayed under the cross in Brzezinka during his first visit to Poland in 1979. After the pope held the mass, the cross, which the authorities requested to be destroyed, was disassembled and concealed on the premises of the parish of St. Maksymilian, Martyr of Oświęcim. In the years

that followed, the cross was erected on the construction sites of two new churches in Oświęcim, and, in 1987, it was once again set up in Brzezinka, during the first anniversary event of Edith Stein’s canonization.63

From the very outset, the cross associated with the Polish pope (although the “Papal cross” was a misnomer since he did not donate or consecrate it) synthesized Catholic and Polish elements. Keeping the cross at the St. Maksymilian, Martyr of Oświęcim, parish and using it during the event connected with Edith Stein also linked it with key figures in the Catholic narrative of Auschwitz, whom the Jews found hard to accept because of the controversy surrounding them. Regardless of his heroism and martyrlogy in the camp, to the Jews, Father Kolbe was the pre-war editor of antisemitic publications, and Edith Stein symbolized conversion as the only way Jews can be accepted by the Christian world. Consequently, when the crosses (and also the Stars of David), spontaneously placed by Polish youths at Brzezinka, were removed and when Krzysztof Śliwiński, the governmental plenipotentiary in charge of relations with the Jewish Diaspora, suggested in the press that it was necessary to move the cross from Żwirowisko, it was construed, in addition to moving the convent, as yet another attack on Polishness and religious identity as a key element of the Polish character.

On June 14, 1998, Kazimierz Świtoń, an activist in the underground trade unions in the 1970s and, briefly, a member of the Polish parliament after 1989, set up a tent at the former Żwirowisko, where he began a hunger strike in protest against plans to remove “the Papal cross.” For those who could not reconcile themselves with the decision to move the convent, which they viewed as giving in to “Jewish pressure,” Świtoń’s protest represented a defense of the Poles’ right to act as they pleased in Poland, and, in particular, to use their own religious symbols at sites associated with Polish narratives of heroism and national martyrdom. This mode of argument became particularly important when certain Jewish circles proposed that the Auschwitz camp be declared as extraterritorial.

Świtoń ended his hunger strike after a few weeks. However, he remained at Żwirowisko, calling for the erection of 152 new crosses around the “Papal cross” to commemorate 152 Poles shot there by the Germans. Until August 11, 1998, when Cardinal Glemp called on the faithful to stop this action, more than 100 crosses were erected at Żwirowisko by private individuals, various “committees for the defense of the cross,” and other organizations

supported by the media, such as “Radio Maryja” and Nasz Dziennik, combining religious conservatism, nationalism, and antisemitism. Świtoń, openly questioning the bishops’ authority, dismissed the appeal by the Cardinal and other leading figures in the Polish Catholic church, condemning what they considered as misuse of the holy symbol of Christianity. Subsequently, Świtoń and his followers were branded as anti-clerical, lacking in respect for the official church authorities, and even as questioning certain tenets of the faith. When the number of crosses at the Żwirowisko site exceeded the planned 152, Świtoń modified his “remembrance ideology.” He switched from commemorating Polish Auschwitz victims to honoring Polishness as such. In his new appeal, he proposed setting up 1,032 crosses alongside the “Papal cross,” at the Żwirowisko site, by May 3, 1999, to mark the anniversary of the May 3 Constitution in 1791, as well as the 1033rd anniversary of Polish statehood and Poland’s Christianization in the year 966. The cross symbolism was to be used in a purely national context and Polish national identity would be identified with Catholicism. The catchwords on the crosses and banners around them left no doubt that no other than the Polish nation was being honored for its martyrdom and sacred character: One of the most frequent slogans was “Only under the Cross/Only under this sign/Poland is Poland/And a Pole is a Pole.”

When the Polish government decided to take a firm position against Świtoń’s protest, the highest possible legal status was conferred on decisions relating to the Żwirowisko site and the procedural character of the planned measures was defined as precisely as possible. A special bill to protect former Nazi extermination camps was tabled in the Polish parliament and, following a stormy debate, was passed on April 10, 1999. It introduced a protective zone around six death camps in Poland. Any economic activity, construction or meetings there could only take place with special permits from the local authorities.

On May 27, 1999, Świtoń was arrested and charged with threatening to blow up the Żwirowisko site. The following day, all the crosses, with the exception of “the Papal cross,” were removed. Consequently, the situation went back to square one. This was presented by certain Polish politicians as a compromise solution, which, however, for many Jews, was just as unacceptable as it was before Świtoń’s protests. Nevertheless, support for the protests voiced by various segments of Polish society, the emotional tension triggered by the conflict, and the weakness of both state and church authorities should be taken into account. This was probably what Yisrael Gutman was referring to in an interview with the Polish daily Rzeczpospolita, when
he concluded that, for the time being, one would have to put up with the cross at Żwirowisko, which would serve as a point of departure in further negotiations.  

The March of the Living

Polish discussions about the Holocaust period and Polish-Jewish relations were kindled by increasingly frequent visits by American and Israeli Jews who brought Jewish memories of the Holocaust with them. Thus, the Poles were directly confronted with a different view of history than their own, a picture “now filtered through the accusatory lens of outsiders determined to reclaim, albeit symbolically, sites such as Auschwitz, which were previously considered Polish rather than Jewish sites of martyrdom.”

The March of the Living, among the most well-known remembrance rituals in which Jews can manifest their memory and identity at Auschwitz, has been taking place annually since 1988. Groups of Jewish youths, mainly from Israel and the United States, come to Poland and visit various former extermination camps and other sites of Jewish martyrdom, and then participate in the march from Auschwitz to Birkenau (many groups only participate in this part of the trip). The march takes place on Holocaust Memorial Day, which has been observed in Israel since 1959, and fulfills several functions connected with the past (e.g., through the participation of Holocaust survivors) and with the present and the future (e.g., through the presence of Israeli national symbols).

Until quite recently, the March of the Living was totally cut off from Polish reality and had no contact with Poles. This ritual recreated the Holocaust reality, as remembered by Jews: the victims’ loneliness, hostility, and indifference of the surrounding world, and, finally, a certain kind of monopoly on suffering, which excluded sharing it with others, or even the recognition that others suffered too. This image undermines the Holocaust

or, rather, as the Poles often put it, the war/occupation reality as they wish to remember it: that is, like the Jews, they were earmarked for total extermination, and they suffered just as much, and, finally, despite all the adversity, they strove to save the largest number of Jews possible.

Whenever Jews and Poles would meet in the March of the Living, the Poles were rather dumbfounded. This is how a 1994 manual coached the march participants for their meetings with Poles: “We will be surrounded everywhere by the local Polish population, and we will have ambivalent feelings toward them. We will hate them for having participated in atrocities, but we will also pity them for their woeful living conditions today. Let us not be carried away by negative emotions. We won the war, we can march there, before the entire world, with our national white and blue flag, and not with the ‘yellow star.”’ Treatment of Poles in accordance with these guidelines, as well as public statements by march participants, whereby “Poles, even contemporary Poles, [are] often cast as enemies almost as much as the Nazis,” triggered feelings of humiliation and hostility in Polish society.

The transformation of the Polish collective memory and the search for new terms of reference and a definition of relations between Poles and other nations and groups, among which Jews are one of the most significant in Polish historical space, requires rethinking Polish identity. Optimistically, it might lead, as Jack Kugelmass puts it, to a “world as a carnival of voices in which multiple cultural realities coexist, clash, and sometimes creatively recombine.” However, in the situation characterizing Polish society, in which past, present, and future are constantly being redefined, it is hard to imagine that a significant number of Poles would dare to question ingrained axioms of memory. Efforts aimed at promoting such a dialog are naturally limited to intellectual elites. However, this does not mean that they do not have practical consequences in a broader context. As far as the March of the Living goes, it is precisely the openness of the Polish elite, both intellectual and political, and the sincerity with which painful and shameful aspects of Polish-Jewish relations are discussed, that make it possible to conduct such negotiations. There have been several outcomes: Statements prejudicial to the Poles were removed from the information brochures; Polish youths

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68 Ibid., p. 18.
were allowed to participate in the march; and greater openness to contemporary Polish reality was permitted in the program.

However, it would be a mistake to treat the post-1989 period exclusively as a clash between the Polish-Catholic and Jewish symbolization of Auschwitz. It was also a time when other groups attempted to turn the Auschwitz camp into an important symbolic site for their national identity and collective memory. This is manifested by a monument commemorating the Gypsy (Sinti and Roma) victims at Birkenau, among other things. An annual event commemorating the liquidation of the so-called “Gypsy camp” is held at the monument. In 2001, a permanent exhibition dedicated to the extermination of the Sinti and Roma was opened at the former camp.

After the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, the need arose to reorganize national exhibitions, due partly to the disappearance of certain states from the political map, and partly to the emergence of new ones. There was also a need to remove ideological elements falsifying historical reality from the existing exhibitions. This process does not only apply to national exhibitions in Eastern Europe. In addition, other exhibitions were changed after 1989, as for example, the French one, which did not originally provide information about the collaboration of the French authorities in the deportation of French Jews to extermination camps. According to some scholars, the need to reorganize national histories with regard to the Holocaust period shows the growing importance of international symbolism at Auschwitz.70

Auschwitz and the Extermination of Jews in Polish Society’s Consciousness

An identity based on remembrance is becoming more and more important for the most significant groups of victims of the Nazi Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, since other determinants of their identity are either weakening or undergoing a crisis. In the case of Jews, owing to secularization and assimilation; in the case of the Sinti and Roma, owing to the breakdown of their traditional way of life; and, in the case of Poles, owing to profound changes in the historical terms of reference that fashioned their identity. This explains why the issue of identity is taking on ever-increasing importance, and remembrance rituals emphasizing past suffering are more frequently

70 Kucia, *Auschwitz*, p. 312.
used for this purpose. The conflict about the cross and the fiftieth anniversary events for the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp proved this most convincingly. Originally planned as an opportunity for reconciliation of Polish and Jewish memory, the events took place in an atmosphere of scandal, providing some representatives of Jewish organizations with an opportunity to blame Polish authorities for staging a “nationalist” ceremony. Some Poles also accused the Jews of completely excluding Poles as Auschwitz victims.

Nevertheless, conflicts concerning remembrance rituals and their presentation in the media fulfill an important role in democratic systems. In this respect, results of sociological polls give rise to moderate optimism. According to opinion polls carried out by the Public Opinion Research Center (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej — CBOS) shortly before the fiftieth anniversary events for the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, 47 percent of those polled considered Auschwitz as, first and foremost, a site of Polish martyrdom, while only eight percent admitted that most of its victims were Jews. However, polls carried out after the events demonstrated that only 32 percent associated Auschwitz mainly with Polish victims, while the percentage of those identifying the camp mainly with the Holocaust more than doubled.71 Thus, perhaps the collective memory can be freed from its subservient role regarding preservation of identity, so that Auschwitz might be rationally discussed and become a place where various forms of remembrance that do not misrepresent the truth coexist.

However, considering the significance of Auschwitz in the broader context of sociological research dealing with the attitude of Poles towards Jews and their extermination, it is clear that the grounds for optimism are rather fragile and dissemination of adequate knowledge about Auschwitz and the Holocaust is not a constant tendency in the Polish collective memory. A great deal depends on situational factors, such as anniversary events, public and media debates, and discussions, which stimulate interest in the past, on the one hand, but once the direct stimulus subsides, leave people indifferent, on the other.72

Sociological research does not corroborate Steinlauf’s view of the Poles

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71 Oświęcim w zbiorowej pamięci Polaków, CBOS Report (January 1995); Aneks do komunikatu Oświęcim w zbiorowej pamięci Polaków, CBOS Report (March 1995); Steinlauf (Bondage to the Dead, p. 142) refers to these research results to support his moderate optimism with regard to the Polish perception of Auschwitz.

as having recovered their memory or, more precisely, his question mark about this is confirmed. The findings seem to indicate that Polish society did not so much recover memory of the Holocaust, but rather became polarized with regard to their attitude towards Jews and the Holocaust.

A comparison of the findings from research conducted in 1992 and 2002 reveals the growing polarization of Polish society with regard to attitudes towards Jews, and also a tendency to equalize Polish and Jewish suffering during the Second World War. It seems that although, after 1989, Poles were provided with information about the extermination of Jews, it was not permanently integrated, and even sometimes rejected outright, by their knowledge structures.

This phenomenon may be explained in different ways, but in the context of the symbolical significance of Auschwitz and its perception by Polish society, the fact that information about Jewish issues usually reached the social consciousness in the context of Polish-Jewish conflicts, often forced Poles to carry out far-reaching reassessment of their attitudes and question deeply rooted certainties, as for example, with the role of religious and national symbolism in commemoration of the past. This might stir up feelings of cognitive uneasiness which, combined with other simultaneously received facts, hampered the inclusion of such information into their pool of knowledge.

Such an interpretation was corroborated by results of research about the consciousness of Auschwitz in Poland, carried out in 1996 and 2000, which show that:

The majority of the country’s residents know that mainly Jews perished in the camp. This realization was due to the media’s influence on younger people, who were receptive to reassessing their way of thinking. However, approximately only half of the answers to the question about the largest number of concentration camp victims at Auschwitz... were correct. In view of the scope of the extermination of the Jews in the camp...and the amount of information regarding these data that was available in Poland in the years before the research, this was a rather low answering score.... It also turned out that a considerable number of the country’s residents was convinced that it was the Poles

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who constituted the majority of those who had died or were killed in the camp.... An equally large group of Poles, when asked about the most numerous group of camp victims, chose the answer “It doesn’t matter which group, simply people were dying there.”

Even more recent research also shows that knowledge about the number of victims does not necessarily affect the general significance attached to the camp.... In 2005, respondents who were asked what the word “Auschwitz” means to them, gave the following answers: for 37 percent, “Auschwitz” was primarily “the site of martyrdom of the Polish nation”; for 17 percent, it was primarily the “site of Jewish martyrdom”; and 43 percent gave a different answer. In the latter group, seven percent of the respondents made statements associating “Auschwitz” with the “site of Polish and Jewish martyrdom”; and 30 percent invoked the universal or international significance of the camp (site of martyrdom for “humanity” or for people of “various nationalities”).

Consequently, for Poles, first and foremost, Auschwitz is a Polish “place”; secondly, a “universal-international” site; and only thirdly “a Jewish” site. Regardless of other explanatory factors, the long-term effect of the “national-state-related” symbolism of Auschwitz is a deep-seated mixture in the respondents’ consciousness to the effect that “Auschwitz is a site of martyrdom of the Polish nation,” and also the perception of Auschwitz in universal categories as a site of crimes against humanity.

This is consistent with Marek Kucia’s presentation of Auschwitz in the consciousness of the Poles as a “multifarious symbol” consisting of Jewish, Polish, religious, international, and universal perspectives. Furthermore, each could take on specific forms depending on various political and cultural factors.

From a chronological point of view, the Polish perspective ought to be viewed as the first, since it developed while the camp was still in operation. As a national and state-related perspective, it provided one of the perceptual frameworks of the camp in the period immediately after the liberation and in the 1960s. This view coexisted with the Communist, ideological vision of Auschwitz, and often provided “national” legitimacy for the latter, and it meshed with religious symbolism, in the 1970s. Its main element

75 *Po obchodach 60. rocznicy wyzwolenia Auschwitz-Birkenau — Obóz w Oświęcimiu w świadomości Polaków*, CBOS Report (March 2005).
76 Kucia, *Auschwitz*, p. 228.
was recognition of Auschwitz as a site of martyrdom of the Polish nation. The interrelated international and universal perspectives, which recognized Auschwitz as the site of torment of people from several nations, and the site of crimes against humanity, respectively, were intensely manipulated politically. They played especially significant roles in the second half of the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, but their impact could be felt at a later stage as well. According to Kucia, since the end of the 1990s, there has been a revival of the universal perspective, enriched by the symbolism of peace and reconciliation at different levels of Auschwitz as a symbol in the consciousness of the Poles. This universal perspective included Polish and Jewish symbols, and made them somewhat complementary despite the fundamental divide between them. The religious perspective, viewing the camp as the “Golgotha of humanity” and the site of a crime requiring redemption in the religious sense, dominated in the 1970s and the 1980s, and incidentally merged with the national perspective. The Jewish vision of Auschwitz as a symbol of the extermination of Jews developed alongside the increasing Holocaust discourse in the 1960s, and began to affect Polish perceptions of Auschwitz in the 1980s and 1990s, partly through its growing presence in the museum exhibition, as well as in the educational and media-related discourse, and, finally, through a series of conflicts with the traditional Polish and Catholic approach to Auschwitz, as exemplified by the disputes over the Carmelite convent and the “Papal cross.”

The Representation of Auschwitz

Auschwitz is a unique site of remembrance where various groups attempt to put emphasis on their presence. Therefore, the message of this site is fashioned differently depending on the applied perspective, discourse, and symbolism. However, there is another fundamental problem: How can the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum preserve essential elements of the represented past and, at the same time, express it in the language of contempo-

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77 Ibid., p. 312.
78 This section summarizes Marek Kucia’s viewpoint (ibid., pp. 311–312), but adds a slightly different chronology, emphasizing the role of political factors and the synthesis of the Polish and religious perspectives. The author also omitted Kucia’s arguable thesis about the collapse of the dominant Jewish symbolism.
rary codes, making it understandable, if possible, and significant for future

generations?

This question has been asked almost since the museum’s establishment. By the end of the 1940s, the view was expressed that even the best preservation of camp structures and maintenance of those in unchanged condition could not possibly reflect what Auschwitz really was. Many voiced the opinion that even the most sophisticated museum concept would fall short of rendering the horror of the crimes. Such thinking led some to conclude that the very idea of a museum in Auschwitz ought to be abandoned and the existing camp structures disassembled. Others opted for a symbolic commemoration of Auschwitz instead of a museum. Yet others were advocates of the concept that was actually implemented.79

Furthermore, as Jonathan Webber wrote, a specific question in the context of the Holocaust is how to render the basically inhuman and “abnormal” character of the represented past, and at the same time to demonstrate how those inhuman crimes were taking place in the banal context of everyday life, and how “normal”80 they were in this sense. In other words: Is it feasible to show in an understandable manner that the Holocaust transformed anomaly into something normal, banal — by means of a museum exhibition or an artistic concept? The historical uniqueness of the Holocaust is yet another problem Webber touched on. If the Holocaust was something unique, how can it be adequately represented and understood in general categories? As a matter of fact, this question pertains to the relation between the represented and the representation: How can something unique be expressed through something general and accessible to many?

Is it possible to preserve the unique character of an event in museum practice and, at the same time, represent it in such a way as to enable the message linked with it to function universally? One must hope that the museum, as a living and evolving body, shall provide answers to these questions. The first opportunity to do so would be the framework of the current reorganization of the entire exhibition.

Of course, one can also hope, along with Jonathan Huener, that regardless of problems in connection with the museum exhibition, Auschwitz can “speak for itself,” through its landscape, vestiges of material objects from the period when the camp was in operation, and, finally, through survivors’ testimonies.

79 Lachendro, Zburzyć i zaorać…?, pp. 90–95.
The hope is that such a message — free of ideological and intellectual manipulation or esthetic overinterpretation\(^1\) — would be the best pedagogical tool. However, such hope is rather naive. As Margaret Olin puts it, a monument or a commemoration site is a void that is waiting for content to fill it.\(^2\) To a large extent, the future history of the museum will depend on what is brought there, regardless of what already exists. Yet, the museum’s contribution will necessarily be subject to future changes in the perception of history, cultural values, and the constellation of political interests. This is unavoidable. As pointed out by James Young, the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial site can only be imbued with an ability to react to changes, to adjust quickly to new times, and to complement existing meanings and interpretations of the Holocaust with new ones that may emerge in the future. However, the most important message about the Holocaust period, which ought to be conveyed by Auschwitz as a memorial site, in Young’s view, is simple: It must clearly state how many people died in this place, why, and at whose hands. Whatever significance future generations confer from this message and the past it reveals will only depend on them. What will be really important is to ensure that the memorial site of Auschwitz imposes a constant obligation to take a position about the past.

\(^1\) Huener, *Auschwitz*, pp. 26–27.
The attitude of the Catholic Church in Poland toward Jews after the Holocaust has not, as yet, been studied comprehensively. Discussions about the Church’s position on Jewish topics have been dominated to a considerable extent by stereotypes and emotional reactions.

In this article, the concept of the Catholic Church includes several different groups: the hierarchy (the primate and the bishops), the clergy, the Catholic press, as well as the faithful and their organizations. It does not include the circles that declared themselves as Catholic (e.g., the PAX Association), but which the Church hierarchy disapproved of because of their support for the Communist authorities. This analysis refers to positions taken by the Vatican and statements made by the post-war popes regarding “Jewish topics.”

The term “Jewish topics” includes issues such as the Holocaust, anti-semitism, the status of Jews in Poland, the Jewish state, Polish-Jewish and Christian-Jewish relations, and past and present attitudes of the post-war Catholic Church toward Jews. The period covered, from 1944 to 1989, the years of Communist rule, was characterized by constraints imposed by the undemocratic nature of the regime, and also the perception of the Church as one of the most serious threats to the Communist state — essential factors for understanding the situation.

Post-war relations were set against the atmosphere of previous mutual attitudes and interactions between Jews and the Church, which was not free of dislike and hostility. On the one hand, the Jewish people were presented as cursed, responsible for Christ’s death, and associated with ideologies negatively perceived by the Church (such as Communism and Liberalism), among other things. On the other hand, there were the pre-war “Odrodzenie”

1 A Polish organization of Catholic university students actively opposed to all manifestations of antisemitism, as irreconcilable with Christianity.
initiatives, and various monastic orders and clergy helped in hiding Jews during the war. However, such initiatives and help did not change the persistent negative attitudes toward Jews in some Catholic circles, while lack of relevant recommendations from the Holy See tended to ossify them.

Several periods can be distinguished with respect to the Catholic Church's attitude toward Jews. The first began in July 1944 and came to an end in the summer of 1946. The Kielce Pogrom, in July 1946, is an important separate chapter. During the next period, from autumn of 1946 until 1961, Jewish topics were seldom included in the Church's activities. The 1960s are an important period: with the Pope's visit to Israel in 1964, the Nostra Aetate Declaration in 1965, the Six-Day War and the severance of diplomatic relations with Israel by most Communist countries in 1967, and Jewish issues during the political crisis in Poland in March 1968. The last period covers the final decades of People's (or Communist) Poland, in the 1970s and 1980s.

First, the Church's attitude toward Jews after the war, in July 1944, during the liberation of the eastern part of post-war Poland from the German Occupation, is considered. The Church's overriding concern at that time was to rebuild parochial structures and provide pastoral care for the faithful. The war resulted in huge losses among the clergy, of over 50 percent in some dioceses. The clergy's difficult economic situation and damage to churches — on the left-bank of Warsaw, 49 of 53 churches and larger chapels were damaged, burned out or totally destroyed — were also problems in the early post-war period. In addition, there were other important “immediate post-war” issues, such as profanation of churches by Soviet soldiers in the areas occupied by the Red Army. The moral condition of society, including some of the clergy, was another of the Church's problems at the time.

The above difficulties were compounded by the question of the relationship with the new Communist authorities, all the more so since some of their actions seemed to be unambiguously hostile toward the Church, such as abrogation of the Concordat in September 1945, and the enactment of a new law providing for civil marriages. The arrest and murder of priests enhanced the sense of insecurity and threat.

Pastoral letters from that period reveal the Church's preoccupations at the time. Among them was the need to get rid of the “post-war plague of

carelessness, dishonesty, cheating, stealing, robberies, and banditry,” and to “respect other people’s property and return what was stolen.” The bishops also appealed to rid “Polish life of hatred.” A communiqué in May 1946 from the Episcopate of Poland’s plenary session mentioned “unrest in the country and the personal safety of citizens” among “issues requiring particular attention.” In the first half of 1946, the Episcopate also faced problems with prisoners deprived of pastoral care, education for young people, abortion, difficult living conditions for those resettled in the Western Territories, the marriage decree, charity work, Church organizations in the Western Territories, memories of Church martyrdom, and the losses during the war, as well as the Catholic press, among other things.

Under these circumstances, Jewish issues remained peripheral to the Church’s activities and reflection. However, some important matters for the Jewish community were treated with sympathy and understanding, but other statements revealed the Church’s lack of receptiveness to Jewish concerns, as well as indifference and resentment toward Jews.

The Holocaust was one of the subjects raised by the Church immediately after the war. It was broached in various ways, e.g., in homilies, and condemning “with the utmost severity all murders perpetrated against innocent people.” The presence of the Holocaust was not limited to recollections: The Catholic press printed texts describing the fate of Jews during the war; the Jewish population was mentioned in articles about the war; and the post-

4 AAL, Dział II–68, Wielkopostny list pasterski Episkopatu, 18 II 1946, pp. 5–6.
7 The martyrdom of Jews was mentioned, e.g., in Primate Hlond’s speech in October 1945. Recalling the war period, he said: “For the believers in Christ, but also for Jews, this was a period of terror, unbelievable cruelty, slavery, camps, gas chambers.” See “Chrześcijaństwo czy materializm — przemówienie ks. Kardynała Hlonda, prymasa Polski, w dniu 28 X 1945 r. w Poznaniu,” Tygodnik Warszawski, no. 4 (1945), p. 1.
10 For example, in a commentary on an exhibition on German crimes in Poland, a Tygodnik Warszawski journalist asked the following question: “For whom is this exhibition actually intended? Probably, least of all, for us Poles, not for the Jews, and it is
war absence of Jews was noted.\textsuperscript{11} It is also worth mentioning that the event marking the third anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was held under the honorary patronage of Adam Sapieha, Archbishop of Kraków, one of the more important figures in the post-war Catholic Church in Poland.

The Church’s help to Jews in Poland\textsuperscript{12} and other European countries\textsuperscript{13} was an important Holocaust-related theme. This subject was expanded in articles about Poles who saved Jews, who were regarded as “the heroic nation’s elite.”\textsuperscript{14}

Discussion of other aspects of the attitude to Jews during the war was practically absent. Betrayal of Jews and handing them over directly to the Germans were only mentioned sporadically.\textsuperscript{15} One of the important texts on Poles and Jews at the time describes the attempts to involve “other nations” in murdering Jews. With Poles and Byelorussians, such attempts, “on the whole,” failed. However, the text mentions the “indifferent look of Poles” accompanying “columns of marching Jews,” but tones this down with the observation that the Poles’ look was more frequently “sympathetic.” Recollection of “the only pogrom against Jews in Warsaw perpetrated by Polish hands during the occupation” explains that it was the rabble-rousers’ only triumph, which was condemned by “all kinds of political leaders.”\textsuperscript{16}

Jewish topics also came within the scope of the Church’s post-war
activities in view of the requests by some Jews to convert to Catholicism. In such cases, recognizing the intention, above all, was recommended, and “not denying admittance into the Church, if there is good will; but, if there are other reasons, denying it.”

The Church’s positive attitude was observed on the Jewish state issue. In an interview, Primate Hlond stated that “the rebuilding of an independent Jewish state [was] a matter of primary importance.”

Attitudes to Jewish issues varied. In recollections and descriptions of the Holocaust, as well as in questions concerning the Jewish state, there was clear evidence of understanding and sympathy for the Jewish fate. Questions of faith were presented in a different tone. In statements on this subject, not only is the firm conviction of superiority of Christianity over Judaism presented, but also a negative view of the Jewish religion. As one of the texts states:

> Instead of opening the door to the Kingdom of God before the faithful, the proud synagogue closes it. It will not let anyone in, and does not want to enter the Kingdom of God announced by Christ.... That is why whoever wishes to follow Christ's call must drive back the synagogue blocking the entry...; he must expose himself to its [the synagogue’s] anger and persecution.

In the immediate post-war period, assaults on the Jewish population and manifestations of active antisemitism posed considerable problems. By July 1946, this issue appeared several times in statements by the clergy and in the Catholic press. In all known cases concerning Church hierarchs, antisemitism was always discussed as a result of initiatives by various Jewish representative bodies who appealed for help in fighting it. The hierarchs were informed of assaults and murders perpetrated against Jewish survivors.

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17 AAL, Dział IV–28, Korespondencja, Okólnik wikariusza generalnego ks. Dr. J. Kruszyńskiego do przewiebnych Księży dziekanów Diecezji Lubelskiej, 20 I 1945, p. 6. The quotation applied not only to Jews but also to Orthodox Church members. Apparently, this was a major problem since the circular refers to “numerous enquiries about how to deal with groups of Jews and Orthodox Church members who express the wish to join the Roman Catholic Church.”


20 Such was the case with Jewish delegations visiting Rev. Kruszyński in Lublin, among others, in early 1945; Czesław Kaczmarek, the Bishop of Kielce, in autumn 1945; and Stanisław Adamski, the Bishop of Silesia, in spring 1946.
of the Holocaust. In the opinion of Jewish activists, the Church could have counteracted this situation, for example, by issuing appropriate appeals. However, as shown by the minutes of these meetings, the Catholic clergy had a different view about this aspect of post-war reality. This statement made by Rev. Kruszyński, the Curate-General of Lublin, is typical:

After the entry of Bolsheviks, no one persecuted or intended to persecute Jews. There were few Jews, and they inspired compassion, therefore, there was no special need to speak up for them.21

As far as an appeal defending the Jews was concerned, according to Rev. Kruszyński, it was up to the Episcopate of Poland or the Archbishop of Kraków to take the initiative: “I explained I could not do it first.” However, if the hierarchy issued such a document, “I shall submit to their will.”22 In fact, no such document was ever issued.

Statements of Catholic hierarchs on the safety of Jews included expressions of regret and sympathy, but were combined with a distinct politicization. Asked about “assaults on Jews immediately after Poland’s liberation,” at a meeting, in January 1945, with Professor Michal Zylberberg, a representative of Jewish Religious Associations, Primate Hlond responded:

They fill me with profound sadness. Nevertheless, I do not see anti-Semitism in this phenomenon, but rather a fierce political game, which claims an incomparably greater number of casualties among Poles. Christian principles do not permit political murder.23

22 Ibid.
23 Jan Żaryn, “Hierarchia Kościoła katolickiego wobec relacji polsko-żydowskich w latach 1945–1947,” in Łukasz Kamiński and Jan Żaryn, eds., Wokół pogromu kieleckiego (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [IPN], 2006), p. 93. According to Żaryn, this part of the primate’s statement was manipulated and presented by the Polish Press Agency as follows: “They fill me with genuine sadness. Without repeating the arguments following from Christian principles, there are no objective grounds for spreading antisemitism in Poland today. It is sheer madness by those who keep on conspiring and hiding out in the forests. They think that they are acting politically, and, by attacking Jews they are fighting the government. I condemn their activities as a Catholic and a Pole.” See “Ks. Kardynał Hlond o Żydach, Hitlerze i Palestynie,” Gazeta Ludowa, no. 13 (1946), p. 3.
Other hierarchs spoke in a similar tone as well.\textsuperscript{24} The Church’s attitude toward Jewish safety was also a complete lack of response to appeals about this. In the spring of 1946, for example, the Voivodeship Jewish Committee in Lublin dispatched a memorandum on the Jewish community’s security in the Lublin region to the Episcopal Curia. The memorandum pointed out that the victims of the assaults were people who “had miraculously remained alive after the horrible Nazi slaughter.”\textsuperscript{25} In the archive of the Lublin Archdiocese, there is only a note confirming the document’s receipt.\textsuperscript{26}

The Kraków weekly, \textit{Tygodnik Powszechny}, took an open view on this issue. After the pogrom in Kraków in August 1945, the editorial, “Our Position,” included the following observations:

\begin{quotation}
The fact remains that the background of the Saturday incidents were antisemitic feelings, which still exist in Polish society. With respect to antisemitism, the Church’s position is quite clear.... Antisemitism is irreconcilable with Catholicism.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quotation}

In the autumn of that year, \textit{Tygodnik Powszechny} published a text devoted specifically to post-war antisemitism in Poland, calling the silence on this

\textsuperscript{24} For instance, Czesław Kaczmarek, the Bishop of Kielce, at a meeting with a delegation of the Kielce Voivodeship Jewish Committee in autumn 1945, “expressed his sympathy over the fate of Jews in the present war...and declared that he had issued instructions for sermons to be delivered in churches, such as would not only spread the ideas of religious freedom but also condemn any phenomena conflicting with the spirit of Christianity,” AZIH, BŻAP, no. 108/118 (1945). (The author thanks Alina Skibińska for information about this testimony.) Also, during that meeting, the Jewish interlocutors were reproached for “taking up politics” and told: “Surely you know that we have no influence.” See David Shtokfish, ed., \textit{About Our House Which Was Devastated} (Tel Aviv: Kielce Societies in Israel and in the Diaspora, 1981).

\textsuperscript{25} AAL, Dział III–3, Memoriał WKŻ w Lublinie do Kurii Biskupiej Lubelskiej, b.d. In the curia’s correspondence register, the date of receipt of the document is given as April 8, 1946, pp. 15–17.

\textsuperscript{26} AAL, Dział IV–603, Dziennik korespondencyjny, 8 IV 1946, p. 69. On the one hand, it is worth noting that the register also has blanks about correspondence with other institutions, e.g., the curia in Poznań. On the other hand, in an article by Alina Cała and Helena Datner-Śpiewak, there is the following statement, without any source provided: “Speaking on behalf of the Episcopal Curia..., Bishop Stefan Wyszyński...directly declined to intervene.” See Alina Cała and Helena Datner-Śpiewak, eds., \textit{Dzieje Żydów w Polsce 1944–1968. Teksty źródłowe} (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny [ŻIH], 1997), p. 42.

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Tygodnik Powszechny}, no. 22 (1945), p. 3.
issue a sin. The article “Żydzi, Polacy i zaminowane dusze” (Jews, Poles and Mined Souls) was written in response to the above-mentioned pogrom in Kraków.28

In July 1945, a parish priest in Rzeszów denounced racial hatred in a sermon: “In response to repeated murders,” he called on people to “resist Nazi propaganda.”29 Some clergymen presented their position on the “brutal murders perpetrated against the remaining handful of population,”30 in a survey conducted in July 1945 by the Central Committee of Jews in Poland. “Jews” are also mentioned in other contexts. The messages were varied: unfavorable,31 neutral,32 but also positive.33

The above examples represent the Church’s position toward Jews in the immediate post-war period. They show that Jewish topics were peripheral to the Church’s activities and teaching at the time. Such an incidental presence also indicates several negative messages about Jews. Among the reasons for this situation are the traditional prejudices against Jews, reinforced

28 Ibid., no. 26 (1945), p. 2.
29 AMSZ, BŻAP, no. 6/104/1677, p. 168.
30 Rev. Stanisław Warchałowski, the General Chaplain of the Polish Army, was among the people who responded to the Central Committee of Jews in Poland’s appeal. AMSZ, BŻAP, no. 6/104/1677, p. 170.
31 This is how the publication of Henryk Sienkiewicz’s text “Osiczyna” (Quaking Aspen) of 1893, in the weekly Tygodnik Warszawski, may be interpreted. It included the following passage: “When the Jews were walking around the forest, looking for something from which to make a cross for Christ, all the trees were trembling with horror and none wanted to be the cross. Only the aspen did not tremble — so they made the cross out of it and nailed Christ to it....” Since then, aspens have been quaking because Christ turns souls who did ill during their lives into aspens. The text closes with the words: “For one must never be wood for anyone’s cross.” Henryk Sienkiewicz, Tygodnik Warszawski, no. 20 (1946), p. 3.
32 For instance, in the article by Rev. Zygmunt Kaczyński, Editor-in-Chief of Tygodnik Warszawski, on the situation of post-war Poland, the paragraph about Polish borders includes the following sentence: “To all those abroad who objected because we had not ruled over the Oder and the Neisse for a thousand years, I responded that the Jews had been living away from Palestine for two thousand years, and yet no one denied them the right to return to the Holy Land,” Tygodnik Warszawski, no. 11 (1945), p. 2.
33 For example, an article on hatred includes the following passage: “I know a very interesting case: a PPR member [PPR: Polish Workers’ Party — the ruling, Communist party after the Second World War], a Jewish woman whose entire family was murdered by Germans, takes care of an abandoned German child. Since I found out about this, I take my hat off to this woman...not because she takes care of a German child, but because she has been able to overcome the feeling of hatred,” Tygodnik Warszawski, no. 32 (1945), p. 3.
to some extent by the post-war situation of Poland, among other things.\textsuperscript{34} The Church’s attitude toward Jews at the time was influenced by various factors: the above-mentioned prejudices, politicization of Jewish issues, authentic compassion, keeping their distance from the Jews, and the need to cope with their own pressing affairs. Similar considerations applied to anti-semitism, one of the main post-war problems the Jewish community faced. The condemnation of anti-Jewish excesses was rarely voiced directly, and, in most cases, was drowned out by the political context of post-war Poland. As far as this was concerned, the conviction that Jews not only supported, but also actively participated in installing Communist rule against the will of the majority of Polish citizens is important. Anti-Jewish acts were also perceived as part of the post-war brutalized reality.

The picture of immediate post-war relations between the Church and the Jewish population was significantly affected by the Jewish organizations’ futile expectations, hoping the bishops would take a definite stand on the murder of Jews perpetrated in Poland after the Germans were driven out. Jews considered isolated statements by Church dignitaries as insufficient, especially in view of many reports of such murders. For the community living in the shadow of the Holocaust, it was only natural to expect a strong condemnation of anti-Jewish incidents. In this situation, there was a gap between the Jewish community’s expectations and the Catholic Church’s attitude.

The problem of assaults on the Jewish population after the war was only sporadically raised in the Catholic press before July 1946. This issue was “reserved” for meetings with Jewish representatives, which the faithful learned about in short notices, if at all. As a result, the faithful were not confronted with this kind of information. The knowledge of Catholics about Jews after the war was shaped by the traditional negative perception of Jews, in general, in Church literature and prayers, as well as by the Catholic press and statements by some of the clergy.

On July 4, 1946, there was a pogrom in Kielce, claiming 42 Jewish lives.\textsuperscript{35} For instance, commenting on the meeting between Rev. Kruszyński and Emil Sommerstein, which took place in Lublin, early in 1945, Libionka mentioned Kruszyński’s anxiety lest his words be manipulated by the Communist authorities. The vicar-general’s wariness vis-à-vis his interlocutor was because the latter was the head of a department in the Polish Committee of National Liberation, which served as the communist government. It is also possible that Rev. Kruszyński did not know what was happening to the Jews in the Lublin area. See Libionka, “Księdza Kruszyńskiego.” In addition, an unknown number of Jews were murdered on trains passing through Kielce that day.
For several hours, soldiers, policemen, and a mob consisting of the local population murdered Jewish residents, accusing them of having kidnapped a Polish child. Among the victims were women, young girls, and an infant who was taken, along with his mother, and shot by the police. During the pogrom, priests from the curia of Kielce appeared twice at the site of the disturbances. The first time they were stopped by soldiers and policemen. They demanded to see the commanding officers, who informed them that “the law enforcement authorities had the situation in hand.” When the priests returned to the site, they concluded that the situation had been brought under control.

This picture of the priests’ behavior on the day of the pogrom emerges from various documents. It is worth considering what shaped the Church’s knowledge about the Kielce events. One factor was undoubtedly the belief that the authorities were in full charge of quelling the disturbances. Further elements emerged relating to the plan to issue joint appeals to Kielce residents by the Church and the authorities. This initiative failed because of the Communists. The voivode of Kielce at the time recalled: “The text of the appeal was inconsistent with the Party line and our principles.” Since the authorities did not authorize posting the appeal prepared by the Kielce curia in the city, it was read out in churches on Sunday, July 7, 1946: “On July 4, 1946, our city became the site of a bloody tragedy...a series of events, which rapidly snowballed into an avalanche.” Inadequately informed about the events, the following statement was made:

What happened is a disaster, all the more so since it took place in front of children and youth. In view of [this]..., no Catholic can refrain from expressing genuine and sincere sympathy over these tragic and lamentable events.
The document called for calm, prudence, and composure.

On July 11, 1946, the Diocesan Curia issued another appeal “to all...parish priests of the Kielce Diocese,” to be read out during the holy mass, on Sunday, July 14, without any comment:

The fundamental principle of Catholicism, next to the love of God, is the love of one’s neighbor, irrespective of background, nationality or religion. The neighbors’ life and health are among the highest earthly values, and respect for this...is the foremost dictate which tells us to love our neighbors. The events which took place in Kielce..., in contravention of these sacred and inviolable principles, took many people's lives and severely injured an even greater number. While announcing these facts, with remorse, it should be clear that acts of deliberate murder are a crime crying out for God's vengeance, and, as such, deserve absolute and unqualified condemnation.... Condemning the above acts in the name of respect for God’s law, the dictates of conscience, the glorious Polish traditions, and Poles’ and Catholics’ honor, the curia...calls on the Catholic community of the diocese, in its own and the nation's interests, to remain calm, controlled, realizing the gravity of the situation. Catholics should not allow themselves to be deceived by those wishing to drive them to similar acts.40

In addition to the Kielce clergy, the hierarchs and the Catholic press spoke about the pogrom. As for statements by the primate and bishops, they contain two kinds of messages: the official one addressed to the faithful, and the other presented at various private meetings.

As far as the former are concerned, the public appeal to the residents in the city of Częstochowa, jointly made by Teodor Kubina, the bishop of Częstochowa, and representatives of the municipal and district authorities, should be mentioned. It was announced in posters a few days after the pogrom, and the content was also published and discussed in the press. It took an unequivocal position not only on the crimes at Kielce, but also on the issue of ritual murder:

Perpetrators of the murder trampled on human dignity and violated the

40 Wrona, Kościół wobec pogromu, p. 294; Meducki, Antyżydowskie wydarzenia, pp. 111–112.
Christian commandment to “love one’s neighbor” in a horrible manner, as well as the universal principle, “Thou shalt not kill.” Nothing, absolutely nothing, can excuse the Kielce crimes, which deserve the wrath of God and the people, and the background and causes of which may be traced to homicidal fanaticism and indefensible ignorance. Fanatics...used deceitful concepts [dating back to] the early Middle Ages for criminal purposes..., plotted crimes, and exploited others’ ignorance to perpetrate this crime. [They] must be absolutely and unreservedly condemned as criminals.... We declare...any claims about the existence of ritual murders to be lies. None of the members of the Christian community in Kielce...or anywhere else in Poland has been harmed by Jews for religious or ritual purposes. We have not heard of a single case of a Christian child kidnapped by Jews.41

The document called on the people of good will not to believe “criminal and deceitful versions of events and rumors” and to “oppose with all their might the possibility of provoking any excesses against the Jewish population.”42 The content of the appeal became known beyond Częstochowa: It was mentioned in various contexts by the press, e.g., the Rzeczpospolita daily reported, in August 1946, that Isaac Herzog, Chief Rabbi of Palestine, sent his “cordial thanks and blessing” to the Bishop of Częstochowa:

The Jewish people will remember the bishop who — in difficult moments for the remnants of Polish Jewry — proved to be one of those who practise God’s great Commandment: Love thy neighbor as thyself.43

This appeal was not the only way Bishop Kubina presented his position on the tragic events in Kielce. Documents report on a conference on July 8, 1946, attended by “representatives of intelligentsia,” in which he “condemned the Kielce murders and their perpetrators, on behalf of himself and the Catholic Church, and stated that he did not believe in the existence of ritual murders.” He also referred to “the popular conviction that many of the highest positions in the public administration are held by Jews,” declaring that “personally, he did not believe it.”44

41 AIPN, d. MSW, 750 (odezwy).
42 Ibid.
43 Rzeczpospolita, August 13, 1946, no. 186.
44 APK UWK, II, 1349, Sprawozdania sytuacyjne starostw i zarządów miejskich za lipiec 1946 r.
The Church’s voice after the pogrom was also featured in the Catholic press. It is worth noting that several themes appeared in this context. The first and foremost is undeniably the condemnation of the crimes in Kielce. On July 21, the front-page of Tygodnik Powszechny, associated with the curia of Kraków, stated:

The Church has repeatedly denounced antisemitism.... [It] teaches love. Antisemitism springs from hatred. A Catholic should hate evil; he should not hate man.45

Recalling how Poles helped the Jews during the war was another theme that emerged in the Catholic press in connection with the pogrom. The Kielce events frequently became a pretext for expressing opinions on the situation in Poland.46 In a monograph on the response of the Catholic press to the pogrom, Dariusz Libionka wrote:

The Kielce events are an important turning point in the perception of antisemitism. Almost all Catholic newspapers express their opinions..., however, the content of all these statements is practically uniform. The position of Catholics was dominated by three issues...: the definition of a pogrom, the Polish-Jewish relations during the war..., and the issue of antisemitism47.... [In addition,] there were the defenses of Primate Hlond, and against unjustified accusations of “silence.”48

The statement on the Kielce Pogrom made by Primate Hlond at a meeting

46 In July 1946, Tygodnik Powszechny stated: “The more freely the Church is able to serve its mission and the greater its role in the education of youth, the stronger is the guarantee that such incidents as the Kielce crimes remain a sad exception,” Tygodnik Powszechny, no. 29, 1946.
47 As Libionka writes, according to the Catholic press “[The] Kielce Pogrom is not proof of Polish antisemitism.” All articles raised the argument about the incompatibility of antisemitism with Christianity, and the view that the Church “has always condemned antisemitism.... [According]...[to this] significant observation, antisemitism is harmful to Poland and Poles.... Moreover..., the attitude of the Western press to the problem of Polish antisemitism was unjust to Poles.” See Dariusz Libionka, “Antysemityzm i Zaglada na łamach prasy w Polsce w latach 1945–1946,” Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały, vol. 2 (1997), p. 187.
48 Ibid.
with American journalists, on July 11, 1946, was important. It consisted of several points. First, the primate condemned:

...all murders...irrespective of the perpetrators,...[and] whether they have been perpetrated against Poles or Jews, in Kielce or in any other part of Poland.

The next point referred directly to “the unfortunate and regrettable Kielce events.” However, according to Primate Hlond, they could not “be ascribed to racism, rather they sprang from entirely different, painful, and tragic grounds. Those events are a horrible tragedy, which fill me with sorrow and grief.” The next paragraph dealt with the Kielce clergy, who, in his opinion, “fulfilled their duty.” The last two points referred to contemporary Polish-Jewish relations:

During the exterminatory German occupation, Poles, although they were being attacked themselves, supported, sheltered, and saved Jews, risking their own lives. Many a Jew in Poland owes his life to Poles and Polish priests.

He then stated that the responsibility for “the present deterioration of this good relationship rests to a very considerable extent with the Jews who hold leading positions in the Polish state, and strive to impose a political system unwanted by the great majority of the nation.” In his view, this situation caused “dangerous tensions,” and consequently “in mortal armed confrontations on the front of this political battle..., some Jews unfortunately lose their lives, but the number of Polish casualties is incomparably greater.” In conclusion, he repeated his personal position toward Jews, mentioning that he helped them during the war.49

Primate Hlond’s statement was criticized by the left-wing press (Głos Ludu and Robotnik, among others); and some journalists went as far as saying that it was “worthy of...Hitler’s disciples.”50

Other bishops expressed similar opinions to that of Primate Hlond, e.g., Bishop Wyszyński of Lublin told a Voivodeship Jewish Committee delegation:

49 AIPN, d. MSW, 750 (odezwy).
50 Robotnik, no. 193 (1946).
The underlying cause (of the Kielce events) is a general dislike for Jews who actively participate in the present political life.... At the moment, Jews should work strenuously to create their own state in Palestine.... The Right Reverend condemns all kinds of murders from the standpoint of Christian ethics.... In conclusion, the Right Reverend states that he cannot issue an official declaration regarding the Kielce events; however, during the next clerical convention, he will clarify the issue so as to pacify the faithful.

During the meeting with the bishop of Lublin, there was also “a discussion on inciting the mob with the false myth concerning the use of Christian blood to prepare matzoth.” He then observed that, “as far back as the Beilis trial, in several new and old Jewish books..., the issue of blood was not ultimately cleared up.” The Church’s version of this meeting is not known because no records have been preserved in the Lublin archive.51

The ritual murder theme also cropped up in a private conversation between an auxiliary bishop from Upper Silesia and the British ambassador in August 1946. According to the auxiliary bishop, there was evidence that “the Jews [in Kielce] had really taken blood from a child’s arm.” Commenting on this episode in one of his reports, the ambassador wrote: “If the bishops are prepared to believe this, it is no wonder that uneducated Poles do so.”52

The above statements were confined to participants in the meetings. Other comments made by the bishops were also not publicly revealed, but are hinted at in internal Church documents. They constitute an important record of the Church’s thinking on Jewish issues. A great deal on the subject can also be learned from Bishop Kaczmarek’s report, prepared for Arthur Bliss-Lane, the American ambassador, and from Primate Hlond’s letter of November 1946 to Rev. Domenico Tardini.

51 Another document, from August 1946, also reveals Bishop Wyszyński’s attitude toward Jewish issues. In his letter to the clergy concerning cemeteries, graves, and execution sites, he wrote: “Fight against Nazi prejudice, which by planting racial hatred has tried to destroy the cemeteries of Israelite faith communities on our land.... It is a human and Christian thing to treat all places where human beings are buried with respect, regardless of their religious and national affiliations.” See “Biskup lubelski do Przewiebebnego Duchowieństwa w sprawie cmentarzy, mogił i miejsc straceń,” Wiadomości Diecezjalne, Lublin, August 1946, p. 294.

The former, which was the bishop of Kielce’s initiative, aimed to “present the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy’s viewpoint on the Kielce events”; and the latter was Primate Hlond’s answer to the Holy See’s inquiries on the absence of “a pastoral letter from the Episcopate of Poland condemning the ‘Kielce Pogrom.’”

In both letters, the hierarchs put forward a theory about provocation. Bishop Kaczmarek attempted to present a version of events reconstructed from independent circles, in a 20-page document. His most important claim was the denial that antisemitism existed in the area: “Until then, there had been no anti-Jewish disturbances in Kielce,” and Poles sympathized with Jews. It is broadly understood that this attitude changed with the emergence of the Communist authorities. At that time, “dislike for Jews begins,” according to the bishop, for the following reasons:

[It is]...not based on race. In Poland, Jews are the main propagators of the Communist system, which is not wanted by the Polish nation, but forcibly imposed, contrary to the people’s wishes.... The average Pole believes (whether rightly or wrongly is of no consequence here) that practically only the Jews are true and genuine supporters of Communism in Poland...

The political context of Polish-Jewish relations proved decisive in describing the background of the Kielce incident. Moreover, the bishop mentioned the “general public’s” conviction that disappearances of Polish children were connected with the “Jews, who commit ritual murders.” In his analysis, Bishop Kaczmarek mentioned police inactivity in such cases. A considerable part of the document was devoted to the court trial, about which the bishop expressed numerous reservations. He disagreed with the Communist claim that the anti-Communist underground organizations, Freedom

55 Micgiel, “Kościół katolicki,” p. 146. While he observed, “The children’s parents’ complaints had an inciting anti-Jewish effect, especially on the common people,” in the next paragraph, he referred to outrage at the disappearance of children by “members of the intelligentsia. For instance, some of them informed the author that Jews carried out blood transfusions from the children and [then] murdered the victims whose blood they had taken.”
and Independence (Wolność i Niepodległość) and the National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne), were responsible for the pogrom.

The document recalls the priests’ attitude and appeal on the day of the pogrom, in which “the crime and the criminals were severely condemned.” According to the report, the demand from the government press that the Episcopate issue:

A collective statement against antisemitism...[is] paradoxical and even insulting to the Church. Besides, it is impossible not only for fundamental reasons. The great majority of Jews in Poland...eagerly spread Communism, work in disreputable security offices, carry out arrests, torture, and kill the arrested, thereby incurring the aversion of society, which does not want Communism and has had enough of Gestapo methods. And now the Church is expected to follow the government press's wishes and solemnly declare this aversion as groundless, the conduct of Jews as quite innocent, and that only the indignant Poles are to blame.

Bishop Kaczmarek concludes:

Analysis of events and the testimonies of witnesses lead us to the following conclusions on the Kielce events..., as a result of the Communist activities of the Jews, hatred toward them has developed among the masses in Poland. Authentic cases of disappearances of children in Kielce, ascribed to the Jews, did not cause this, but aggravated it considerably. Certain Communist Jewish circles, with the Security Office's approval, decided independently to take advantage of this situation to provoke a pogrom, which would later be...[cited] as proving the need for Jewish emigration to their own country, that Polish society is imbued with antisemitism and Fascism, and, finally, that the Church the killers came from is reactionary.

Among the pogrom's perpetrators, the report mentioned “policemen and soldiers, workers, and a randomly assembled mob.” The final paragraph includes the following statement:

The killers...certainly deserve the most severe condemnation regardless of the fact that they had been provoked and acted in the heat of the moment. All antisemitism is an unethical feeling that debases human
being[s]. Murdering people, even of different races, beliefs or social classes, is always a crime.

According to Bishop Kaczmarek, not all those responsible for the Kielce tragedy sat in the dock, which should have also included “those who provoked the Kielce events.”

Primate Hlond’s letter to Rev. Domenico Tardini was similar in tone. Based on Bishop Kaczmarek’s report, as well as other sources, the primate presented his own assessment of the events to the Holy See: The Kielce Pogrom was:

[Part of] a large-scale pogrom plan, agreed upon by the Russian government, the Polish Communist authorities, and several international Jewish organizations.

The objective of this action was to enable Jews to emigrate “to Palestine and the United States,” for economic reasons:

Large Jewish centers realized that Eastern European countries had become so impoverished that, at least for some time, Jews could not support themselves there.... The sacrifice of a few human lives in the pogroms staged in Poland was aimed at opening up...the route to the countries that remained rich or promised rapid economic growth to the Jewish masses.

Primate Hlond explicitly stated that “the pogrom had been...jointly contrived by the security office and a group of Russian Jews.”

It is worth examining how the primate justified his behavior after the events and how he perceived the Polish Church’s stand on this issue. In the letter to Rev. Domenico Tardini he wrote:

It was clear to me from the very beginning that the responsibility for those events lay to a considerable extent with the state authorities, and that there was some dark secret behind it. This meant that one needed to be extremely cautious in all statements on the subject, so as to avoid offending the nation’s feelings, on which the blame was being shifted,

56 Ibid., pp. 167–168.
on the one hand; and, to safeguard the Church’s standing, which the authorities wanted to use to distort what had actually happened, on the other hand.... The repeated pressures exerted by the authorities on the Episcopate to publicly announce unqualified condemnation of the sad Kielce events were aimed at driving a wedge between the nation and the Church, which would facilitate the spreading of Bolshevism.... Besides, I do not think that either the Jewish organizations or the authorities would have been satisfied with what we could have honestly said. The statements they have been trying to elicit from myself and the entire congregation of bishops so far would have been unjust, untrue, insulting to the nation’s honor, and harmful to the Church’s prestige. In reality, the objective is not to ensure protection of the Jews in Poland from the persecution threatening them, but to make us issue an official and sacred document which would demonstrate that the Jewish Communists, who keep going further and further away from Russia to the West, should definitely be allowed to enter Palestine and the rich United States because even the Polish Episcopate is concerned about their safety... in Eastern Europe.58

This letter shows his “thinking” not only about the Kielce Pogrom, but also about Jews, in general. It reveals the considerable influence of stereotypes and prejudices. The extent to which the attitude of the Communist authorities after the pogrom (accusing the Church of silence, failing to provide full information and lying about the events in Kielce, and censoring and suppressing texts about the pogrom) encouraged the Church to adopt this particular interpretation is an open question. According to Krystyna Kersten:

Propaganda did everything possible to consolidate the myth connecting antisemitism and the pogrom to resistance to the new order. This presents the opposition and the Church with a truly diabolical choice: They can either join in the political propaganda campaign conducted around the Kielce tragedy, or else they will be targeted themselves as being — even if only morally — co-responsible, to a considerable extent for the crime.59

58 Ibid., pp. 275–276.
All these factors led the Church to take an ambiguous position on the Kielce tragedy. This included sympathy for the victims and condemnation of the crime, on the one hand, and political interpretation and belief in ritual murder, on the other. At that dramatic moment, the Church failed to reconsider what Jules Isaac described as its “teaching of contempt” about Jews. Once again, the dramatic gap between the Jews’ expectations and the Church’s reactions became evident.60

The autumn of 1946 opened a period of discussion on Jewish issues in the Church, but only in the Catholic press. There was no more contact between Jewish representative bodies and Church hierarchs. The problem was how a communist state dominated by the Church could function, especially since it suffered from escalating repression and restrictions of various kinds. In this situation, Jewish topics became even more peripheral than before.

The Jewish topics discussed in the Catholic press in the second half of the 1940s were primarily the Jewish state, and Holocaust recollections on the anniversaries of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.61 Reports on other topics, e.g., the work of the Jewish-Christian Council, and Jewish delegations visiting the pope, were published only occasionally. As in the earlier periods, attitudes varied. Alongside the evidence of the Church’s favorable position toward the State of Israel,62 there are articles with negative views about the Jews.63 An extract of the article by Rev. Paweł Demann from the

60 In his speech at the pogrom victims’ funeral, Rabbi David Kahane stated: “There is one category of people, one class in Poland, who could have prevented this.... The clergy, the official authorities of the Catholic Church in Poland.... Bishops of Poland, where is your pastoral letter on this matter? Are you not acquainted with the papal encyclicals, which clearly belie all the nonsense about the ritual murder? Does the commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ not apply to murdering Jews? I am speaking to you in the face of this new tragedy so that these weighty and dignified words might move petrified hearts to remorse,” Opinia, no. 1 (1946), p. 2.

61 “Thousands of Jews imprisoned in the ghetto suffered not only because of persecution. Poverty, as well as starvation and epidemics, decimated the population, crammed within the ghetto walls and doomed it to destruction from the very beginning. The tragic conclusion of the uprising is well known.... In those horrible weeks, almost all the ghetto population died, and only a few ŻOB members managed to survive,” Niedziela, no. 16 (1948), p. 145.


63 For example, a text about Rev. Skarga’s fight against sectarianism in the sixteenth–seventeenth century included a sentence about the rabbis’ influence on the emergence
Our Lady of Zion Congregation, published in *Homo Dei* in 1949, is worth noting. For the first time in the Catholic press, addressing the clergy, Jews were described in the following significant words: “They...are linked to us by close ties.... They are our ‘older brothers.’” In the context of the Holocaust, the author wrote about distortions of Christian teachings. He noted negative messages regarding Jews in Church literature, and called on “souls of the faithful” to do “cleansing work.” He thought it necessary to return to teaching the history of the Old Testament and emphasized not glossing over the fact that Jesus was a Jew, among other things. This important text was published at the time when Jewish topics had “disappeared” from the Catholic press.

In the late 1940s and in the first half of the 1950s, as a result of Stalin’s anti-Jewish, anti-Zionist, and anti-Israeli policy, the Communist parties in most countries of the so-called Eastern Bloc were suspicious of Jews. However, the clergy and the faithful primarily focused attention on the parallel repressive measures undertaken by Communists against the Church (arrests of priests and bishops, show trials, expulsions of the clergy, the arrest of Primate Wyszyński, and liquidations or takeovers of Catholic journals, among other things). As a consequence of these developments, Jewish topics completely disappeared from the scope of Church activities. For example, in the bibliography of the Christian-Jewish dialog in Poland from...
1945 to 1995, the first half of the 1950s (from 1950 to 1956) is a blank. Not a single text related to Jews was published during that period.67

During the period covered in this article, references to Jews were not only in the above-mentioned statements by the clergy and texts published by the Catholic press, but also in the “daily practice of the Church and the faithful” — prayers, Gospels, hymns, and Church literature. In these sources, the image of Jews was predominantly negative. As Rev. Grzegorz Ignatowski admits:

The Good Friday prayer, which included the phrase pro perfidis Judaeis [for the perfidious Jews], until the end of the 1950s, could have been a source of anti-Judaism for many Catholics over...the centuries.68

The content of other prayers consolidated the Jews’ image as the “people that were once especially beloved.”69 Sporadic information about Jews in the Church literature was decidedly unfavorable. For instance in the Święci i błogosławieni Kościoła katolickiego (Saints and the Blessed of the Catholic Church Encyclopedia) by Bishop Karol Radoński, the Blessed Andrew of Rinn was cited as a little boy murdered by Jews for ritual purposes. However, this information was accompanied by a note from Pope Benedict XIV allowing continuation of the local cult, while refusing to proceed with the boy’s canonization because “the facts were doubtful.”70 Under the date November 15, there was a note on Blessed Hugh of Lincoln:

67 Mirosław Mikołajczyk, Bibliografia dialogu chrześcijańsko-żydowskiego w Polsce za lata 1945–1995 (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, 1997), data for 1950–1956. Under these circumstances, the publication of a sizeable text on Israel, entitled “Tyberiada,” in the Catholic weekly Niedziela, in January 1951, was an interesting exception. Perhaps the censor of Niedziela was misled by the title or maybe the anti-Zionist policy had not yet reached this level. This explains why it was possible to publish the following observation: “The young sporty-type Zionists whom I saw during my wanderings in Palestine came across as energetic and determined to reach their goal,” Niedziela, no. 2 (January 14, 1951), p. 12.
69 Ibid., p. 55. This is part of “The Act of Consecration of the Human Race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus” prayer. Further on, it includes the following sentence: “Let the same blood which they once invoked upon themselves flow down on them as a source of life and redemption.” The Holy See removed these words in June 1959.
Murdered by a Jew, Koppin, and his accomplices.... The reasons for the murder are unknown but it was widely believed that Hugh had fallen prey to the hatred of fanatics toward Christians. Eighteen perpetrators were hanged. The diocese of Nottingham celebrates the memory of Hugh as a martyr.\textsuperscript{71}

Negative views on Jews also appeared in the art works of various churches. Paintings of ritual murder were exhibited in the Sandomierz Cathedral as late as 2008, and one Station of the Cross in Krzeszów depicted Jews accusing Lord Jesus before Pilate.\textsuperscript{72} Prayers for the Jews’ conversion are another illustration of this.\textsuperscript{73}

A certain liberalization of the Communist system in 1956 and Władysław Gomułka’s subsequent 14-year leadership constitute a separate chapter in the history of post-war Poland. Relations between the Church and the authorities also changed. Fairly soon after the Communists’ anti-church policy was relaxed in 1956 (including release of the Primate and the returning Catholic periodicals to their rightful editors, among other things), the relations cooled down again. In the 1960s, there were several serious conflicts between the Church and the authorities.\textsuperscript{74}

During the political “thaw,” a few Jewish topics were discussed in the Catholic press, including antisemitism.\textsuperscript{75} In 1957, Jerzy Turowicz published an article as a reaction to the antisemitism in public life at the time. In his view, the experience of the Holocaust has brought “a fairly fundamental

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} “Miejsca pielgrzymkowe w Archidiecezji Wrocławskiej,” Wiadomości Kościelne. Organ Administracji Apostolskiej na Dolnym Śląsku, no. 6 (1960), p. 351.
\textsuperscript{73} A later example, from 1960, clearly speaks about the status of the Jews. In January 1960, at an event in Rome, after the High Mass, the faithful said prayers for the unification of all peoples in one Holy Catholic Church. During the next few days, they prayed for “the return of all lost sheep to one flock and one shepherd”; “the reunification of Eastern and Western Christianity”; “the return of Anglicans, Protestants, dissenters”; “the repentance of lapsed and estranged Catholics”; and, on the last day, “the conversion of the Jews,” Oktawa modłów o zjednoczenie ludów w jednym świętym katolickim Kościele, 18–25 stycznia, 1960,” Wiadomości Kościelne. Organ Administracji Apostolskiej na Dolnym Śląsku, no. 1 (1960), p. 41.
\textsuperscript{74} For instance, after the address of the Polish bishops to their German counterparts in 1965, and during the Millennium of Christianity events in Poland.
\textsuperscript{75} This subject was also mentioned in a draft policy statement of a lay Catholic circle, in October 1956, in which the fourth aim was “to fight all manifestations of chauvinism against other peoples and, in particular, antisemitism,” Jerzy Zabłocki, Dzienniki 1956–1965, vol. 1 (Warsaw: IPN, 2008), pp. 31–32.
change to Polish-Jewish relations in our country.” The martyrdom of Jews led to “a sense of solidarity and a willingness to help the persecuted,” while the ghetto uprising inspired “admiration for people who fought to the last in such a hopeless situation.... At the time, I thought that there would be no antisemitism in future Poland.... Now, in 1957, I think that conviction was an illusion.” The author also discussed the role of Jews in Poland and the relationship between Catholicism and antisemitism in more detail. In the first case, referring to opinions about the harm done by the Jews to the Polish economy and culture, he stated: “There are no grounds for such general judgements.... Of course, the Jews’ influence would sometimes be negative. So was the Poles’ influence. All of them are human beings.” Writing about antisemitism “among Catholics,” he unambiguously affirmed that “[It] cannot be reconciled with Catholicism; [It]...is utterly pagan in its essence.” That these two attitudes were combined in pre-war Poland was “merely proof of intellectual weakness and superficiality of a large part of Polish Catholicism, and of the failure to comprehend the essence of Christianity.”

Three years later, another Catholic periodical, Więź, published the important text “Antysemityzm ludzi łagodnych i dobrych” (The Antisemitism of Good, Kind People), in which Tadeusz Mazowiecki described three kinds of antisemitism in Poland: the “covert” type, mild antisemitism, and “contempt harbored deep down inside.”

In the second half of the 1950s, the Catholic press published various articles relating to Jews (e.g., on the State of Israel, the Holocaust, the relations between Jews and the Church, and the pope’s meetings with Jewish community representatives). As in the previous period, these texts were short and largely unnoticed. Any free debate at the time was obviously limited by censorship and by the nature of the state. Polish-Jewish relations in that period also suffered because of very few mutual encounters and the lack of an appropriate setting for such meetings. In the late 1950s and the early

77 Idem, “Antysemityzm”; idem, Bilet do raju, p. 228.
1960s, the removal of expressions unfavorable to Jews from prayers was a new feature in the Church's attitude.\(^80\)

The 1960s were undoubtedly important for the Church's position on Jewish issues. There were several reasons for this increased interest: the well-known trial of Adolf Eichmann, who was among the principal organizers of the genocide perpetrated by the German state against the Jews. The trial, which began in April 1961 in Jerusalem, reminded the world of the Holocaust. For the Church, the prominence of Jewish topics during John XXIII's pontificate (1958–1963) was also important. The decisions of the Second Vatican Council and the *Nostra Aetate* Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions in October 1965, as well as Paul VI's visit to Israel in January 1964, were also significant. The Church's position was undoubtedly also influenced by Rolf Hochhuth's famous play, *The Deputy*, of 1963, which launched the "black legend" about Pope Pius XII's attitude toward the Holocaust. In Poland, Jewish topics were brought to the fore by the Communist Bloc's, including Poland's, hostile reaction to Israel's victory over its Soviet-armed neighbors in the Six-Day War, in June 1967, as well as by the brutal antisemitic campaign initiated by the Communist authorities in March 1968.

When the Eichmann trial began, the Catholic press carried many articles about the event. There seems to be a certain temporal coincidence between the trial, which ended in December 1961, and such initiatives as, for instance, the evening devoted to the nineteenth anniversary of the German demolition of the Great Synagogue on Tłomackie Street in Warsaw, held by the Warsaw Club of the Catholic Intelligentsia in 1962,\(^81\) and the distribution of a questionnaire on "The Protection of Jews by Polish Nuns during the Second World War," by the Office for Monastic Affairs at the primate of Poland's secretariat. In March 1963, *Tygodnik Powszechny* published an appeal by Władysław Bartoszewski calling on readers to send in their recollections about Poles who helped Jews during the war.\(^82\)

Help provided by the Church and the clergy to Jews in hiding emerged

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81 About 250 people attended the meeting. The speakers included Jerzy Zawieyski, Chairman of the club, and Bartoszewski, among others. The official part of the program was followed by the presentation of testimonies about the tragedy of Polish Jews. Wojciech Wieczorek, "Wspomnienie o męczeństwie i o godności," *Więź*, no. 6 (1962), pp. 168–170.
as an important Polish-Jewish topic at the time. The history of the Holocaust was recalled more frequently than in previous years through the publication of documents and photographs revealing the tragedy of the Jews. There were also sporadic references to “betrayals by ‘szmalcowniks.’”\(^8^3\) The Catholic Church hierarchs did not lose sight of the Holocaust either, as evidenced by a sentence referring to Jewish martyrdom in one of the most important ecclesiastical documents of that period, “The Address of the Polish Bishops to their German Brothers in the Pastoral Office of Christ” of November 1965.\(^8^4\)

In the 1960s, the State of Israel, especially after Paul VI’s visit there in January 1964, was a major Jewish issue discussed in the Catholic press. One of the periodicals called it an “unprecedented event.” *Tygodnik Powszechny* published not only a detailed account of the pilgrimage, written by Father Daniel Rufeisen, but also occasional articles, including “The Holy Land — Today,” which had more comprehensive coverage of Israel.\(^8^5\) In the same year, Władysław Bartoszewski published a series of articles on Israel in *Tygodnik Powszechny*.\(^8^6\) His thoughts about the journey became the subject of public meetings, some of which took place at the Club of the Catholic Intelligentsia.

In the 1960s, there were articles on Jewish topics in the Catholic press, including that of the pope’s meetings with Jewish delegations, and discussions on the Jews’ attitude toward the Second Vatican Council. Compared

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\(^8^3\) The *szmalcowniks* were people who blackmailed or betrayed Jews in hiding. This subject was raised, among others, by Bartoszewski during the meeting at the Club of the Catholic Intelligentsia in Warsaw to commemorate the demolition of the Tłomackie Street Synagogue in May 1943. Extensive excerpts of his speech were published in Wieczorek, “Wspomnienie o męczeństwie,” p. 170. The following sentence appeared in “Apel Władysława Bartoszewskiego”: “It would not be right to deny or conceal the harm suffered by Polish Jews and the Poles who helped them during the occupation from criminal elements collaborating with the German police. They did a great deal of evil, were fought and condemned by patriotic underground organizations, and stigmatized by the public opinion.” See Bartoszewski, *Moja Jerozolima*, p. 188, 191.

\(^8^4\) Recalling the war, the bishops wrote: “Over six million Polish citizens, the majority of whom were of Jewish origin, lost their lives during that period...” See Piotr Małajczyk, *Na drodze do pojednania. Wokół Orędzia biskupów polskich do biskupów niemieckich z 1965 r.* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe [PWN], 1994), p. 184.


to the previous period, there was an evident interest in matters concerning the Jewish community.

In October 1965, the Second Vatican Council passed the “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” known as the Nostra Aetate Declaration, since these are its first words. The document contains information on the relations between the Church and the Jewish people, the “great spiritual heritage shared by Christians and Jews,” and recommends “learning about each other and mutual respect.” It states that the responsibility for “what was done during...Christ’s passion cannot be ascribed to all Jews who lived at the time, or to today’s Jews.” The declaration condemns “acts of hatred, persecutions, [and] manifestations of antisemitism.” The text of the declaration, undoubtedly representing a new attitude toward Jews, was published by the Church journals in all Polish dioceses, in 1966. Commentaries on the document were presented in Catholic periodicals and in sources dealing with the Second Vatican Council. 87

Discussion on Jewish topics in the Church in the 1960s was, to some extent, prompted by the initiatives of the pope and the council. Still, there were also other reasons. For certain Catholic circles, obliged to remain silent during the Stalinist years, interest in Jewish topics was a matter of course. However, items about Jews consisted mainly of information on historical or current events. Difficult and controversial issues were rarely raised, but it should be remembered that mutual discussion about them was still impossible then. During that period, meetings between Poles and Jews were initiated including those in institutions associated with the Church. Such was the case with the above-mentioned evening organized by the Warsaw Club of Catholic Intelligentsia to mark the blowing up of the Great Synagogue. The meeting brought together Poles and Polish Jews, as well as representatives of the Israeli Diplomatic Mission in Poland. 88 The changes in the relations between the Church and Jews only occurred in certain circles. “The new thinking about Jews” did not extend to publications and isolated initiatives.

In 1967 and 1968, Jewish topics were raised as part of a wide-scale antisemitic campaign mounted by the ruling Communist Party. 89 Primates Wyszynski’s statements on Israel, articles in the Catholic press, and

88 Wieczorek, Wspomnienie o męczeństwie, p. 170.
89 See Feliks Tych’s article, “The ‘March ’68’ Antisemitic Campaign: Onset, Development and Consequences,” in this volume.
comments from the clergy were representative of the Church’s attitude toward these events. The primate’s prayer on the day the Arab-Israeli War broke out, including an entreaty for God’s protection over “the Holy Land...and the whole country, which also has a right to freedom and self-determination,”90 is clearly tinged with sympathy for Israel.91 Tygodnik Powszechny took a similar view of the situation, but had limited possibilities of presenting it to the public because the censors rejected “several pro-Israeli articles” within a single week.92 The clergy’s pro-Israeli attitude with regard to events in the Middle East was partly stimulated by the involvement of Communist countries on the Arab side;93 but, as many statements show, support for Israel during the conflict was also explained by “the historical right of Jews to Palestine.”94

A few months later, in connection with the events that went down in history as “March 1968,” Jewish topics reappeared95 as part of an antisemitic campaign instigated by the Communist regime. In historian Feliks Tych’s view, the propaganda of that period was based “on almost literal plagiarisms of Nazi antisemitic literature.”96

What was the Church’s stance on those events? As far as the student protests were concerned, the Church showed understanding of “student unrest” combined with the condemnation of “the brutal use of force.”97 With regard to the antisemitic campaign, the Church only took an official position on May 3, 1968, in the “Letter from the Episcopate of Poland.” Initially, the Primate and some Catholic activists interpreted the March events as a manifestation of a factional conflict within the Polish United Workers’ Party. The “Letter” referred to two issues related to the Jews: “The bishops...

92 AIPN, MSW II, 1976, Informacja za okres 5 VI–12 VII 1967, p. 37. For this reason, the newspaper published articles on other Jewish topics.
93 Ibid.
95 For more information on the March 1968 events, see Feliks Tych’s article, “The ‘March ‘68’ Antisemitic Campaign: Onset, Development, and Consequences,” in this volume.
97 Eisler, Polski rok, p. 664.
were aggrieved by voices blaming the Poles for the extermination of Jews, which are heard abroad.” Invoking the Nostra Aetate Declaration, “Polish bishops remind everyone of those principles on account of their profoundly humanistic content.”

As for the Catholic press, it is difficult to establish to what extent articles on Jewish topics published at the time were a “game with the censors,” especially as they were then particularly “sensitized” to Jewish topics. The May issue of the Catholic monthly Znak, prepared at the very peak of the anti-Semitic campaign, included an article devoted to Edith Stein, which also brought up the situation of Jews in the Third Reich.

Little is known about the attitude of the clergy toward the anti-Semitic campaign. An account by Janina Bauman, a March émigré, about a “priest who...went from door to door...explaining that everything they said on TV about Zygmunt [Bauman] was a lie, that we were decent people, and that the neighbors should be helping us” is just an isolated example. Once again, the Jewish community’s crucial experience remained peripheral to Church activities. The Church failed to comprehend the dramatic experiences of Jews in 1968, which resulted in another exodus from Poland. This situation demonstrates a persistent distance — the lack of dialog or space for encounters.

In the 1970s, the implementation of the Second Vatican Council’s decisions, the Nostra Aetate Declaration, led to an increase in the number of texts on Jewish topics. For the sake of comparison: In the 1960s, Więź published seven such articles, and in the following decade, 19. There was also a greater diversity of subjects, compared to the previous period. Along with those related to the Second World War, the Holocaust, the Poles’ (including the Church’s) help to persecuted Jews, and Polish-Jewish relations, articles on anti-Semitism, and commentaries on the Nostra Aetate
Declaration also appeared,101 as well as publication of the document’s text.102 The announcement of “The Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Nostra Aetate Declaration” provided an impetus for the Church to take up the subject.

One step in implementing the Nostra Aetate recommendations was to develop a new curriculum for Catholic religious instruction, where Judaism was presented among other issues related to world religions.103

In the second half of the 1970s, Jewish topics were also discussed in illegal, underground periodicals associated with the democratic opposition, which declared themselves as Catholic. These included Niezależne Pismo Młodych Katolików — Spotkania (Encounters — Independent Catholic Youth Magazine), published in Lublin.104

There were new initiatives expressing the need to discover and connect with the world that had been wiped out. In June 1973, a group from the Warsaw Club of Catholic Intelligentsia began to clean up the Jewish cemetery in Okopowa Street, while “those who wished so went to Mass” and lectures on the history of Jews, in the evenings. Both Poles and Jews attend these activities, unofficially known as the Jewish Culture Week, which takes place every year. As Krzysztof Śliwiński, one of the initiators of the tenth anniversary events, reported:

We persisted in our endeavors to understand many issues, which, although distant, were also relevant to us.... Thus, we made efforts to learn about the past so as to better understand the present.105

The election of a Pole, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, to the papal throne, in October 1978, was a turning point in the relations between the Catholic Church and Jews and Judaism. In his first year, the new pope already showed interest

in the Jews. He referred to Jewish topics during the first visit to his native Poland, in June 1979. In his homily during the Holy Mass at the grounds of the former Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, the pope mentioned the inscription in Hebrew on the plaque commemorating “the nation whose sons and daughters were sentenced to total annihilation...the nation that... particularly suffered in the killing.” He stressed that “no one should pass by it [the plaque commemorating the victims — B.S.] with indifference.”

Interest in Jewish issues increased markedly as a result of the Holy See’s initiatives. There were more publications about the Jews, but implementation of the Nostra Aetate Declaration only involved a limited group. The Second Vatican Council’s positions on the Jews seldom reached the parish level. Despite instructions from the Holy See, some prayer books still contained negative passages about Jews.

Further changes in the relations of the Catholic Church to Jews and Judaism occurred during the last decade of People’s Poland (1980–1989). John Paul II’s new attitude toward Jews became fully apparent during that period (the first visit by a pope to the Rome synagogue, in April 1986; publication of several documents redefining the Church’s position toward Jews; and numerous meetings with Jewish community representatives, among other things). Both papal pilgrimages to Poland in the 1980s also included “Jewish events” — a visit to the Monument to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto in Warsaw, and meeting Jewish community representatives.

The pope’s teachings and the filling in the missing pages in Polish history during the Solidarity movement’s heyday also stimulated interest in Jewish topics. They were also included in various ways in Church activities.

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106 For example, meetings with Jewish community representatives at the Vatican and during the pope’s visit to the USA. Żydzi i judaizm w dokumentach kościoła i nauczaniu Jana Pawła II (1965–1989) (Warsaw: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej, 1990), p. 95, 100.
111 For instance, publication of important articles on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Kielce Pogrom in the Tygodnik Solidarność weekly.
Existing forms of interest in Jewish topics were augmented by new ones: meetings and mutual learning about each other’s religion, tradition, and history. For example, in September 1981, participants in a conference at the Catholic University of Lublin attended the “Jewish Passover Seder ritual.” The meal was preceded by joint prayer, and the rabbi asked a Catholic priest to read from the Old Testament. A report on that meeting described “the atmosphere of religious solemnity, dignity, and respect for tradition and the experience of common roots of faith.”

The meetings were varied in character and included: Holy Masses on the anniversaries of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, participation of Catholic clergymen in celebrations organized by the Jewish community, a seminar on Judaism, as well as a Christian-Jewish colloquium in the late 1980s.

An innovation in the relations between the Catholic Church and Jews was first the subcommittee and then a Committee of the Episcopate of Poland for Dialog with Judaism. This created an institutional space for encounters between Catholics and Jews within the Church.

Compared to the previous decade, there was a considerable increase in the number of texts on Jewish topics in the Catholic press: From 1945 to 1985, about 600 articles on the Christian-Jewish dialog were published, whereas over 1,100 appeared in the next four years, from 1985 to 1989.

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115 Stanisław Krajewski recalled the first ecclesiastical conference devoted to Judaism: “It was organized by Societas Verbi Divini priests in their seminary...in April 1986... The idea was...that Jews would popularize their own Jewish tradition among priests and seminarians... At the same time, it was an encounter between [different] people, and, for me and my Jewish friends, the first opportunity to visit a seminary... I remember it with fondness because it was the first such meeting, and Rev. Bernard Wodecki, SVD, earned our great recognition with his knowledge and enthusiasm. What impressed us the most was the fact that he taught his students all the stanzas of the Israeli national anthem.” Stanisław Krajewski, “10 lat dialogu katolicko-żydowskiego w Polsce — perspektywa żydowska,” Collectanea Theologica, vol. 67, no. 2 (1997), p. 61.
116 For example, the Christian-Jewish colloquium in Tyniec, in November 1988.
117 Mikolajczyk, Bibliografia dialogu chrześcijańsko-żydowskiego, p. 9.
In 1983, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, two influential Catholic monthlies, 
*Znak* and *Więź*, published issues entirely on Jewish topics. The *Znak* special issue has nearly 600 pages.

The subjects were more varied than in the previous decade. Among the articles published, there were texts about the history of Jews in Poland, the dialog between Christianity and Judaism, photography, cemeteries, the Jewish community in People’s Poland, Judaism and religious tradition, and antisemitism, among other things. The new features included interviews with historians, witnesses, as well as with Catholic clergy and the faithful involved in the Polish-Jewish dialog. Jewish topics were also discussed in underground Catholic periodicals.

The above initiatives brought Catholics and Jews closer together, but only involved a limited group of people. Only occasionally did the Jews become a part of life in the Catholic community. The wording of some prayers still remained unfavorable to Jews. Reservations were also expressed about some catechism books used for religious instruction, e.g., they did not state that Jesus, his mother, and the Apostles were Jews. Some-

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118 Ibid., pp. 75–152.
120 The Jewish Culture Week, which has been taking place since 1973, organized by the Warsaw section of the Club of the Catholic Intelligentsia, sometimes “entered” parish life. For example, in 1980, it was organized, jointly with the St. Augustine Chaplaincy in Nowolipki Street, on the former Warsaw Ghetto grounds: “The meetings enabled dozens of parishioners to discover the history of people who used to inhabit their quarter,” J. Ch., “Tydzień kultury żydowskiej,” *Więź*, no. 7–8 (1980), p. 278.
121 This “free and unfaithful” Polish translation deprived the Jewish people of their privileged status mentioned in the Good Friday prayer: “Jews are those to whom God spoke first...and the people whom God first made His own.” Instead, the Polish version included a sentence about “the once chosen people.” Ignatowski, *Kościół*, p. 54. This translation was only revised in 2009, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 26 (2009), p. 9. According to Rev. Dr. Romuald Weksler-Waszkinel of the Catholic University of Lublin, “Certain footnotes and titles in the Polish translation of the Bible..., as well as some prayers in the Liturgy of the Hours, recited by priests, require editorial changes.” Marcin Dzierżanowski, “Kościelna rewizja,” *Wprost*, no. 12 (2005), p. 10.
times, “the wording was in glaring contradiction” to the Nostra Aetate Declaration. Some sermons also reinforced a negative perception of Jews.

Despite the changing relations between the Catholic Church and Jews, there were few debates on difficult problems with their roots in the past until the end of the 1980s. Initial encounters were, above all, a process of mutual discovery, and a declaration of openness to dialog. A test of openness to the other side’s arguments only came with the discussion triggered by the publication of Jan Błoński’s article, “Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto” (The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto), in Tygodnik Powszechny, in January 1987. Despite the constraints of Communist censorship, the debate over that text was among the most important episodes in Polish-Jewish relations. Jerzy Turowicz, Chief Editor of Tygodnik Powszechny, recalled: “The reaction was greater than anything in the course of the 42 years when I was editor of the paper. I cannot remember any article that provoked such a strong reaction on the part of the readers.” The disputes prompted by Błoński’s article triggered heightened emotions around the discussions about Poles and Jews, because some Tygodnik Powszechny readers were not ready for polemics with respect to long-standing patterns of thinking about Poles and Jews. The response to this text showed that previous decades were only a partial preparation for difficult discussions, but earlier initiatives succeeded in creating a space in which they could take place. The events of the years that followed confirmed this view.

124 Ibid.
125 Quoted in Michael C. Steinlauf, Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), p. 115.
The Place of the Holocaust in the Consciousness of Polish Jews

MAŁGORZATA MELCHIOR

Introductory Remarks

Writing about the place of the Holocaust in the collective memory and consciousness of the Jews, Saul Friedländer pointed out that, for some Jews, it is also, or above all, a personal experience. The fundamental problem of the direct and long-term consequences of the Holocaust is the way in which the event has imprinted itself on the consciousness of individuals. In the case of Poland, a further question is whether and in what way the Holocaust featured, or still features, in individual identification and in the ways of defining Jewishness by Polish Jews and Poles of Jewish descent. The individuals referred to in this article are those who affirm their Jewishness or Jewish roots in any way, irrespective of how they define themselves: whether simply as Jews, Polish Jews, Poles of Jewish descent, or as both Poles and Jews. The way in which these people have been, or are defined by non-Jews is not under consideration in this work. The subject of my analysis is the consciousness of individuals who belong to, and are involved in, the Jewish community, as well as of those who are outside, or on the fringes of the Jewish milieu in the broadest sense. This also includes attitudes to the Holocaust apparently demonstrated by those who do not publicly manifest their Jewish roots in any way, i.e., Poles who conceal their Jewish roots — “hidden” or “invisible.”

1 Saul Friedländer, Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993).

2 See Joanna Wiszniewicz, “Dzieci i młodzież pochodzenia żydowskiego w szkołach śródmiejskich Warszawy lat sześćdziesiątych XX wieku,” in Eleonora Bergman and Olga Zienkiewicz, eds., Żydzi Warszawy: Materiały konferencji w 100. rocznicę urodzin Emanuela Ringelbluma (21 listopada 1900 — 7 marca 1944) (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2000), pp. 267–312; Grzegorz Berendt, Życie żydowskie w Polsce
The crucial question here is that of the Jewish identity of Polish Jews and the place of the Holocaust in their consciousness (and identity). With respect to the category of survivors, this question addresses the ways and the sense in which their personal experience of the Holocaust, survival, and their attitude to the Holocaust are indicative of age or intrinsic to their way of defining themselves as Jews and as Poles. In the case of people born after the Second World War, the issue in question is their individual attitude to the Holocaust as an inherent ingredient in and/or indicator of their Jewish identification. Hence, this article probes the meanings of the experience of the Holocaust for the former group, and the former and the latter groups’ attitudes to the Holocaust as components or determinants of the complex identity of Polish Jews.

The issue as defined above falls into the categories delineated by two factors: 1) Distinction between successive generations of Polish Jews dependent on the age of individuals and the nature of their experiences. The important division here is between the pre-war and post-war generations; and 2) The period when attitudes were examined — whether directly after the war or later on in the Polish Jews’ biographies — defines and differentiates these attitudes. The time factor has not only altered their attitudes to the Holocaust, but most likely has also modified how they define their own Jewishness. Not only the distance in time from the traumatic experiences of the German occupation, but also certain salient events in the post-war period (whether in their own lives or in the surrounding reality) may have provoked associations with and revived the subject of the Holocaust and hence wrought a change in its significance for their self-identification. By this, I mean the events of March 1968 and the attendant antisemitic propaganda, in addition to contemporary discussions about the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations. However, the fact is that often only decades later do some survivors feel ready to talk about their own experiences during the German occupation: by giving interviews as part of projects such as Steven Spielberg’s *Visual History Foundation* in the 1990s; participating in the activities of the “Children of the Holocaust” Association, founded in Poland in 1991; or simply reminiscing about their own past and the details of their family history in answer to questions from children or grandchildren. All circumstances of this nature are often precipitators of change in the ways individuals define themselves in relation to the Holocaust, by modifying

their individual consciousness of the Holocaust. The process may have been influenced by external occurrences, such as changes in the slant of official policies of the People's Republic of Poland; evolutions in the perception of broadly defined Jewish issues in Polish society; and changes in attitudes toward the Holocaust both in the Jewish Diaspora and among Israeli Jews. All these factors may have had an impact on shaping and modifying the Jewish identification of people from wartime and post-war generations. What is more, they may also have influenced the practical (i.e., not only identity-related) decisions in their lives: whether to emigrate or stay in Poland, their political choices, their worldview, and other decisions affecting the nature of their families, environment, etc.

This article is largely limited to outlining the state of consciousness and sense of identity of Jews living in Poland at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty-first century, only sporadically invoking the retrospective aspect. The thesis proposed and illustrated is that the Holocaust plays a major role in the way individual Polish Jews define themselves as Jews.

The Holocaust As an Identificatory Reference for Polish Jews — General Remarks

One important point of reference in defining the individual's social identity is, or can be, a conscious attitude to the past of his/her own group, family, and individual biography. The cultural community of members of a given group may comprise the following elements: common language, traditions, cultural legacy, shared history, the more or less distant past, and memory of the past. As Paul Ricoeur wrote: “Memory makes sense of the past.”

For those European Jews who survived or escaped the Holocaust, and for those born shortly after the Second World War, the primary, and often sole, historical reference shaping their sense of common fate is the Holocaust. Edgar Morin writes: “The Second World War and its consequences deeply shook Jewish identity. The vastness of the persecutions, which in 1942 evolved into systematic extermination, gives all Jews, assimilated...”

or not, a sense of participation in a terrible and unique fate.” Morin emphasizes here the fundamental impact of the Holocaust on the identity of European Jews, stating that even for assimilated Jews — through the very fact of the Holocaust — their Jewishness remains something immensely important. Bernard Wasserstein wrote the following on the meaning of the Holocaust as the central component or essential ingredient of European Jews’ identity: “By the end of the 1970s the Holocaust...had developed into a central feature of Jewish identity in the Diaspora.” This thesis may, to a great extent, also be applied to American Jews, as Friedländer wrote: “The Holocaust became part and parcel of American Jewish consciousness in the 1980s.” These quotes indicate that the 1970s and 1980s were the time when Holocaust-related thinking began to play a significant role in the consciousness of Jews, and in Jewish identity.

It is probably accurate to state that, with regard to the contemporary consciousness of Jews in Poland, there are many complex determinants of their Jewish identity, and individuals vary as to how they feel connected to their Jewishness. The Holocaust holds a unique position in the consciousness of most Polish Jews of middle and older generations, but it has proved to be of great significance, also to many young Poles who, by now, possess often fairly distant Jewish roots. Moreover, this element of rootedness in the memory of a past, which was the Holocaust, will be at the center of the discussion in this article. This is not to say that identification with Jewishness could not have other foundations, such as tradition, culture, religion, etc.

The Experience of the Holocaust and Survival versus Identity in Those Born before and during the Second World War

The discussion starts with the question of the identity of individuals who directly experienced the Holocaust. They survived the war in a variety of ways, experienced the deaths of close ones, and were aware of the exceptional nature of their survival. How did the experience of the Holocaust and of the survival affect their identity? How did they feel about themselves? Who did they aspire to be? How did they define themselves? And what did they

7 Friedländer, Memory, History and the Extermination, p. 46.
identify with? These questions refer to the initial post-war years and to later periods, in particular, the time of the antisemitic campaign waged by the Communist authorities in 1967–1968, known as “March ’68.” For these individuals, these questions began to be salient again at their very mature age.

After the cataclysm of the war and border shifts, both Poles and Polish-Jewish survivors had to seek new homes in Poland and outside of the country. The Jewish survivors had a fairly broad gamut of experiences: They had been through concentration camps, labor camps (in Germany and Poland), they had experienced rootlessness and deportation into the depths of the Soviet Union, and many had been in hiding in forests or hideouts in villages or towns. Some had fought in partisan formations, while others survived the war and the occupation under assumed non-Jewish identities using Aryan papers. Each of these experiences could have influenced, and did impact, their consciousness in a variety of ways throughout their lives.

In the period immediately after the war, survivors had to find a way to come to terms with a completely different reality, the trauma of the Holocaust, the deaths of their loved ones, and almost total annihilation of their nation. They had to make efforts to rebuild their lives either in Poland or outside of their homeland if they opted to emigrate. What role did the Holocaust and survival play in life-changing decisions and identity choices at that time and later in their lives?

In the early post-war period, populations were on the move on an unprecedented scale. Virtually everyone, including Christian Poles, who intended to remain in Poland, was attempting to reestablish their lives — investigating if they could return to where they had lived before the war, and to their previous jobs and their social milieus. The surviving Jews had to start practically everything from scratch. This meant rebuilding the material foundations of their existence and reestablishing their social bonds in society. They also had to decide who they now were, who they had become after going through the wartime traumas, and who they and their children would become in the future.

The experiences of the Holocaust and of survival were varied, and this impacted in different ways on the survivors’ identity. Their age at the outbreak of the war was probably one of the differentiating factors in these

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experiences and their post-war identity choices. Whether they were already fully grown adults (born before 1920); young individuals just embarking on adulthood (born between 1921 and 1924); or still children, some of whom (e.g., those born before 1931), by the time the ghettos were being liquidated, already had considerable awareness of the danger and of what was happening around them. Most younger children were not usually fully aware, if at all, of the process of extermination.10

Before the war, the way a person defined himself/herself in relation to his/her Jewishness might have depended, to a certain extent, on his/her age, although, above all, it was dependent on the environment in which the individual had grown up: whether the family was a traditional religious one, had Zionist leanings, or tended toward assimilation, with Polishness counting as much as Jewishness. In examining the decisions and attitudes of Polish Jews immediately after the war, another significant factor might be the manner of survival: in hiding, by using Aryan papers, in partisan formations, in exile in the Soviet Union, in forced labor in the Reich under an assumed identity of a Christian Pole, or in concentration camps in the General Government (GG) and Germany.

It is impossible to reproduce accurately the way in which the consciousness of the Holocaust shaped the attitudes and identities of Polish Jews in the initial post-war years. Some attempted to rebuild their lives in Poland in spite of the Holocaust and the tragedy of their wartime experiences. Others wanted to flee as soon as they could, and start a new life in Palestine, America, or Western Europe. Some wanted to rid their memory of the Holocaust years and their losses, while others could not and did not want to forget these painful matters.

The individuals whom I interviewed in the late 1990s11 were Polish Jews living in Poland at that time. They survived the Holocaust thanks to the fact that, after escaping from the ghetto to the Aryan side, they acquired and existed on Aryan papers12 — they concealed the fact that they were Jewish from their Aryan environment by taking on a non-Jewish identity and assuming an attitude of “mimicry.” From the perspective of many decades past, they

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10 Hence, at least four categories of survivors may be distinguished by age during the German occupation.
11 This article only considers a small part of the issue — the special case of the surviving Polish Jews. Moreover, the issue of their attitude toward the Holocaust as an element of their identity is viewed retrospectively from the present.
12 In the years 1997–1999, I conducted interviews with 26 individuals: Polish Jews who survived on the Aryan side with false papers. Melchior, Zagłada a tożsamość.
referred to the major decisions in their lives and the identity choices that they had made in the immediate post-war period and later on. In many instances, their decisions to remain in Poland were influenced by personal reasons: family or professional circumstances, as well as environmental and psychological factors, including attachment to Polish culture, and the sense of being at home. Fear of “an unknown” or inertia may also have played some role in their decisions to remain in Poland. In the case of pre-war Communists and individuals of leftist political leanings, whose hopes and plans were bound up with building a new order in post-war Poland, their choice to stay in Poland would also — and, perhaps above all — have been ideologically motivated.

The decision to remain in Poland in spite of the sustained sense of danger due to antisemitism, in some cases, may have been connected either with the decision not to return to their past after the war or, conversely, with the resolve not to disavow the past. One of the interviewees, while justifying her decision of not returning to her Jewish identity after the war, said: “One could not be a Jew during the war, so one should not be a Jew in Poland today.” (K-18, born 1911)

Another interviewee represented the opposite attitude: Deep in her heart, she continued to feel Jewish even if she had to deny her origin. After the war, she immediately returned to her real identity: “I was Jewish all the time. I didn’t stop being Jewish. I wanted to return to my family name, to my roots. Those papers, the fact that I pretended to be a Pole — all that saved me to a certain point.” (K-15, born 1913)

For the most part, those who took the latter stance also made no secret of their biographical details or their Jewish roots to their children. By contrast, the decision to conceal the truth about wartime experiences and Jewish family origins was often important in the post-war choices of Jews who survived using Aryan papers and did not want to reveal their Jewish identity to their environment, or to return to either their wartime or pre-war past.

The changes to which survivors were subjected (or which they deliberately made themselves) at various stages of their lives could affect very different areas of their overall identity. This sometimes involved substituting one identification for another. It might have also involved a change in the relative importance of the two identifications: Polish and Jewish. In the

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13 I use the category of “overall identity” here, because an individual’s overall or full identity usually comprises many different identifications (e.g., an identification with their Polishness, with their Jewishness, with being a European, with family or professional roles, etc.).
early decades after the war, the Polish identification tended to prevail, but, over time, their Jewish identification took on increasing significance, often becoming dominant. The content of a given identification and the value or significance attributed to it might have also become modified with time. Changes in identification may affect both what is, or becomes, fundamental in the individual's identity and what becomes less critical. The dilemma faced by Jewish survivors after the war was resolved in many different ways. They had to decide whether to remain faithful to their Jewishness and to what they had to renounce during the Holocaust years in order to survive, or to reject consciously everything a Jewish identity entails — in effect, to choose the “external” identity and continue living “in hiding,” as it were, concealing the fact that they were Jews. Irrespective of the decision taken immediately after the war, however, the relationship to the past might have also changed with the age of the individual and as the temporal (and mental) distance from the trauma of Nazi occupation increased. The interviewees’ words shed some light on the general directions of such potential changes.

Above all, the resolve of some “not to affirm [their] Jewish identity” and not to return to their memories of the past sometimes weakened. Toward the end of their lives, which may in some cases be equated with retirement and, hence, a change in lifestyle and/or place of residence, many individuals no longer wanted to keep silent about their pre-war past and German occupation experience. Nor did they wish to disavow their Jewish roots. In such cases, the way in which they identified with their Polishness and their Jewishness shifted in two possible ways. Their homogeneous Polish identification either evolved into a dual, Polish-Jewish identification, or was replaced by a more clearly defined, and often dominant, Jewish one.

Above all, whether under the influence of their experiences or merely due to the passage of time, the reference groups in the lives of these individuals have changed. In light of my interviewees' words, it is possible to state that sooner or later, after the end of the war, often only many years after the events, other survivors began to constitute a significant reference group for them. They saw their place within this unique category, because of the similarity of the past experiences they had shared with one another.

Sometimes a person's ambivalent attitude towards his/her own Jewishness arises as a result of the definition of his/her individual identity by other individuals, for whom the Jewish origin of the other is a significant identifying criterion. Some of my interviewees — the Holocaust survivors with an
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assumed non-Jewish identity — today do not want to disavow their Jewish roots, but, at the same time, they do not wish to be regarded unequivocally and exclusively as Jews. If they are sometimes perceived by others as Jews, it is precisely because of the Holocaust and the extermination of their loved ones that they are unwilling to and cannot deny their origin for moral reasons. According to them, a denial of their Jewishness would be felt by them as a betrayal of themselves, their past, and their roots. It would also mean disavowing their families murdered in Belżec, Treblinka, and Auschwitz.

Attitude to the Holocaust As a Determinant of Individual Identity among Post-War Generations of Polish Jews

A separate issue is the question of attitudes toward the Holocaust among individuals born after the war: subsequent generations of Jews or Poles with Jewish roots. Did the awareness of the Holocaust, and the knowledge that most members of their own families perished in the Holocaust, influence the way these people define and think about themselves in relation to their Jewishness or Jewish descent, and, if so, how? In particular, in situations where intergenerational communication was interrupted, either because the parents did not want to burden their children with their past and tragic experiences, or because they had nothing to pass on to them as they themselves had been cut off from their past. How did that attitude change in successive post-war years? Did the significance of this element change in the consciousness of particular generations and in their identificatory references, and, if so, how?

The research that I conducted in the late 1980s involved individuals of Jewish descent born in the first decade after the war — the “middle” generation of Polish Jews. These individuals were brought up, for the most part, without references to Jewishness, Judaism or the Jewish tradition, either because they grew up in families that had been assimilated for generations or had been raised in families with left-wing or Communist orientations.15

I found then — and my conclusion may doubtless be applied to the majority of Jews living in Poland today — that a fundamental attribute of the way my subjects identified themselves with regard to the categories of their “Jewishness” and “Polishness” is their sense of a simultaneous, dual identification in this respect. On the whole, this simultaneous identification with Polishness and Jewishness does not seem contradictory or conflicting to these individuals. Each of these two identifications affects different matters and values, or at least this was the case among the interviewees. The two identifications — the Polish and the Jewish — require separate mental attitudes. Although it was clear that all the individuals I spoke to had some form of duality in their identification with both Polishness and Jewishness, and in spite of considerable similarities in both their biographies and their environments, they nevertheless differed in the way they defined themselves as Jews. They represented differing models of self-identification in respect to their Jewish background. For some, the Jewish identification appeared to be one of the fundamental elements of their individual identity, while for others it was an auxiliary, secondary element. For some, it is the dominant identification, more exposed than other aspects of the individual’s social identity; for others it is not exposed, remaining in the shadow and, on occasion, latent, not generally revealed, and even concealed to a varying extent.

Here, I differentiate three modes of identification with Jewishness: “positive,” “negative,” and “idle” (“barren”).

When Jewish identification is “positive,” i.e., individuals consider themselves Jewish, such identification includes a range of positive emotions and content. This type of identification may consist of interwoven or separate elements that appear together or singularly:

- Natural recognition and acceptance of their Jewish descent.
- Interest in Jewish history, culture, tradition, and Polish-Jewish relations.
- A sense of pride about, and affiliation with, Jewish matters.
- A conscious attitude toward the Holocaust.

A “conscious attitude toward the Holocaust” may thus be one of several components of the sense of identity of Polish Jews or individuals affirming their Jewish roots. For all the interviewees, this was a significant point of reference to a varying degree. There are grounds for claiming that such a situation also applies to the members of the “middle” generation, in general. Thus, I concluded at that time that a “conscious attitude toward the Holocaust” was the fundamental or even sole indicator of Jewishness among individuals characterized by “negative” Jewish identification. In other words, by those whose only way of identifying with Jewishness is by negative emotions such as fear, a sense of threat, stigma, and feelings of inferiority and being “worse than others.” My study also reveals that “a conscious attitude toward the Holocaust” is significant among individuals characterized by a “barren” or “idle” identification with regard to their Jewishness, namely identification devoid of either content or emotions. These individuals treat their Jewish roots simply as fact or a piece of information that does not determine their identity in any essential way.

The interviewees born in the first decade after the war were generally not exposed to their families’ wartime memories. On the contrary, their parents’ past and the wartime tragedies were something of a taboo in their homes. As a rule, only as adults and relatively late in life did they begin to ask questions about the past — the history of the Holocaust and their parents’ wartime memories. However, these issues inevitably became very important elements in shaping their Jewish identification. As one of the interviewees remarked: “An awareness of the history and fate of this nation, especially of the Holocaust, are elements of my being a Jew.”16 There were those among my interviewees who even spoke of a sense of community, a community of suffering, in relation to other Jews, precisely in relation to the Holocaust.

In recent years, other authors have discussed the significance of an individual’s attitude to the Holocaust as an element of his/her Jewish identity

16 Melchior, Społeczna tożsamość jednostki, p. 15.
with regard to the “middle” generation and subsequent younger generations. Observations similar to those described above regarding the importance of the Holocaust for Jewish identification in the first post-war generation of Polish Jews (the “middle” generation) have been registered and analyzed by Joanna Wiszniewicz. She points out characteristic patterns of family transmission of the Jewish past, in particular the Holocaust and wartime biographies of family members. Based on interviewees’ accounts, she proposes five types of attitudes toward the Holocaust: “absolute silence,” “partial silence,” “painful silence,” “compulsive talking,” and “communication based on open memory.”

Analogously, some interviewees in the study carried out by Claire Rosenson in Poland in 1994 claimed that “their parents had only recently called up their reminiscences from their [Jewish] past, [and] shared with them stories of which they had not spoken previously.”

In the case of the “third” and “fourth” generations — the generations of grandchildren of those who had survived the Holocaust as adults or as children — we can talk about a new phenomenon of deassimilation that has been observable for over two decades since the 1990s. This term refers to the

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effects of discovering Jewish origins among the 20- and 30-year-old individuals. Newly found Jewish roots, in many cases, have become important and significant in the consciousness of these individuals. They have become an element of a new, constructed, more complex Polish-Jewish identity. All the studies I know of, conducted in recent years on individuals of Jewish descent in the youngest adult age groups, indicate a duality in their contemporary identity. Yet, the creation of this new Jewish identity (or, more accurately, Jewish identification) is not usually accompanied by the weakening of their Polish identification or their vision of themselves as Poles. Hence, the deassimilation process is more about the emergence of a complex, dual identity, about a multiplication of the dimensions by which these individuals identify themselves, than abandoning their previously exclusive and naturally occurring identification with their Polishness. Marius Gudonis proposes that this is a phenomenon of “deassimilation without de-Polonization.”

The foundation of these latter-day discovered identifications with Jewishness is the belief that “I can be a Jew but I do not have to be one.” There are also motives such as curiosity, interest in otherness, and admiration for the complexity and multiplicity of the world. Another fairly significant factor in this process is probably respect for the past, and the importance of the Holocaust and the family fate directly associated with the Holocaust. Frequently, it is the curiosity of members of the “third” and “fourth” generations that has prompted their grandparents to begin talking about their past, about their wartime experiences. Thus, for survivors, the past and their relations with their Jewishness have become significant once again.

Polish Jews from the second (“middle”) and third (“youngest”) generations, interviewed by Urszula Pękała, most often indicated the elements on which they base their Jewishness as religion, Holocaust memory, historical links with their ancestors, and tradition. “Relatively frequently,” according to Pękała, “they seek to rebuild their roots because of the Holocaust, in order to pay tribute to [their] decimated nation.... This was not a sufficient motive [in itself].... Most important [to them] seemed to be the need for deep roots and full participation in community life, as defenses against the atomization of modern society.”

The first impulse to start thinking about their Jewish roots in connection with the Holocaust might simply have come in a history lesson. In

21 Pękała, “Zakorzenienie a deasymilacja.”
22 Ibid., p. 92.
Michał Klimkiewicz’s study about “becoming a Jew,” an interviewee, born in 1985, stated: “I remember learning in school about the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the Nazis. They counted a Jewish background three generations back. I remember thinking then: Oh, that would have meant me, too! I would have also suffered such a fate!”23

Agnieszka Chrabołowska24 interviewed Poles born after 1980, usually individuals from mixed marriages who discovered their Jewish roots. They spoke about the need for identification partly in connection with the Holocaust: “The Holocaust gives [you] an incredible sense of identification, too. It really wouldn’t have taken much, and I wouldn’t be here either. So, maybe I ought to do something about all those people who went to the gas chambers [because] I’m alive.... Another thing: The war and the Holocaust — in which nearly all our family was killed — always fascinated me. Fascinated me in an unhealthy way. Whenever I could, I would delve into it, in films, books, and exhibitions.”

Such statements confirm the fact that the Holocaust and the conscious attitude to it of members within the youngest generation of Polish Jews (or rather: Poles affirming their Jewish roots) is often an important element of their thinking about themselves as Jews, and thus seems to occupy a fairly important place in their Jewish (or rather: Polish-Jewish) identification. Representatives of this youngest generation (whose grandparents — or even only one grandparent — were “children of the Holocaust”) often feel their Jewishness as a responsibility or commitment. One of Chrabołowska’s interviewees remarked: “What I say will be brutal, but I think that I have to be a Jew, in the face of what happened [the Holocaust]. In a sense, I have to be a part of it. I feel something like that. I’m a poor-quality Jew, but still a Jew.”25

Chrabołowska distinguishes three ways of “being a Jew” among her interviewees. The first is an “inner” identification, the “feeling that I am a Jew.” In addition to a sense of closeness with other people of Jewish descent, and aside from the fear connected with the sense of their own Jewishness, this type of identification also incorporates a “duty to be a Jew,” as mentioned by the interviewee quoted above. “This duty,” Chrabołowska writes, “is connected [...] with the tragic history of the Jewish nation and concern for its survival.”26 The second way of “being a Jew” is defined by the author as “so-

24 Chrabołowska, “Między chrześcijaństwem a żydostwem.”
25 Ibid., p. 72.
26 Ibid., p. 75.
cial identification,” and, as she states, is expressed as the need “to be among people of Jewish origin, [through] participating in their social life, maintaining contact with other Jews, [...] belonging to Jewish organizations, and working” for them. The third way of “being a Jew” is, according to her, “religious identification,” i.e., believing in and practicing Judaism and upholding Jewish traditions. Nevertheless, the motive behind all these three ways of being (or becoming) a Jew is the memory of the Holocaust and the fate of their murdered ancestors and survivors within their families.

Concluding Remarks

My intention in this short article is to show the significance of the attitudes toward the Holocaust for Jewish identity among individuals belonging to different generations of Polish Jews living today in Poland. I provide here more questions than answers. These questions reveal the complexity of the problem.

A more detailed analysis about the consciousness of the Holocaust has only been conducted among selected groups of Polish Jews. This article is restricted to the contemporary perspective. Since the end of the 1980s, Jewish life in Poland has seen something of a renaissance, but the scale and nature of this development cannot be compared with the early post-war reality when the awareness of the event was still raw and its impact directly tangible. It also cannot be compared with the extremely minor presence of Jews in contemporary Poland as viewed in the context of the years before the great exodus of Jews from Poland between 1946 and 1950, and the later waves of emigration in 1956–1960 and 1968–1970.

The thesis proposed here suggests that the relations towards Jewishness of many Polish Jews and Poles of Jewish descent seem to be defined, at least in part, or sometimes, above all, by their attitude to the Holocaust. For many individuals, consciousness of the Holocaust becomes the basis or a “core” of their Jewish identity. Many of those who currently only minimally identify themselves as Jews are unwilling to refute their Jewish roots precisely because of the Holocaust. For this reason, the topic of consciousness and identity of contemporary Polish Jews has to receive a proper place in this volume that is dedicated to the direct and far-reaching consequences of the Holocaust.

27 Ibid.
The historical consciousness of society is shaped by many factors. Among the most significant are family and friends, press, books, radio, television, theater, and film. Schools play a particularly important role. At present, in Poland, there is compulsory education for children and youth from 6 to 18 years of age. Despite curriculum differences, certain standardized information modules are conveyed in the consecutive stages of education.

The aim of the present study is to determine the importance of the Holocaust in history teaching over 45 years of Communist rule in the People’s Republic of Poland (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa — PRL), and after the political changes in 1989 under the Third Polish Republic (III Rzeczpospolita — III RP). This article examines approved textbooks for all types of schools published between 1945 and 2008. Their content reveals the body of knowledge offered to students and the state’s changing policy in teaching history.

This evaluation of the textbooks is based on two principal criteria: 1) The quality of information about the German genocide of Jews perpetrated on the biggest scale in Poland; and 2) The comprehensive presentation of the attitudes of Polish society toward the mass murder, ranging from the unambiguously negative ones, such as blackmailing Jews in hiding and direct involvement in their murder, to the indifference of the majority and risking their own lives to provide assistance.

Only a few textbooks fully satisfy these criteria. There are many causes of this situation, such as authors’ ignorance, yielding to the pressure regarding the official “historical policy,” or lack of books in the Polish language on the extermination of Jews in the entire pre-war territory of the Second Polish Republic, particularly in areas annexed by the USSR in 1939. Only very
few recently published books deal with these issues.1 The situation in small ghettos has as yet not been extensively researched. Studies on the attitudes of Polish society toward the Holocaust and on the extent of wartime moral decline have only been published in the last few years. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that textbooks have long ignored these issues. The fate of the Jewish population is still frequently presented incompletely. It is hoped that, with increasingly extensive research, as well as debates on these issues, the situation will improve. This issue is extremely important for disseminating knowledge and influencing attitudes in what is now a democratic society.

The Education System and Curricula in Poland

Since the end of the Second World War, the Polish educational system has undergone several important transformations. Between 1945 and 1950, the curricula and organized education were in chaos, leaving teachers some leeway in the choice of material taught. In addition to state schools, there were quite a number of private schools, both secular and denominational. In late 1944, the Communist authorities had already begun work on a new educational system.2 In a climate of debate as well as protest, by the Catholic Church and other institutions, several new plans were formulated.3


Endeavors were made to extend the primary education so as to demonstrate the “superiority” of socialist schooling over the former Second Polish Republic (II Rzeczpospolita — II RP) system. However, owing to lack of financial resources and adequate teaching staff, it proved impossible to implement either ten-year compulsory education, following the USSR’s example, or eight-year primary school. Obligatory seven-year primary school, plus the possibility of continuing education in the four-year grammar school, was adopted as a temporary solution, initiated on September 1, 1948.

History was taught from the fourth year of primary school onward. The curriculum covered the history of Poland and world history until the outbreak of the Second World War. Initially, only pre-war textbooks were available for teachers and students. After 1946, new textbooks were also available, but did not cover material beyond 1939. After 1947, when the Communists had already acquired complete control over the country, the ideologization of education was intensified. Schooling was meant to serve as a tool in the formation of the new socialist society. Periodization based on the Marxist socioeconomic historical perspective was introduced. Experts from the USSR, however, criticized the existing situation in Polish education, which made it necessary to introduce translations of several Soviet textbooks, not extending beyond 1918, into Polish schools.

In the 1946/1947 school year, a new subject was introduced in secondary schools: “Knowledge about Poland and the Contemporary World”

4 Jakubowski, Polityka oświatowa, p. 33.
5 Osiński, Nauczanie historii, p. 24.
It was soon also taught in the seventh year of primary school. It covered the Second World War period, including the Holocaust, among other things. In the early 1950s, the work on the first history textbooks to include the history of the first half of the twentieth century was completed. Only then did issues relating to the Second World War become part of history teaching, and the NPŚW was then changed and limited to the political system and the state’s internal and foreign policy.

In the mid-1950s, a debate on the education system began, criticizing overloaded curricula and excessive incomprehensible ideological content. As a consequence, in 1957, after marked political liberalization in the wake of “Polish October 1956,” new textbooks began to appear. Although the choice of information remained much the same as before, the language was less ideological, and quotations from Lenin and Stalin were removed.

From 1963 to 1966, primary school education was extended to eight years. Grammar schools continued with the four-year model. From 1966 on, new history textbooks were successively introduced and republished.

In the early 1970s, new reforms were initiated and preparations were made to introduce obligatory ten-year secondary schools. These plans were ultimately abandoned, but attempts were made to utilize the new curricula developed for that purpose. Decisions to revise textbooks, which accompanied political agreements between the Polish government and the Fed-

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eral Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1970, required certain modifications in the content of historical instruction.

Important changes to the history curriculum were initiated in 1980–1981 as a result of the growing trade union movement, and, in particular, the activity of the “Solidarity” Independent Trade Union (NSZZ “Solidarność”) education section. New curricula were developed, covering many issues previously omitted, including some pertaining to the modern history of Poland, among others. The imposition of martial law in December 1981, which put an end to political reforms, did not stop the curriculum changes.

After the fall of Communist rule in 1989, curricular diversity was allowed, but only in 1999, after lengthy preparations, did reform of the education system begin. Primary school education was shortened from eight to six years, and the three-year lower secondary school was introduced. Education on both the primary and lower secondary levels was made compulsory. Schooling in upper secondary schools, including grammar schools, was reduced from four to three years. New textbooks were written, some with an entirely new approach, while others were modelled on old publications. However, this structural reform was not accompanied by fundamental changes in the content of historical instruction.

In December 2008, the Ministry of National Education (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej — MEN) approved a new core curriculum for all syllabi and school textbooks. The new adopted programs met with criticism from many teachers. The history curriculum in lower secondary schools covers the period up to 1918, whereas modern history, including the Second World War period, is only taught in upper secondary schools, i.e., grammar schools or upper technical secondary schools or vocational schools. Thus, during compulsory education in primary schools and lower secondary schools, students will not be able to acquire knowledge that is not only crucial for their understanding of the contemporary world, but

also important for questions arising in other subjects, e.g., in Polish lan-
guage, literature, and geography.

The Holocaust in History Curricula

The content of textbooks results from the requirements stipulated in the
curricula designed for particular types of schools, established by the ap-
propriate ministries. The first history curricula, developed as early as the
1940s, were complemented and modified every year. Initially, they did not
include the Second World War. Even after new history textbooks including
the events of 1939–1945 were published in the 1950s, the curricula on the
subject did not extend beyond 1918. At first, the Second World War was
discussed in NPŚW lessons. In the second half of the 1940s, these accounts
were already saturated with Communist ideological and political content.
This also applied to perception of the Holocaust. Among the subjects listed
in the first NPŚW curricula were such issues as: The invaders’ crimes; The
destruction of the Polish population; The fate of Jews and defence of the
Warsaw Ghetto. This subject matter was similarly represented in the cur-
riculum for the 11-year secondary schools (including the primary schools
and grammar schools) of 1949. In the seventh form, students were sup-
posed to learn about such topics as:

Terror under the Nazi occupation (expulsions and expropriations, the
Volksliste, impressment into the army, mass executions, roundups, and
transportation to forced-labor sites, concentration camps and cremato-
ria); The looting of Polish property; The destruction of the culture; The
poisoning of the people with anti-Soviet and antisemitic propaganda;
The extermination of Jews; The destruction of the Polish nation.

19 Plany godzin i materiały programowe na rok szkolny 1945/46 dla szkół powszechnych
i I-jej klasy gimnazjów ogólnokształcących (Warsaw: PZWS, 1945); Plany godzin i pro-
gramy przejściowe na rok szkolny 1946/47; Program nauki w 8-letniej szkole podsta-
20 Program nauki w 11-letniej szkole ogólnokształcącej. Projekt. Historia (Warsaw: PZWS,
1952).
21 Plany godzin i programy przejściowe na rok szkolny 1946/47, p. 205; Nauka o Polsce
i świecie współczesnym, p. 3. Program nauki w 8-letniej szkole podstawowej. Projekt.
Nauka, p. 8.
The syllabus for the eleventh form was not significantly different. It included the following topics:

Nazi terror methods (mass murder, roundups, executions, death camps, exterminating the Jews, imposing forms of slave labor, transportation to forced labor sites); Poisoning the public consciousness (racist propaganda, undermining the foundations of social ethics, promoting alcoholism, and demoralizing the youth); The systematic looting of Polish property. 

The language used, such as “exterminating the Jews,” was referred to on German propaganda posters depicting Jews as insects that had to be exterminated. Naturally, the use of such expressions in the curricula was not deliberate, but rather an unthinking use of Nazi terminology. When referring to Poles, the less brutal term “destruction” was used. More importantly, there were also such expressions as “antisemitic propaganda” and “racist propaganda,” which were absent in later curricula and could be interpreted as attempts to explain and justify negative Polish attitudes toward Jews.

Most of the topics included in the NPŚW curriculum concern the fate of the Polish population, culture, and property. This exclusive focus contributed to the conviction that only one group of former citizens of the Second Polish Republic was an important set of victims, marginalizing the fate of others, such as those of Jewish origin. This approach in presenting the Nazi occupation predominated education, propaganda, literature, and film throughout the Communist period and had an enormous influence on shaping the historical consciousness of Polish society. This conclusion can easily be confirmed by browsing through contemporary Internet entries. Even today, a large part of Polish society accepts the perception of the history of the Second World War adopted in the 1940s and 1950s, which emphasizes Polish martyrdom while marginalizing the tragic fate and almost total annihilation of the Jewish population.

The first standardized curriculum for history teaching in primary schools was only developed in the late 1950s. This delay reflected the many

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23 Ibid., p. 22. “The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising” was added to the part on armed resistance.
political and ideological controversies accompanying its development. In
the extensive part on the Second World War, only two sections relate to
the Jewish population’s fate: “The Auschwitz, Majdanek Death Camps” and
“The Persecution and Extermination of the Jews.”25 Moreover, these sec-
tions were not described in detail when discussing implementation of the
curriculum, but it was stated that “the main emphasis should be placed
on the Polish nation’s struggle against the Nazis” and “the Polish-Russian
brotherhood of arms.”26

In the late 1960s, the curriculum had to be modified for the purpose of
extending the primary school education from seven to eight years. Introduc-
ing these changes happened to coincide with the Communist authorities’ an-
tisemitic campaign, which started in 1967 and continued into the early 1980s,27
and which was also reflected in the history curriculum. Alongside topics such
as “Ghetto uprisings” and “The extermination of the Jews,” the new one “Res-
cuing the Jewish population (“Żegota,” military actions of the GL [Gwardia
Ludowa — People’s Guard], i.e., Communist partisans) was added.28 Another
characteristic change is the increasingly frequent recurrence of the word “na-
tion,” e.g., “the policy of destroying the Polish nation,” or “destroying the cul-
tural achievements of the Polish nation.”29 At the same time, the tremendous
cultural losses suffered by the Jews were ignored.

The national and patriotic vocabulary is even more prominent in the
subsequent curriculum of the mid-1980s developed for the proposed ten-
year secondary school.30 In this curriculum, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising
topic was considerably expanded, but there was a complete lack of informa-
tion on the extermination of Jews. Although the list of concepts the stu-
dents were expected to assimilate included such terms as “ghetto,” “exter-
mination,” and “crimes against humanity,” the extent to which they were
associated with the fate of the Jewish population was unclear.31

26 Ibid., p. 288.
27 See Feliks Tych’s article, “The “March ’68” Antisemitic Campaign: Onset, Develop-
ment and Consequences,” in this volume.
28 Program nauczania ośmioletniej szkoły podstawowej. Historia klasy V–VIII (Warsaw:
29 Ibid.
30 Historia. Wstępna wersja programu dziesięcioletniej szkoły średniej (Warsaw: Instytut
31 Ibid., p. 25.
Radical changes in the content of curricula began in the early 1980s, when some formerly omitted topics, such as the situation in the territories annexed by the USSR in 1939, and the activity of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa — AK), were introduced into history teaching. However, these changes did not apply to the subject of the Holocaust. The curricula repeated the long-established list of subjects:

The extermination of Jews; The extermination of Gypsies; The resistance movement in the ghettos; The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; The ŻOB; The assistance to Jews — Żegota.

The changes introduced in the second half of the 1980s pointed in a similar direction. More and more subjects, which had once been rejected by censorship, were now deemed acceptable. The history curriculum for the secondary schools consisted of a one-and-a-half page list of topics relating to the Second World War, but only two of them dealt with the fate of the Jewish population: “The extermination of Jews and Gypsies” and “The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising — assistance to the fighters.”

The situation only began to change in the mid-1990s. Owing to democratisation, teachers were allowed to implement syllabuses of their choice, provided they had MEN approval. Only a few among several hundred syllabi chose to devote more attention to the Holocaust. At the same time, use of the word “Holocaust” started. The mutual arrangements adopted in 1994 by the Polish-Israeli Commission for Textbooks contributed to the popularization of Holocaust education.

The education system reform initiated in 1999 included work on a new core curriculum, i.e., guidelines specifying the information students be given during successive stages of their education and what content should be included in the syllabi and textbooks. This sparked off intense debates among scholars, history teachers, and educators concerning the regulations

33 Ibid., p. 29.
35 Ibid.
36 Zalecenia dotyczące podręczników historii i literatury w Polsce i Izraelu (Warsaw-Jerusalem: Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport in Israel, 1995).
guaranteeing the introduction of Holocaust education into Polish schools, among other things. There was considerable controversy about the age at which young people should be taught these issues: in primary school, in lower secondary or only in grammar school.37

Ultimately, the requirement of teaching about the Holocaust was included in the core curricula for lower secondary schools and grammar schools. In the case of lower secondary schools, syllabi were supposed to include such topics as “the extermination of peoples in the occupied territories; concentration camps and Soviet forced-labor camps; and the Holocaust.”38 A somewhat different selection of topics was adopted for grammar schools: “Progress versus civilization crises; Social conflicts; Wars, genocide, and the Holocaust.”39 The Holocaust was omitted in the core curriculum for primary schools and vocational schools, although, in the former, it could have been included in “The Second World War, occupation, and the struggle for independence” or in classes on regional history.

The introduction of Holocaust education into the newly established lower secondary schools, which became one of the stages of compulsory education, was the most important. However, the extremely vague character of the core curriculum was problematic. The document included the “Holocaust” alone, without specifying what exactly should be discussed in the classroom. This gave a great deal of leeway to the authors of syllabi and textbooks, as well as to teachers. The problem was supposed to be solved by new, more specific core curricula. Several drafts were prepared, all of which led to stormy debates and critical comments.40 The new, extended core

39 Ibid., p. 3648.
40 Ewa Bartnik, Krzysztof Konarzewski, Alina Kowalczykowa, Zbigniew Marciniak, and
curriculum for all types of schools was approved by the MEN in December 2008.\textsuperscript{41} By comparison with the former curricula, this document is more specific, although it can hardly be considered as sufficiently exhaustive.

**The Fate of the Jews during the Second World War According to History Textbooks**

Analyzed in terms of the content and scope of information about the Holocaust, Polish history textbooks may be divided into six periods:

1) 1945–1951: History textbooks did not cover the Second World War or deal with the Holocaust, but these issues were discussed to a limited extent in textbooks for the NPŚW course.

2) 1952–1956: The first Polish history textbooks with a detailed discussion of the Second World War, including the fate of Jews, were written, but they totally ignored Polish attitudes toward the Holocaust.

3) 1957–1967: In the wake of de-Stalinization and the political “thaw” initiated in October 1956, new textbooks were introduced. They were written in less ideological and more objective language, but their content, including information about the Holocaust, was considerably poorer.

4) 1968–1980: Influenced by the 1967/1968 antisemitic campaign, there was a change in the way the Holocaust was presented. Certain passages on Polish assistance to Jews (including the role of “Żegota”) were added to the textbooks, but with subtexts implying Jewish ingratitude.

5) 1981–1992: With the emergence and development of independent grassroots movements, substantial changes were made in the content of textbooks. However, they did not significantly affect the way the Holocaust was presented, which generally followed earlier patterns.

6) After 1993: The first textbook to use the term “Holocaust” appeared in

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1993, followed by more and more textbooks discussing the Holocaust in an increasingly comprehensive and multifaceted manner.

In the first period, the Communist authorities began developing their historical policy and interpretations of the most sensitive topics. The history of the Second World War, including the extermination of Polish Jews, was discussed not in history classes and textbooks, but in the NPŚW course. The first textbook for this was published as early as 1948, authored by Władysław Bieńkowski, Deputy Minister of Education, and member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza — PPR). The textbook was not addressed to any specific group of readers. According to the preface, it was meant for teachers, educational activists, and students in secondary schools and universities. The position of the author and the large number of 200,000 copies that were printed indicate that it presented the official view of modern history in accordance with the Communist authorities. Bieńkowski’s textbook is considered the first to follow Marxist principles. About 40 pages were devoted to the Second World War, but only a single, short paragraph to the Jewish population’s fate:

The slaughter of the Jewish people, toward whom the Nazis endeavored to arouse racial hatred among Poles and thereby paralyze the Polish nation, was a prelude to biological extermination of the Polish nation.

Further on in the book, “death camps” are mentioned, without indicating the identity of the victims. Only Treblinka was unequivocally identified as a site of mass murder of the Jewish population:

The largest “death factories” were the camps at Treblinka, where about two million Jews and several thousand Poles were killed; Majdanek near Lublin; Bełżec; and Auschwitz, where about three million people were murdered.

45 Mielczarek, *Ideologiczno-polityczna indoktrynacja*, p. 75.
46 Bieńkowski, *Nauka*, p. 35.
47 Ibid.
All these figures were very imprecise, reflecting the contemporary knowledge on the subject and serving propaganda purposes.

The frequent use of the term “Naród Polski” (Polish Nation) and the capitalization of both words — even though in Polish, adjectives referring to nationality are not capitalized — clearly served as a sign of deep respect and is striking. The interpretation of wartime events was clear: The principal victims of the war were Poles, while the fate of the Jewish population constituted a mere backdrop for presenting Polish martyrdom: “These crimes had the strongest impact on our nation, sentenced by the Nazi leaders to complete annihilation.”

Mention of the attitude of Poles toward Jews is highly significant, since it shows that both the authorities and society were aware of the problem.

Bienkowski’s book only came out in one edition. In the two years that followed, textbooks for NPŚW teaching in the seventh form of primary school and the eleventh, or the fourth (final) form of grammar school were published. Most of the authors were Communist activists of many years’ standing. The content of the new textbooks, albeit somewhat extended, followed Bienkowski’s book, and they even repeated some phrases and expressions:

The slaughter of the Jewish people was a prelude to extermination of the Polish nation. The Jews were fenced off behind ghetto walls, deprived of all means of livelihood, and tortured in the most brutal manner.

This information was supplemented with a brief mention of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and a photograph of the Memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes.

The book presented events concerning the Jewish population at several other points. However, it only emphasized the martyrdom of Poles. The authors mentioned in passing that about six million of the victims were “Polish citizens,” without stating how many Jews were included. Treblinka was described as a place where “the Nazis slaughtered about two million

48 Bienkowski, Nauka, p. 35.
50 Roman Kornecki, Zdzisław Kowalewski, Zbigniew Mitzner, N. Silber, and Maria Turlejska, Nauka o Polsce i świecie współczesnym (Warsaw: PZWS, 1950).
51 Barbag et al., Nauka o Polsce, p. 76.
52 Ibid., p. 99.
People,” but, unlike Bieńkowski, the authors do not indicate their ethnic background. There is just a general statement that the victims of extermination camps were of many different nationalities. Poles are always mentioned first, and Jews second or third: “Poles and Jews, Russians, Frenchmen, Greeks, and Yugoslavians were poisoned in horrible gas chambers. Their bodies were incinerated. The crematoria released smoke day and night.”

As in Bieńkowski’s book, the issue of Polish society’s morals was raised: “The invader attempted to whip up racial hatred toward the Jewish population and arouse hatred toward the Soviet Union, which was portrayed as an enemy of humanity.” Today, it is only possible to speculate as to how school teachers explained these issues.

The NPŚW textbook for grammar schools discussed the Holocaust in greater detail, but, again, the main emphasis was on the martyrdom of Poles and the activities of the Communist underground and the Red Army. The fate of Jews was discussed rather matter-of-factly in a paragraph of half-a-page or so, underscoring the mass murder of Jews perpetrated by the Nazis, as well as the centers for their immediate extermination at Belżec, Chelmno, Sobibór, and Treblinka. The Auschwitz camp was discussed separately, but, in this case, there is no information about the ethnic identity of most victims. The authors report:

The records of the Auschwitz camp include: 400,000 prisoners, whereas three million went to the gas chambers straight from the railway platform. Those who died in Auschwitz were Poles, Russians, Jews, French, Austrians, Germans, Czechs...from almost all the European countries.

The order in which the nationalities are listed is highly significant.

In the part devoted to the resistance movement, the authors included a separate paragraph on the Warsaw and Białystok Ghetto uprisings, as well as the armed struggle by prisoners in Treblinka and Sobibór. The revolt by the Sonderkommando at Auschwitz in October 1944 was omitted. This camp

53 This figure was overstated by 100 percent. See Robert Kuwalek’s article, “Concentration Camps and Death Camps As Memorial Sites to Jewish Victims or Mutual Polish-Jewish Martyrdom Sites,” in this volume.
54 Barbag et al., Nauka o Polsce, p. 76.
55 Ibid.
56 Kornecki et al., Nauka o Polsce, p. 68.
57 Kornecki et al., Nauka o Polsce, p. 69.
58 Ibid., p. 71.
was considered a symbol of Polish martyrdom. The authors emphasized the Leftist character of the Jewish resistance movement. They affirmed that the actions against Nazis had been carried out by “the Jewish working class and its progressive organizations,” while assistance to the fighters was exclusively provided by the Communist People’s Guard. At the same time, only the extreme nationalist wing of the Polish underground movement, the National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne — NSZ), was blamed for the murder of “Jews hiding, who had escaped from the jaws of death, [and] the runaway Soviet POWs fighting in Polish partisan units.” Attitudes of Polish society toward the fate of Jews, mentioned only in passing in textbooks for primary schools, were elaborated upon. Only one group was singled out as having behaved “immorally,” implying that few Poles, clearly opposed to the Communist authorities, harmed Jews. The rest of society was thus cleared of blackmailing, denouncing, and, sometimes, participating in the murder of Jews.

A team of authors prepared the NPŚW textbook for grammar schools. Particular chapters are not attributed to specific authors, so it is impossible to establish who wrote about the Second World War. However, Maria Turlejska was probably the author because in the early 1950s she participated in the work on the first history textbook for secondary schools, which covered modern history. She was also an eyewitness of the Holocaust.

Teaching about the Holocaust in the late 1940s and early 1950s, albeit schematic and highly ideologized, did deal with the issue of the moral attitudes of Poles toward the annihilation of Jews, of which some sectors of society were undoubtedly aware. Poles blackmailing and denouncing Jews who were in hiding was the theme of several feature films made at the time. These included Zakazane piosenki (Forbidden Songs), 1946, directed by Leonard Buczkowski; and Ulica Graniczna (Border Street), 1948, directed by Aleksander Ford. Both movies became extremely popular: The former was seen by over 15 million viewers, the latter by over eight million.

60 Kornecki et al., Nauka o Polsce, p. 71.
61 Ibid., p. 73.
subject of denouncing or blackmailing Jews was not raised in such an explicit manner in any later movies made in the PRL.

The manner in which the Holocaust was presented changed in the early 1950s, when the topic was included in the teaching of history. The 1952 publication of a textbook for the eleventh form, *Historia Polski 1864–1945*, edited by Żanna Kormanowa, with the section on the Second World War written by Turlejska, was a turning point.64 This handbook set the standard for teaching about the Nazi occupation and the fate of Jews, and established a set of events and figures that subsequently came to be regarded as common knowledge, which has survived to a considerable extent to this day. The most important point was to present the martyrdom of the Polish nation. Textbooks discussed displacements, confiscations, executions, and cultural losses, but mainly those suffered by the Poles. Fewer than 20 pages were devoted to the Second World War.65

Kormanowa was in charge of school reform, at first in the education department of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN), and then in the Ministry of Education from 1945 to 1948.66 Already during the Second World War, in her draft syllabus for Polish schools operating in the USSR, she included the topic “Poland under the yoke of Nazi occupation from 1939 to 1943,” which dealt with the following themes: “The tragic fate of Jews in Poland; Racist legislation; The creation of ghettos for Jews in Warsaw, Łódź, and Lublin; The bestial slaughter of Jews; and The tragic fate and heroic defense of the Warsaw Ghetto.”67

In the textbook edited by Kormanowa, the fate of the Jewish population at the beginning of the war was discussed in the chapter, “The Policy of the Nazi Invader toward the Polish Nation.” The Holocaust itself was presented in an extensive passage in another chapter, “The Nazi Policy of Annihilation; The Intensification of the Resistance Movement” (about three to four pages of text altogether).68 Students were taught about the confiscations of Jewish property, the establishment of the first mass extermination center for Jews at Chełmno nad Nerem (Kulmhof), and Auschwitz, which was turned from a labor camp into a mass murder center. The German policy toward Jews after

65 Ibid., pp. 383–412.
the outbreak of war with the USSR was discussed at length. There was also some information about the Wannsee Conference, followed by passages on the campaign of the total annihilation of the Jews, launched in July 1942; the development of other mass extermination centers; the armed struggle in the Warsaw Ghetto in January 1943; the economic exploitation carried out by German industrial enterprises; and Himmler’s decision to demolish the Warsaw Ghetto completely. Aside from the language of the narrative and the issue of the alleged assistance from the communist Polish Workers’ Party to the Jewish resistance movement, this was the most complete description of the Holocaust in any Polish textbook, published in the PRL and the III RP, until 1997.69

Despite the considerable informative value of the textbook, the marginalization of material on the fate of the Jews is striking. This politically motivated way of presenting the history of the Second World War was imposed by censorship, as confirmed by extant memoirs.70 The propaganda at the time stressed the enormity of persecution suffered by Poles at the hands of the Nazi invaders, confirming society’s belief that, during the war, Poland had only one enemy, the Germans, who still constituted a real danger in the form of the Federal Republic of Germany (or West Germany).71 The USSR was thus portrayed not as the aggressor in 1939, but as the liberator and the guarantor of the inviolability of Polish borders.

It was only in 1956 that the first history textbook for primary schools72 dealt with the Second World War, including the activity of Nazis in the occupied Polish territories (the word “Germans” was not used at the time, out of consideration for the German Democratic Republic). In this case,

69 In that year, a textbook by Andrzej Garlicki was published. See his Historia 1939–1996/97: Polska i świat, podręcznik dla liceów ogólnokształcących, kl. IV, 1st edition (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 1997). For the first time, a Polish history textbook included a separate chapter on the Holocaust and, for the first time, it stated that the majority of Polish society had remained indifferent toward the Holocaust.


72 In 1951, Historia Polski (History of Poland) by Gryzelda Missalowa and Janina Schoenbrenner was published, which covered the Second World War, but the book was officially treated not as a textbook but as a kind of additional material.
the authors also concentrated on repression against Poles, only marginally discussing the annihilation of Jews. In fact, the textbook included a one-and-a-half page passage entitled, “Murder of Jews,” in which the authors wrote about the creation of ghettos and the fighting in the Warsaw Ghetto, but the narration was extremely simplistic. For example: “Every now and then, the Nazis took small or large groups of Jews away from the ghetto and murdered them, with the aim of killing all Jews within several years.” Students were not informed of the ultimate results of those activities. A short paragraph devoted to concentration camps was summarized in the following two sentences: “Some of them, such as Majdanek and Auschwitz, were particularly cruel. Many millions of people from all over Europe died there.” Another passage dealt with the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, presented in the form of a simplistic little tale, which was supposed to demonstrate the fighters’ courage and the Nazis’ cruelty: “The insurgents displayed extraordinary heroism and set the example of fighting in the most adverse circumstances.” The authors emphasized that it was the first Jewish act of armed resistance in occupied Poland, ignoring the activity of the Jewish resistance movement in the Eastern Territories of the former Second Polish Republic.

Both textbooks, i.e., for the seventh and the eleventh forms, were withdrawn in 1959, but they became models for presenting the Second World War for the following few decades. Later publications, despite their reduced length and different narrative language, continued along the lines of Turlej-ska and Kormanowa’s interpretation of events. As for the textbook for the seventh form, facts were selected on two subjects: life in the ghettos; and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This model for discussing the history of the Holocaust was continued until the early 1990s. In a sense, it satisfied the teachers’ demands, who claimed that their curricula were overloaded and should be reduced. The Holocaust was perceived as an issue of secondary or tertiary importance.

In the 1960s, both in primary schools and grammar schools, modern history was presented by means of textbooks written by Henryk Sędziwy, a teacher of the prestigious Bartłomiej Nowodworski grammar school in

74 Ibid., pp. 147–148.
75 Ibid., p. 146.
76 Ibid., pp. 177–178.
77 Osiński, Nauczanie historii, p. 25.
Kraków. The first textbook published was for the seventh form, which came out in 1959. The section on the Nazi occupation still focused on the persecution suffered by Poles, and other chapters were entitled: “The Partition of the Country and Looting of Polish Property,” “Destroying the Polish Nation,” and “The Destruction of Polish Culture.” The fate of the Jewish population was discussed in a short section, only half-a-page long, entitled “The Persecution and Extermination of Jews.” From this section, students were able to learn about a “special action,” which consisted of “mass poisoning with gases,” and about “extermination camps,” such as Treblinka, Majdanek, Bełżec, Auschwitz, and Chelm (Chelmno is, in fact, the correct name). Two photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto were also included, and there was a separate passage devoted to the uprising there. In terms of structure, the book was like the textbook from 1956: The layout of the text and the titles of chapters were similar. However, its factual content was different. Although the text itself was very short, the choice of facts created a more objective picture of events. The “thaw” taking place in political life exerted a positive influence on the educational methods and content.

Sędziwy included similar content in a textbook for grammar schools, supplementing it with specific figures and dates. Once again, the martyrdom of the “Polish nation” was given priority. The section entitled “Plans for the Biological Extermination of the Polish Nation” included the following quotation from Hans Frank:

> We must take advantage of the moment when the attention of the world is focused on the Western Front for mass elimination of thousands of Poles.

This created the myth that the Nazis’ main purpose was to annihilate the Poles. The only separate paragraph concerning the Jewish population’s fate was devoted to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

Sędziwy introduced minor changes in the textbook for primary schools after the extension of primary education to eight years. He described the

79 Ibid., pp. 221–222.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., p. 231.
83 Ibid., pp. 177–178.
persecution of Poles at greater length, while simplifying the account of the Holocaust. Critical views of the Vatican’s attitude toward the Nazi crimes were also added. “The pope saw fascism and Nazism as an instrument for fighting the ‘Godless Communism.’” This comment was undoubtedly a reaction to the well-known letter of 1965 written by Polish bishops to their German counterparts. The letter was meant as a gesture of reconciliation between the two nations, and the statement “We forgive and ask for forgiveness” caused particular controversy.

Textbooks from the 1970s adopt an even more schematic approach to the subject of the Holocaust. The only history textbook for grammar schools, and later also for vocational and technical secondary schools, was written by Roman Wapiński and published during the 1969–1981 period. In this book, the theme relating German plans to exterminate Poles was even more developed. The author completely ignored the methods for mass extermination of Jews. Instead, he underscored the enormous number of Polish victims of concentration camps. The discussion on the fate of the Jewish population was narrowed down to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. A relatively lengthy paragraph devoted to that event did not mention the Jewish resistance movement there, concentrating instead on the assistance provided by Poles, both those associated with the left (PPR) and the Polish government-in-exile based in London. This theme was further developed in subsequent editions, augmented with information on the Council for Aid to Jews, code-named “Żegota.” These changes can be regarded as a response to the antisemitic campaign of 1967–1968 and the severance of diplomatic relations with Israel. This historiographical approach, as already mentioned, was meant to marginalize the tragedy of the Holocaust, while emphasizing the assistance provided by Poles, thereby also implying the Jews’ ingratitude for not appreciating Polish sacrifices.

85 Ibid., p. 173.
The paragraph is as follows (italics mark the text added to the editions published after 1972):

On April 19, 1943, the Warsaw Ghetto inmates also took up arms to defend their dignity in view of the Nazi policy to annihilate Jews. The uprising met with support from the entire democratic Polish underground movement, which had been providing all kinds of assistance to the Jewish population since the beginning of the occupation. Despite the threat of the death penalty, thanks to the utmost dedication of Polish society, about 100,000–120,000 Polish Jews survived. The Council for Aid to Jews, codenamed “Żegota,” established in 1942 at the Delegatura [the Polish Government-in-Exile Delegate’s Office], played a very important role in this, providing financial and medical assistance, searching for shelters for those who escaped from the ghettos, and supplying them with legal documents. The Warsaw Ghetto fighters were also provided with all possible assistance. The Polish underground movement, both the London branch [under the Polish Government-in-Exile] and the PPR, provided the insurgents with arms and helped to smuggle people out of the ghetto. Although it could not prevent an overthrow of the uprising, which lasted until mid-July, Polish assistance made it possible to save some of the insurgents, symbolizing the unity of struggle of the Poles and Jews against the Nazi invader.88

In the early 1970s, two new textbooks for primary schools appeared. The first was authored by Marian Wojciechowski, a specialist in German history;89 the second, by Andrzej Leszek Szczęśniak, an employee at the Ministry of Education, gained greater recognition among teachers.90

Wojciechowski did not devote much space to the subject of the Holocaust, but collected some basic information to provide a simplified picture of the Jews’ fate. In this respect, Szczęśniak’s textbook did not significantly differ from the earlier one. It gives the impression of being largely based on the above-mentioned textbook by Wapiński for grammar schools. The subject of the Holocaust was dealt with in two short paragraphs, devoted mainly to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the assistance provided by Poles.

New information began to appear in textbooks published after the early 1980s. This was due to debates during the revival of political life related to the emergence of the NSZZ “Solidarność.” Tadeusz Sergiejczyk’s textbook for grammar schools, which included a great deal of information that had been previously omitted due to censorship, such as the situation in the Polish territories annexed by the USSR or the scale and range of AK activities, is particularly noteworthy. This textbook, however, did not depart very much from the previous pattern concerning the fate of Jews. Although the subject was discussed in greater detail, the presentation raised various objections.\(^9\)

On several occasions, the author emphasized Jewish passivity, and one chapter was entitled “The Extermination of Polish, Jewish, and Gypsy Populations.”\(^9\)

A new textbook by Szcześniak, published in 1984, in which the author presented all the principal issues concerning the policy of the Third Reich toward the Jews, as well as the Holocaust itself, is much more interesting. He discussed Hitler’s plans and their ideological basis, the Nuremberg Laws, and the Kristallnacht events, and then moved on to the fate of Jews under German occupation, presenting their isolation in ghettos, the activity of the Jewish Councils, “the mass murder of many millions of Jews” in extermination camps, the emergence of the Jewish resistance movement, which began in 1939, and the armed struggle in the Warsaw, Wilno (Vilnius), Białystok, Częstochowa, Będzin, Krzemieniec (Kremenets) ghettos, “and even in the death camp in Treblinka.”\(^9\)

He mentioned the award of the Virtuti Militari Cross to Mordechaj Anielewicz, by Stefan “Grot” Rowecki, AK Chief Commander. As in the earlier textbooks, a great deal of space was devoted to the Polish assistance to Jews and the activities of “Żegota.” However, the author did not indicate the ethnic background of most victims at Auschwitz and Treblinka: “About three million people of various nationalities died in Auschwitz-Birkenau.”\(^9\)

Genuine changes in teaching about the Holocaust were introduced by a reform of the education system initiated in the 1990s, or actually by the accompanying debate, in which the ways of presenting the history of Jews

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\(^{9}\) Ibid., p. 170.


\(^{9}\) Ibid., p. 222. The figure he provided was considerably overstated.
in Polish history textbooks were evaluated. The debate influenced the content of historical instruction.

Since the 1990s, more than one textbook has been recommended for any specific type of school. Tens of textbooks have been published and the choice has been left to the teachers. Almost all history textbooks presenting modern history also discuss the question of the Holocaust to varying degrees.

In terms of how the history of Jews and their extermination is presented, Polish history textbooks in the twentieth century can be divided into the following groups:

1) Those with comprehensive presentations of not only the Holocaust, but also the history of Jews in the II RP.
2) Those with selective presentations of the Holocaust, which do not provide a coherent picture of events, following PRL lines.
3) Those with fragmentary information on the fate of the Jewish population, discussing other subjects, such as the policies of the Third Reich in the occupied territories, and the ideological basis of Nazism.

A great number of textbooks, especially those in groups 2 and 3, suffer from deficiencies, such as factual errors or oversimplifications, and some contain questionable views. The length of the texts does not determine their factual or educational value. Extensive narratives are frequently too general, which may indicate that authors are not sufficiently acquainted with the subjects.

The number of factual errors in a very popular textbook published by the Operon publishing house is striking. Here is one of the most glaring examples: “Jewish ghettos were established in Polish territories, Lithuania, Latvia, Byelorussia, and Ukraine as early as autumn 1939,” which suggests


97 Bogumila Burda, Bohdan Halczak, Roman Maciej Józefiak, and Małgorzata Szymczak,
that the ghettos were also created by the Soviet authorities. Another example: “Extermination camps, such as Belzec or Chelmno, became mass murder sites for the Jewish, Polish, Romany, and Russian populations.”

The textbooks written by historians who conduct their own individual research on the Holocaust or Jewish history, and are active teachers, are among the most interesting and thorough. Two examples are the books by Anna Landau-Czajka and Włodzimierz Mędrzecki for the fourth form of primary school, and that by Mędrzecki and Robert Szuchta for lower secondary school, who devote a great deal of space to the history of ethnic minorities, not only Jews. The latter also describes the life of the Jewish population in the II RP, analyzes the ideological basis of Nazism and racism, and provides a thorough discussion of the successive stages of the Holocaust. All this content is presented in a clear and intelligible form.

The textbook for the third form of lower secondary school, Przez tysiąclecia i wieki, is also a model of accuracy. The authors made efforts to adapt information to the students’ age, including almost all the important events but without overloading the text with details. They managed to discuss racism, antisemitism, the Nuremberg Laws, and the events of Kristallnacht. A separate chapter is devoted to the fate of Jews during the Second World War.

Among textbooks for grammar schools, the one by Grzegorz Szymański and Piotr Trojański deserves special attention. The authors deal with subjects seldom presented in school textbooks. For example, they


Ibid., p. 172.


mention the civilian resistance of Jews, which took the forms of self-help, as well as cultural and educational activities in the ghettos. Another textbook presenting the fate of Jews in a thorough and accurate manner is by Andrzej Garlicki, one of the first authors to include a separate chapter on the Holocaust.103

Most of the textbooks follow a typical pattern and can be classified in group 2. They include separate chapters on the Holocaust, but the content is limited to enumeration of “extermination camps” and ghettos, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and the activities of “Żegota.” The narrative is frequently too general and the juxtaposition of several important, unconnected, events creates a simplified and chaotic picture of reality.

There are also some textbooks for grammar schools in which the subject of the Holocaust is only briefly mentioned, as in the long book by Jerzy Kochanowski and Przemysław Matusik. The authors conformed to the instructions in the core curriculum by not explaining the meaning of the term “Holocaust.”104 However, even an extensive definition cannot exhaust this topic, especially textbooks developed for higher-level instruction. Among other things, the authors failed to mention that Poland was the extermination site for all European Jews.

In teaching about the Holocaust, how to communicate the universal significance of this experience for human civilization, and select information and instruction methods appropriate to the students’ age are important challenges. A considerable obstacle, in this case, is the inadequate knowledge of the subject among most teachers, as well as some authors of textbooks, which results in factual errors, misleading expressions, a random selection of facts, and questionable interpretations of some events. The development and publication of educational materials and portfolios for teachers, particularly Robert Szuchta and Piotr Trojański’s textbook on the history of the Holocaust, are of great importance.105 These are normally used only by the most dedicated teachers. Hence, the only effective solution would be to extend the scope of Holocaust education in the universities.

105 Szuchta and Trojański, Holokaust, zrozumieć dlaczego.
Polish Literature Supporting Holocaust Education

Literary texts were and still are an important complement to the education on the Holocaust. Historical realities, including those of the Second World War, are presented in literary works covered in Polish literature textbooks and in required reading in Polish lessons. The subject of the Holocaust appears in those texts relatively frequently, but is not always given adequate attention by teachers and literary critics. The required reading lists in the 1940s, partly based on school requirements during the II RP, have only slightly changed.

The Second World War appeared as a topic in the Polish literature curriculum as early as 1946. Among other texts, students read fragments of *Kamienie na szaniec* (Stones for the Rampart) by Aleksander Kamiński. In the early 1950s, the experiences of the Second World War were presented mainly through the works of Soviet writers. Literature depicting the wartime fate of Poles had a much more limited representation, while the Holocaust only received marginal treatment. In the first form of grammar school, the curriculum only recommended reading sections of *Samson* by Kazimierz Brandys (the death of Jacob), and in the fourth form, the poem *Żydom polskim* (To Polish Jews) by Władysław Broniewski. In primary schools, teachers discussed the essay “Dorośli i dzieci w Oświęcimiu” (Adults and Children in Auschwitz) from the *Medaliony* (Medallions) collection by Zofia Nałkowska, placing emphasis on the martyrdom of the Poles, although the author also wrote about the mass murder sites of Jews.

Following the political “thaw” after Stalin’s death in 1953, and the “Polish October 1956,” some changes were made in the reading lists. The translations of Russian and Soviet works were reduced, and almost all socialist

108 *Plany godzin i programy przejściowe na rok szkolny 1946/47*, p. 191.
109 Franaszek, *Od Bieruta*, p. 94.
realist novels were removed. Instead, several titles suitable for young people, as well as some works depicting the struggle of Poles during the Second World War, were added.\textsuperscript{112} Brandys's \textit{Samson}, practically the only text concerning the Holocaust, among other things, disappeared from reading lists for several years. \textit{Bankructwo małego Dżeka} (Little Jack’s Bankruptcy) by Janusz Korczak was added to the list of novels to be read in the fifth form of primary school. Analysis of the text presented an opportunity to discuss the author’s biography, but it is difficult to determine whether and to what extent this was done. After the extension of primary education to eight years, several other titles dealing with the Second World War were added to reading lists. These selected works demonstrated the cruelty of German invaders, the tragic experiences of Poles, and the activity of the left-wing underground movement.\textsuperscript{113} Literature describing the fate of the Jewish population was practically omitted.

In the late 1950s, new titles were added to the reading list for grammar schools: short stories by Tadeusz Borowski, which referred to the Holocaust, and Roman Bratny’s novel \textit{Kolumbowie rocznik 20} (Generation of Columbuses 1920),\textsuperscript{114} in which there is a recurrent, veiled theme of Jews in hiding, including the eponymous Columbus, as well as episodically mentioned blackmailing, trade with the ghetto, and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The curriculum, however, did not require a classroom discussion of these themes, which was left to the teachers’ own initiative.

In the 1970s, the literature discussed in Polish lessons more and more frequently presented Polish heroism and the participation of Poles in fighting on all fronts in the Second World War, and not only on the Eastern front alongside the Red Army. Works devoted to the fate of the Jewish population were practically absent. Although young people read and analyzed Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński’s poems and Tadeusz Różewicz’s drama \textit{Kartoteka} (The Card Index), these works were not discussed in the context of the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{115}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112} \textit{Program nauczania w szkole podstawowej} (Warsaw: PZWS, 1959), p. 212.
\item \textsuperscript{114} \textit{Program nauczania liceum ogólnokształcącego klasy I–IV (tymczasowy)} (Warsaw: PZWS, 1966), p. 43.
\end{itemize}
As in the case of historical instruction, the political changes in the early 1980s constituted an important turning point. Only then was the Holocaust presented for the first time as a separate literary theme, and titles entirely devoted to the fate of the Jewish population were added to reading lists. Among them were two works relating to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: Czesław Miłosz’s poem *Campo di Fiori*, and Hanna Krall’s report *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* (To Steal a March on God), based on an interview with Marek Edelman.116 These were supplemented with Jerzy Ficowski’s poem *Sześcioletnia z getta żebrząca na Smolnej w 1942 roku* (A Six-Year-Old Girl From the Ghetto Begging in Smolna Street [in Warsaw] in 1942).117 Among the readings discussed at schools in the 1980s there were also some works by other authors indirectly alluding to the Holocaust, such as Borowski’s short stories and Różewicz’s poems *Warkocz* (The Pigtail) and *Ocalony* (The Saved One).118

The changes initiated in the 1980s continued on a wider scale in the following decade, after the emergence of the III RP. Many curricula and Polish literature textbooks were developed at that time. Today, the implementation of the curriculum depends primarily on the teacher’s discretion. However, many teachers, especially those educated under the PRL, continue to follow old formulas. The predominant readings in most schools, including those related to the Holocaust, are the same as in the 1980s. Students continue to discuss Borowski’s short stories, *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* and *Campo di Fiori*. Only seldom are other works presented, such as Zuzanna Ginczanka’s poem *Non omnis moria*, or fragments of Paweł Huelle’s novel *Weiser Dawidek* (Who Was David Weiser?).119 Baczyński’s and Różewicz’s are still analyzed, but only in the context of the literary output and experiences of the Columbus generation. Among Julian Tuwim’s works, students read *Kwiaty polskie* (Polish Flowers), but there was no place for *My, Żydzi polscy*120 (published in the English version, “We, Polish Jews,” in Jerusalem). Only the more ambitious syllabi recognize the Jewish religiousness and mysticism in Bruno Schulz’s works.121

117 *Franaszek, Od Bieruta*, p. 59.
120 Ibid., p. 64.
The Polish literature curricula, both past and present, have always recommended current literary criticism, theater performances, and movies. A relatively large number of movies devoted to the Second World War were made in the PRL. They were fairly homogeneous in character and, like historical instruction, they were meant to emphasize the Polish nation’s suffering. Only occasionally did they include episodes pertaining to the fate of Jews. Few movies have been entirely devoted to the subject of the ghettos and the Holocaust. Apart from the already mentioned *Ulica Graniczna* (Border Street), shot directly after the war, the following should be mentioned: *Samson* (1961), *Kartka z podróży* (A Postcard from the Journey, 1983), *Tragarz puchu* (Down Carrier, 1983), and the newer productions — *Korczak* (1990), *Wielki Tydzień* (Holy Week, 1993), *Daleko od okna* (Far from the Window, 2000). Some of these were only screened in selected movie theaters. In recent years, the movie *The Pianist*, directed by Roman Polański, enjoyed great popularity. It was an important complement to literary texts.

The Prospects for Holocaust Education in the Near Future

The minister of education approved new core curricula for all types of schools on December 23, 2008. Given the vague character of the recommendations available at the time, this document was long in coming, but was disappointing and met with wide criticism. There are many reservations especially concerning teaching the history of the twentieth century, including the Holocaust.

The subject taught in primary schools is “History and society.” Owing to the small number of history lessons, and the young age of students, modern history is discussed in a very superficial manner and usually without referring to the international context. It is not surprising, then, that the subject of the Holocaust appears to a very limited extent, only as part of a single subject, “Poland in the Second World War,” which aims to enable students to “describe life in the occupied territories, including the fate of the Jewish population.”

It is a matter of concern that modern history has been removed from the lower secondary school curriculum, which is the last level of compulsory

education. Questions associated with events later than 1918 are only discussed in grammar schools, technical secondary schools, and vocational schools. The core curriculum recommends the same syllabus content for all types of upper secondary schools, which is impractical on account of the limited number of history lessons in secondary technical schools and especially in vocational schools. What it amounts to is that students are presented with the full course of Polish and world history only once: from Antiquity until 1918, in the lower secondary schools, and: from 1918 until recent times, in the upper secondary schools (grammar schools, secondary technical schools, and vocational schools). Thus, the same subject is not studied in greater depth at higher levels of education. The situation is only slightly different in grammar schools implementing the extended history curriculum. There are strong reasons for concern that the new core curriculum will contribute to a significant deterioration of educational standards. In the context of education on the Holocaust, this is tantamount to nullifying the changes introduced in the late 1990s and at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The recommendations for secondary schools, which have been in effect since December 2008, are still rather vague and barely go beyond those included in the core curriculum for primary schools. It was only recommended that, while discussing “the Second World War, the student...is able to present the Holocaust and describes examples of the Jewish population’s resistance.” It still has not been specified precisely which information should be included in the classroom. The new core curriculum is more detailed in classes in which the extended history curriculum is implemented. Requirements for such classes were formulated as follows:

1) The policy of the Third Reich toward the peoples of occupied Europe,
including the Nazi plan to exterminate Jews and other nationalities and social groups; 2) The responses of Jews to the extermination policy, including the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and the attitudes of Polish society toward the extermination of Jews; 3) The attitudes of the Western world and the Catholic Church toward the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{125}

The extended history curriculum applies to the small proportion of students participating in grammar school classes specializing in humanities.

The changes resulting from the introduction of the new core curriculum will be fully implemented within six years from September 1, 2009. New syllabi and textbooks are still being developed. In the 2009/2010 school year, new syllabi were introduced in the first form of lower secondary schools. In the following years, they have been gradually introduced in successive forms in lower secondary schools, and, as of 2012/2013, in upper secondary schools as well. This is also the point at which the new manner of representing the history of the Second World War and the Holocaust will ultimately be announced. Some teachers and educators view this most recent Ministry of Education experiment with considerable skepticism. There are still ongoing debates, which may ultimately make it possible to continue the process of instituting comprehensive education on the Holocaust initiated ten years ago. This would make it possible to fulfill the international obligations of the Stockholm Declaration and membership in the International Task Force for Cooperation on Holocaust Education. Poland should play a particularly important role in these activities, because the extermination of European Jews largely took place on Polish territory and three million of the six million Jewish victims were Polish citizens.

At present, most syllabi and textbooks present the subject of the Holocaust in a fragmentary and haphazard manner. The aim should be not to write extensive chapters on the fate of Jews during the Second World War, but rather to create a synthetic module to enable students to learn basic facts and realize the magnitude and cruelty of those tragic events. Such a concise and informative module would require no more than 4–5 pages of text.

Textbooks should discuss the following points:

1) The meaning of the terms “Holocaust” and “Shoah.”
2) Theoretical assumptions of Nazism and racism.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p. 343.
3) The policy of the Third Reich toward Jews, the Nuremberg Laws, and Kristallnacht.
4) The distribution of the Jewish population in Europe and the II RP as Europe's largest Jewish population center.
5) The policy toward Jews in the occupied territories — differences in various parts of Europe.
6) Isolating the Jewish population — armbands and ghettos.
7) Mass executions — the Einsatzgruppen operations.
8) Mass extermination centers and their function.
9) Reasons for locating extermination centers in the General Government (Treblinka, Sobibór, Belżec, and Majdanek) and in territories annexed to the Third Reich (Kulmhof and Auschwitz-Birkenau).
10) The Jewish resistance movement — armed struggle.
11) The civilian resistance movement — self-help, cultural, scholarly, educational, and documentative activity.
12) The diversity of attitudes in Polish society and the Polish underground movement toward the Holocaust and the situation in ghettos.
13) The reaction of the western Allies to the reports on the Holocaust.
14) The overall outcome of the Holocaust.

It is hoped that success in these objectives becomes part of the ongoing reform in the education system. This would make it possible for historical instruction to be a source of universal moral and cultural values, and to promote a multifaceted approach to Polish history in society.
Holocaust Consciousness among Polish Youth after the 1989 Collapse of Communism

JOLANTA AMBROSEWICZ-JACOBS

Introductory Notes

The Nazi planners of the extermination of European Jews chose occupied Poland as the execution site. Given the extent of this mass murder, it inevitably has become part of the historical consciousness of young Poles and affects their collective identity. This article considers Holocaust consciousness in Poland among young people and its determinants. Young people are assumed to be not merely passive objects of socialization, but also involved in social change and, thus, their education is a significant task in modern societies. According to Erik Erikson, during the period of youth, personal history intersects with history. The Holocaust, owing to its dramatic consequences for human civilization and morality, cannot be allowed to become a remote historical fact for young people, like, for instance, the Napoleonic Wars. Education, along with the media, political debate, national culture, literature, and film, is assumed to be a major determinant of young people's consciousness. In turn, education is affected by family function, peer influence, state institutions, public administration, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

According to sociological research conducted in 1959 and 1988, non-symbolic reality, primarily parents’ and grandparents’ memories, was the main source of information and attitudes with respect to Jews for young people. Further research is needed to determine the extent to which this information is processed and internalized by young people.

people. As research carried out in the first decade of the twenty-first century shows, television, film, and radio (77 percent in the survey by Ireneusz Krzemiński in 2002, and 74 percent in the 2008 survey by the author’s team), as well as books, newspapers, and magazines (64 percent and 52 percent, respectively), were the main sources of information about the Jews among young Poles at those times, whereas conversations in the family only constituted 27 percent and 28 percent, respectively. School was a source of information about Jews for 46 percent of respondents in Krzemiński’s 2002 research (and for 49 percent in 2008). In Marek Kucia’s 2000 survey, school was mentioned by as many as 63 percent of students, and the family by 44 percent, as sources of information about the Auschwitz concentration camp. On the one hand, in late 1994 and early 1995, in a survey of 24-year-olds conducted by the Demoskop Polling Institution for the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the influence of school was mentioned by 90 percent, the family by 20 percent, the media by 94 percent, and books by 82 percent. On the other hand, in a survey of a group of high school students in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki in 2003, none of them mentioned school as a source of information about the town’s Jewish past. These results suggest that the

4 I. Krzemiński, ed., Antysemityzm w Polsce i na Ukrainie. Raport z badań (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2004); Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, “Badanie antysemityzmu i postaw wobec Holokaustu wśród młodzieży polskiej,” typescript of a research project initiated in 2008 at the Center for Holocaust Studies, the Jagiellonian University (CBH UJ), co-financed by the International Task Force for Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF), Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah, and the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. The research includes a national survey carried out on a representative sample of 1,000 17- to 18-year-old high school students, carried out ten years after the first survey in 1998. Both the 1998 and 2008 national surveys were carried out by the CEM Market & Public Opinion Research Institute, Kraków.

5 Krzemiński, Antysemityzm w Polsce i na Ukrainie. Further in this article, the 1998 and 2008 studies refer to research by Ambrosewicz-Jacobs in “Badanie antysemityzmu,” while the 2002 research is Krzemiński’s research in Antysemityzm w Polsce.


7 Jennifer Golub and Renae Cohen, Knowledge and Remembrance of the Holocaust in Poland. Working Papers on Contemporary Antisemitism (New York: AJC, 1995), p. 16. The author would like to thank Professor Antoni Sulek for drawing her attention to this source.

8 Dorota Szumska, “Nieobecni w świadomości współczesnych. Żydzi Nowego Dworu Mazowieckiego a dzisiejsza pamięć o nich wśród miejscowych licealistów” (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2003), typescript, p. 72. The author would like to thank Professor Małgorzata Melchior for providing access to her student’s master’s thesis.
research methods largely determine the respondents’ answers. Therefore, in order to provide a picture of young people’s consciousness of the Holocaust, it is important to compare data from different sources and levels: official declarations and state commitments, publications, syllabuses, and textbooks, on the one hand, with the results of research on young people’s knowledge and attitudes about the Holocaust, on the other. Concrete activities undertaken in this area by young Poles in their communities should also be considered.

This article aims to look at Holocaust consciousness and the factors affecting it, as expressed in young people’s opinions and activities, from various perspectives. The first includes empirical research of attitudes toward the Holocaust. Another deals with the official Polish state commitments on Holocaust education, based on Poland’s membership in international organizations, including comparison of the state political commitments with existing formal education practices. This article also looks at the activities of NGOs mainly, though not exclusively, in informal education, with the reservation that, in many Holocaust remembrance projects, in practice, the scope of “formal” and “informal” education overlaps. Another perspective involves the influence of teachers as social actors on young people’s attitudes toward the Holocaust. Apart from Sweden’s Living History Forum, very few countries have carried out complex research into teachers’ knowledge and attitudes on the Holocaust.

9 Face-to-face interviews create a different research environment than telephone surveys (the technique of collecting data most often used by polling institutions) or anonymous surveys conducted in class. The telephone samples, controlled by gender, age, level of education, and other variables, are samples of people who stay at home at the time of polling and like to answer questions by phone.

10 The projects presented here are only examples of very intensive educational activities in Poland involved in teaching about the history of Jews, including Holocaust memory. They do not necessarily represent the most significant initiatives, but rather those genuine grassroots activities undertaken by local communities, frequently in small towns, far from academic centers.

11 Anders Lange, *An Attitude Survey of Teachers. Experiences and Perceptions in Relation to Teaching about the Holocaust* (Stockholm: The Living History Forum, 2008). The author would like to thank researchers from the Living History Forum for sharing their research results.

12 In Poland, Marek Kucia carried out the survey of teachers; see idem, *Auschwitz jako fakt*.
Assumptions, Concepts, Definitions, Problem Formulation, and Research Questions

Consciousness (the internal reflection of reality) is not limited to knowledge alone. It also includes ideas, notions, attitudes, worldviews, and values, as well as fears, anxieties, ambiguities, and predispositions. According to Émile Durkheim, social consciousness is independent of the sum or average consciousness of individuals belonging to a given group.13 According to Yehuda Bauer, for the historian, in the context of the Holocaust, “It [awareness] means receiving, and then accepting, internalizing, and finally understanding factual information. Ideally, this should lead to what may be called knowledge, and that should, again ideally, lead to appropriate action.”14

This article presents young people’s attitudes and the associated conflicts, initiatives addressed to the young, as well as their own activities stimulated by factors that are not always rationally explicable, alluding to numerous questions young Poles (middle, high school, and university students, approximately 15–25 years of age) have been asking Holocaust survivors in recent years,15 their choice of university majors, the subjects of master’s theses, and traineeships or positions in NGOs preserving Holocaust memory. Perhaps some young people put questions to survivors because they did not ask their grandparents and parents about these issues, while, in most cases, such choices and activities spring from moral impulses and simple curiosity, often without any conscious motives. Whether generated by discomfort, cognitive dissonance, sense of responsibility for others, or other reasons, these questions, choices, and actions help strengthen their social consciousness.

Memory, which consists of a socially shared perception of the past, involves selection and interpretation.16 Theory stresses that memory is a

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15 For example, as part of the “Memory for the Future” project, developed by the “Children of the Holocaust” Association and the National In-Service Teacher Training Center.
process of constructing meanings and experiences with the use of cognitive patterns and narration models provided by culture, including the media. At present, Polish society is in the process of (re)constructing Holocaust memory, and empirical research carried out more than 50 years after the Holocaust (in 1995, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2005, and 2008) reveals conflicts with the memories young people “inherited” from their family members, who were witnesses of the Holocaust in occupied Poland.

Among the research questions still worth considering 60 years after the Holocaust are the following: 1) Is it possible to integrate Holocaust memory into the younger Polish generation’s collective memory? 2) Is Polish youth conscious of the scale of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust? 3) To what extent do generational changes affect Holocaust consciousness? 4) How effective are the educational activities concerning the history and memory of the Holocaust? 5) Can young people, given their limited knowledge and temporal distance from the event, really contribute to changed attitudes toward the Holocaust? 6) Does research among Polish youth confirm Charles Maier’s concept of mutually exclusive memories, i.e., different kinds of remembering in “communities of memory”? 7) Are political declarations and commitments of the Polish state concerning Holocaust education and remembrance put into practice? 8) Has the state’s role in the area of Holocaust education been taken over by NGOs in Poland, or are their activities complementary? 9) Does the history of the Holocaust exist in the institutional memory, e.g., in Polish schools? 10) It is also worth recalling the question posed by Kucia: Is a positive educational effect, including the effect of a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau (Kucia’s research from 2000 and 2005), short-term and superficial in view of the national survey conducted by Krzemiński in adult Poles in 1992 and 2002, which revealed an increase in antisemitism? Finally, two rhetorical questions: 11) How many teachers

18 The author would like to thank Professor Antoni Sulek for suggesting this question.
21 Krzemiński, Antysemityzm w Polsce.
take children and young people to the sites associated with the Holocaust rather than claiming they lack the time to do this? 12) In how many areas in Poland are such sites marked and made known to young Poles?

Problems and Challenges Relating to Holocaust Consciousness in Poland

The almost universal collective amnesia about the Holocaust after the fall of Communism affecting several generations of Poles was not unique to Poland. Except for discussions of some Polish intellectuals and the memory of Polish Jews, there was no awareness concerning Jewish contribution to history and culture of Poland. Students did not learn in schools almost anything about a Jewish past in Poland, including the Holocaust. The amnesia was a cumulative effect of such factors as the historical policy of Communist authorities; painful memories associated with the sense of helplessness Polish society experienced in the face of the Holocaust; Poles living in Jewish houses or having seized Jewish property; and shame about the hostile behavior of some of their co-nationals toward their Jewish neighbors. Such Polish writers and intellectuals as Jerzy Putrament, Kazimierz Wyka, Jerzy Andrzejewski, and Stanisław Ossowski described the moral dilemmas of Poles after the Holocaust in the immediate post-war period. Jan Tomasz Gross recently recalled the Holocaust’s beneficiaries in his book *Fear*:

And after the war..., a tacit social agreement was made — naturally, it was never articulated, but it was confirmed by experience, everyday practice, language used by simple people and officials, pejorative popular notions about Jews, in which people found something suitable for every occasion — to mothball the whole “Jewish issue” in the most general sense.22

The destruction of entire Jewish quarters in Warsaw, Lublin, and many other cities and towns made it easier for society to forget. “The history of Jews and their destruction has not always occupied its rightful place in history education in schools, and, consequently, in Polish society’s collective consciousness,” according to Robert Szuchta, co-author of the first Polish syllabus and

textbook on the Holocaust. This gap in the school curriculum was only partially filled since the early 1950s by the Polish literature syllabus, including *Dymy nad Birkenau* (Smoke over Birkenau) by Seweryna Szmaglewska (1945); *Medaliony* (Medallions) by Zofia Nałkowska (1946); *Pożegnanie z Marią* (Farewell to Maria) by Tadeusz Borowski (1948); and poems by Tadeusz Różewicz (*Warkoczyk* (Pigtail), 1948) and Władysław Broniewski (*Na mojej ziemi był Oświęcim* (Auschwitz Was on My Land), 1949. To some extent, social consciousness was also influenced by movies.

For many years, the post-war collective memories of the Jews and Poles followed different paths based on their respective views of their mutual relations during the war. Using Tzvetan Todorov’s term, it is possible to say that history was rewritten when the “management team” changed. Historical consciousness of elites began to take shape in the second half of the 1980s. Even after transformation of the political system in 1989, the Holocaust narrative in school textbooks was initially scarce, reflecting the range of attitudes in Polish society toward the destruction of Jews in a limited and very incomplete fashion. This situation began to improve only in the second half of the 1990s. However, consciousness of the Holocaust in the collective memory of ethnic Poles does not always keep pace with newly available information.

Several educational projects, aimed at changing this situation, have been conducted mainly by NGOs and various academic institutions: the Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny — ŻIH) in Warsaw, the “Children of the Holocaust” Association, the Center for Citizenship


24 The subject of the Holocaust in Polish textbooks is discussed in Hanna Węgrzynek’s article, “The Presentation of the Holocaust in Polish History Textbooks from 1945 to 2010,” in this volume.


27 For more information about textbooks, see Hanna Węgrzynek’s article, “The Presentation of the Holocaust in Polish History Textbooks from 1945 to 2010,” in this volume.
Education, the Grodzka Gate Center — NN Theater in Lublin, the Borderland Foundation in Sejny, as well as many others. However, there is still no community of memory or common narrative. Holocaust memory is not universally represented in political debates and media, except on anniversaries. It also does not occupy a significant place in education, despite the minister of education’s order of May 21, 2001, on the core curriculum (Dziennik Ustaw No. 61, item 625), which requires middle and high schools to include information on Jewish culture and history in Polish language and history classes. The widespread debates following the publication of Jan Tomasz Gross’s books Sąsiedzi (Neighbors) in 2000 and Strach (Fear) in 2008 were exceptions.

Until 1989, the Holocaust tended to be either universalized or treated as a taboo topic in education. The education system, controlled by the authorities, was ideologized and centralized. The subject of the Holocaust was brought up only occasionally at schools. The Jewish victims of Nazi camps were seldom mentioned. Young people were taught that those who had died in the camps were Poles and prisoners “of many different nationalities.” The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau — PMAB), often on school trip itineraries, was presented as a site of national Polish martyrdom, and not as a place where mainly Jews had been murdered.

Between 1989 and 2000, the number of visitors to Auschwitz-Birkenau decreased, but since 2001, it has been steadily increasing. While there was a decrease of visitors from Poland, this did not apply to young people. The State Museum at Majdanek (Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku — PMM) noted a similar decrease in the number of visitors between 1989 (262,331 visitors, including 188,597 from Poland) and 2000 (93,855 visitors, including 62,271 from Poland), but there has been an increase since 2004.

28 Marek Kucia, Auschwitz jako fakt, p. 47.
29 See Sławomir Kapralski’s article, “The Role Played by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Public Discourse and the Evolving Consciousness of the Holocaust in Polish Society” and Robert Kuwałek’s article, “Concentration Camps and Death Camps As Memorial Sites to Jewish Victims or Mutual Polish-Jewish Martyrdom Sites,” in this volume.
30 In 2000, a decrease was also noted in the number of school trips to other museums, e.g., the Royal Chambers of the Wawel Castle. This was among the results of the education system reforms introducing new final examination formats during the traditional period of school trips in the spring; see Kucia, Auschwitz jako fakt, p. 66.
31 Ibid., p. 68.
32 The author would like to thank Maria Wiśnioch from the PMM for the data from Sprawozdania Działu Oświatowego za lata 1989–1994, Sprawozdania Roczne z działalności
Between 2005 and 2008, the number of visitors also increased at the Museum of Combat and Martyrdom in Treblinka (Muzeum Martyrologii i Walki), reaching a peak in 2007.

Since 1989, and more markedly after 2000, the author’s team observed (re)construction of Holocaust memory among young people — and frequently at their initiative. NGOs increasingly play an important role in the process of identifying the darkest pages in the history of Poland and the Poles, which have been avoided until now, thereby attempting to fill the gap between academic circles and society at large. Projects undertaken by various organizations often cross the boundaries between formal and informal education. Informal education frequently reaches a wider audience, for example, the Festival of Jewish Culture in Kraków, since 1988; the Festival of Dialog of Four Cultures in Łódź, since 2002; the Festival of Jewish Culture — Singer’s Warsaw, since 2004; Encounters with Jewish Culture in Chmielnik, since 2003, and in Pińczów and Szydłów, both in the Świętokrzyskie voivodeship; and the Jewish Culture Days in Olsztyn, since 2007, Bielsko-Biała, since 2008, and in many other places.

These events are organized by local governments, teachers, and young people. In the growing number of projects concerning Holocaust memory in educational institutions and public space, the Holocaust is perceived as part of Polish and European history, as well as particular regions and places. For many Poles, memory of Jewish cultural heritage constitutes a significant element of their identity, as one Chmielnik resident put it:

With the annihilation of 3.5 million Jews, the Poles lost part of their heritage forever. Our country became homogeneous, and we are understanding this only now, after many years. Jews will never settle in Poland again. But we should be proud that they used to live here with us. This is the only chance of preserving our...Polish identity. As a nation, we do not exist without the Jews.


34 www.4kultury.pl (accessed, July 2, 2013).
37 Students from Olsztyn and volunteers from Poland, Russia, and Germany clean up the Jewish cemetery before the Jewish Culture Days in Olsztyn.
Young People’s Attitudes toward the Holocaust

Few random national surveys on young people’s knowledge about the Holocaust have been carried out in Poland. Such surveys are also lacking in many other countries, except for the Living History Forum in Sweden, as mentioned above. However, Kucia carried out research among teachers and students on the Auschwitz concentration camp’s place in Polish historical memory and social consciousness. By contrast, the attitudes toward the Holocaust in Poland have been a subject of research on the national scale. According to most theories, they consist of three components: the cognitive (beliefs and opinions), affective aspects (emotions), and specific behavioral predispositions. This article presents the results of surveys on attitudes toward the Holocaust carried out among Polish youth in 1998 and other panel research in selected groups in 1998, 2000, and 2008, as well as results of longitudinal research in three experimental and control groups. For the sake of comparison, selected distributions of responses from the national survey conducted for the AJC in early 1995, Krzemiński’s research on a group of 173 respondents under 25 years of age in 2002, and from the author’s research in 2008 are presented.

In 2006, longitudinal research was carried out in three rural schools near Glasgow, Scotland, to investigate the effect of teaching about the Holocaust on civic attitudes and values, with particular reference to minorities in Scotland. See www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/06133626/1 (accessed, July 11, 2009).


On the basis of the 1998 survey results, it is impossible to create a scale of attitudes toward the Holocaust (Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.235 is unsatisfactory). Hence, only the distribution of responses to particular questions can be analyzed.

The surveys in 1998 and 2000 were financed by the Open Society Institute (grant RSS 122/98) and the Jagiellonian University (grants CRBW 1999, 2000, and 2001).

The surveys in 1998 and 2000 involved a randomly selected sample of 1,002 students. They were conducted using a questionnaire with 78 questions (14 of which were open-ended). The questionnaire included nine other questions relating to the respondents’ sex, age, residence, type of school, school marks, parents’ education, religion, religiousness, and church attendance. The questionnaire was completed voluntarily in classrooms of 93 randomly selected high schools in ten regions of Poland.

Golub and Cohen, *Knowledge and Remembrance of the Holocaust in Poland*.

Krzemiński, *Antysemityzm w Polsce*. The author would like to thank Mikołaj Winiewski from the University of Warsaw’s Center for Research on Prejudice for the statistical analysis of the research results in this group of young people.

The 2008 research, meant to be as similar as possible to the 1998 study, involved a randomly selected group of 1,000 students. The questionnaire, including 63 questions
Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska conducted a short survey about the Holocaust among the participants of her graduate seminar on problems with Holocaust representation in American film and literature, hoping that her students, who graduated from high schools in the 1990s, would be more familiar with the subject than those from the two previous decades. Although the handbooks used in high schools were revised and supplemented after 1989, the students’ knowledge about the Holocaust was inadequate. Only one out of more than ten students could answer most of the questions concerning, for example, a brief definition of the Holocaust or the Umschlagplatz, and identify Anne Frank or Jan Karski.

As the AJC-commissioned research showed, in early 1995, 41 percent of adult Poles and 38 percent of those aged between 20 and 24 were familiar with the term “Holocaust,” while 48 percent and 54 percent, respectively, were not. Kucia’s research suggests that the proportion of young people who are able to explain the term “Holocaust” is increasing, with 40 percent of correct responses to an open-ended question in 2005, as compared to 24 percent five years earlier. In the 2008 survey carried out by the author’s team, 33 percent of young Poles (almost 45 percent of the high school students (children aged between 13 and 16 — translator’s note), but only 14 percent of those in vocational schools) correctly answered the question about the meaning of the term “Holocaust.” It is a matter of concern that, despite systemic changes in teaching about the Holocaust in Polish schools and numerous educational initiatives by NGOs and individual teachers, a sizeable proportion of students, i.e., 39 percent of the national sample, still did not know the meaning of the term (66 percent of vocational school students).

On the one hand, in the survey conducted for the AJC in 1995, 25 percent of young people aged between 20 and 24 (as compared with 34 percent of the adult Polish population) knew the total number of Jews killed during the Holocaust, but only ten percent of them were aware of

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48 Golub and Cohen, Jews in a New Europe.
49 Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, “Badanie antysemityzmu.” The term “Zagłada,” unfortunately, was not included in the questionnaire.
50 In this survey by Golub and Cohen, the proportion of correct responses among adult
the correct proportion of Polish Jews murdered (90 percent). On the other
hand, in the 2008 research, 55 percent, over half of the respondents, who
were asked about the number of Jews killed during the Second World War,
answered that they did not know (surprisingly, as many as 52 percent of
high school students). The correct response was given by 14 percent of
those polled (18 percent in high schools). Asked who were the most nu-
merous victims in Auschwitz, the vast majority of students answered “Jews”
(47 percent); however, girls were more likely than boys to choose the re-
response “It is not important which group: All those murdered were human
beings.”

In the AJC-commissioned survey of 1995, 77 percent of young people
aged between 20 and 24 (as compared with 86 percent of the adult popula-
tion) considered knowledge about the Holocaust to be very important for
Poles. An equally high proportion of positive responses to this question
was only noted in France. A total of 88 percent of respondents in the 1998
sample (as compared to 93 percent of all students, including 96 percent
from the high schools and 88 percent from the vocational schools ten years
later) agreed with the statement that knowledge about the crimes commit-
ted in Auschwitz-Birkenau should be passed on to future generations as a
lesson for humanity. In the first stage of the research, in 1998, this statement
was confirmed by a higher proportion of students (96 percent) from experi-
mental classes whose syllabuses had been extended beyond the obligatory
minimum so as to encourage students’ openness to national and religious
minorities. In the second stage of the survey, two years later, in 2000, this
statement was confirmed by 99 percent of those students as well as by all
those in special program classes, with teaching extending beyond the core
curriculum, in Warsaw and Kraków. According to these data, young Poles
are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of knowledge about
the Holocaust. Nevertheless, in the 1998 survey, 31 percent of respondents
from the national sample stated they were not disturbed by, or ashamed of,
anti-Jewish graffiti (as compared to 24 percent in 2008), whereas only six
percent of the students in special program classes gave this response (none
of them from the Warsaw class). Students in the special program classes
seem to demonstrate a greater awareness of these issues.

According to responses in the 1998 survey, 13 percent of those polled
Poles was lower than in the USA, Great Britain, France, and Australia. The only similar
data were from Germany and the USA (36 percent of respondents in Germany and 35
percent in the USA gave the correct figure of six million Jewish victims).
(eight percent of high school students, 21 percent of vocational school students, and only two special program students) believed that “many crimes in Auschwitz and other concentration camps never really happened” (in 2008, the figures were only five percent of all students and two percent of those from high schools). In both the first and second stage of the survey, none of the students in the special program classes in Kraków and Warsaw expressed any doubt that the genocide had actually taken place. According to the survey conducted for the AJC in 1995, only one percent of young people admitted the possibility that the Holocaust might never have happened, four percent said they did not know, and 95 percent were convinced that it happened. The distribution of responses among adult Poles was very similar. Since the statements and choices of responses were differently constructed and formulated, it is difficult to compare the results relating to Holocaust denial to those from other surveys among young people, and those carried out in other countries. For the sake of comparison, in representative surveys conducted in Sweden, the proportions of young people who were certain or almost certain that the Holocaust had taken place were 85 percent in 1997 and 83 percent in 2004 (as compared with 80 percent of young people in Poland in 2008).

As Henryk Grynberg stated in 1997, young Poles attended his meetings following publication of his new works because of the “inherited” anxiety about the Jewish tragedy from previous generations who observed it, adding that it was difficult for young people to deal with that heritage, which caused them suffering. Some Polish youth take an interest in Jewish history and culture in Poland by attending lectures and movie screenings on these subjects and consciously accepting them as elements of their own cultural heritage (in 2008, Holocaust memory was personally important to 38 percent of all respondents and to 46 percent of high school students). Others deal with the anxiety and cognitive dissonance associated with the history of the Holocaust by denial.

In AJC-commissioned research in 1995, 54 percent of young people and 49 percent of the adult population interviewed thought the Poles had

done enough to help Jews. The opposite view was expressed by 18 percent of the young and 15 percent of the adult respondents. Fourteen percent of young people and almost twice as many adults (26 percent) believed that Poles had done as much as they possibly could under the circumstances. Respondents most frequently answered the following question in a national survey: “Do you think that Poles helped Jews during the war?” with “Yes — as much as they could” (46 percent and 52 percent in 1998 and 2008, respectively), or “It is difficult to say” (43 percent and 31 percent in 1998 and 2008, respectively). Only nine percent of the students surveyed in 1998 (29 percent from the experimental classes) and 11 percent of those surveyed in 2008 responded, “They could have done more,” while two percent of students in both surveys chose the response, “They did not help them at all.” In Krzemiński’s 2002 research, after the debate over Jedwabne, more young people, i.e., almost 80 percent, answered the above question affirmatively, and 14 percent responded, “They could have done more,” while only four percent of those polled chose, “It is difficult to say.”

Views as to whether Poles could have rescued more Jews during the war were equally polarized in 1998, 2002, and 2008. However, in the 1998 survey, more than half of the young people were not sure or did not respond, while in 2002, this dropped to 16 percent. Moreover, in 1998, 22 percent of students claimed, with conviction or a certain hesitation, that Poles could not have saved more Jews, while in 2008, the number of respondents with this view rose to 28 percent. In 2008, the most frequently chosen response, 46 percent of the total, was “It is difficult to say.” About 25 percent of those polled believed that Poles could have saved more Jews, and 28 percent thought the opposite. The distribution of responses in different types of schools are very similar. In the 2002 research, over 50 percent of young people thought that President Kwaśniewski had been right to apologize to Jews for the massacre in Jedwabne (58 percent), but as many as 65 percent agreed with the view, “Poles generally have a clean conscience.” Undoubtedly, students should be taught more and in a better way about mutual Polish-Jewish relations in the past, which should enable them to understand the attitudes of Poles toward Jews during the Holocaust.

The inconsistency of responses relating to the Holocaust can be explained by the students’ lack of knowledge on the subject and emotions stemming from patriotism and attachment to the idea of Poland’s special historical role. Another reason for inconsistency may be socially inherited conflicts raised by the Holocaust and defensive mechanisms aimed at denying them. The data obtained in the surveys can also be interpreted as
an expression of a peculiar rivalry for moral superiority between the two nations, which would support a thesis proposed by a team of Warsaw researchers headed by Krzemiński, also put forward by Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania (who studied attitudes of Poles toward other nations), Marcin Kula, and Zdzisław Mach.

Due to the fact that Poland was deprived of its statehood for more than 100 years, Poles have integrated the sense of martyrdom and the memory of the heroic struggle into their national consciousness. The traces of this conviction about national suffering are still present in schools today. The suffering of Jews remains taboo for many respondents, although with time, according to some surveys, young Poles apparently tend to acknowledge that the Jewish people’s suffering was greater than the Polish people’s: 37 percent of respondents agreed with this statement in 2002, and 20 percent in 2008. However, the number of young people claiming that Poles suffered more than Jews decreased almost by half, with 31 percent responding, “It is difficult to compare.” In 2002, most young people (46 percent) thought that “both peoples suffered to the same extent,” while, in 2008, 28 percent of students expressed this opinion. As Michael Steinlauf and Feliks Tych point out, the situation of Jews during the German occupation differed qualitatively from that of ethnic Poles, and their fate was fundamentally different, a fact that Polish youth apparently did not learn in the course of their education in school. Research results demonstrate that young Poles are not aware of the unique character of the Holocaust. They are also consistent with the thesis that they fear acknowledging another nation had greater losses and

suffering than theirs, lest this would belittle their own. In 1998, 51 percent of the respondents in the national sample (60 percent ten years later) responded negatively when asked whether Jews deserved special treatment because of their losses and suffering during the war.

In explaining students’ inconsistency in responses relating to the Holocaust, the developmental factor should also be considered, i.e., the students surveyed were aged between 16 and 18, a period of change in both their personal image and social perspectives. The reasons the respondents gave for some people’s anti-Jewish attitudes are also important: Among them were “negative opinions about Jews in the environment” (64 percent and 78 percent of the responses in 1998 and 2008, respectively); “conflicts from the past” (52 percent and 50 percent in 1998 and 2008); “some people’s aversion to foreigners” (50 percent and 60 percent in 1998 and 2008); and “lack of direct contact with Jews” (47 percent and 50 percent in 1998 and 2008).59

The cliché of searching for a scapegoat — blaming Jews for all evil, including the bubonic plague in the distant past and the rise of Communism in more recent times — was not chosen as the most common reason for anti-Jewish attitudes. “The responsibility of Jews themselves for such attitudes” constituted 14 percent and 12 percent of all choices in 1998 and 2008, respectively. Therefore, students seem to repeat the opinions heard at home or in the media, which are not necessarily deeply rooted, and hence their inconsistent responses.

A careful look at the distribution of responses to questions relating to the Holocaust, both in 1998 and ten years later, indicates persistent conflicts between the realization of the need to teach about the Holocaust, on the one hand, and indifference toward anti-Jewish graffiti on the other, and between the perception of Polish assistance for Jews and the competitive juxtaposition of Polish and Jewish suffering during the war.

A finding that raises concern in the pilot survey conducted in 1997 in selected schools of the Małopolskie voivodeship was that almost one-third (33 percent) of the children surveyed in an elementary school located in the vicinity of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp denied the crimes committed there.60 Conflicts about the camp and the oppressive and considerable tension caused by the unwanted presence of the Holocaust site in their

59 They could choose one or more out of nine possible responses, or express their own opinions.

hometown seem to have led to denial as a defense mechanism. Some local politicians skilfully manipulate these emotions in society, creating conflicts and tensions. In the same pilot research, a statement denying the crimes committed in Auschwitz and other camps was rejected by 100 percent of university candidates and all students from the experimental classes.

Disagreement with the view that the Holocaust is not important at present — because it happened over 60 years ago — expressed by over half of all surveyed students (65 percent of high school students) is a positive finding in the 2008 survey. The fact that nearly one in three students surveyed was pleased that there were fewer Jews in Poland than before the war (44 percent of vocational school students) is cause for concern. The prevailing opinion among the other respondents (41 percent) was that the smaller number of Jews was neither positive nor negative. One in four students did not express an opinion.

In 2008, 38 percent of students responded “I don’t know,” and 34 percent responded affirmatively to the question “Did Jews live in your town before the war?” One in five students answered that they were not interested in this subject, and about 50 percent claimed that Jews once lived in their town and left various things behind. A considerable proportion either knew nothing about the topic or were not interested in it.

As most recent research demonstrates, there are some positive changes in knowledge about and attitudes toward the Holocaust. However, there is a danger that students’ consciousness with regard to it may become limited to bare historical facts or repetition of certain general statements without deeper understanding of the essence of the phenomenon and the losses to Poland and Polish culture. Despite numerous initiatives in local communities, a considerable proportion of young people did not seem to realize that Holocaust victims, apart from the Jews deported to extermination camps in Poland from other European countries, were also Polish citizens living in Polish cities, towns, and villages. Qualitative research would be required to confirm or reject the above hypothesis.

**International Institutions and Activities**

This article also focuses on the activities of groups organized around certain values, and initiatives aimed at reviving or creating Holocaust memory. It would be interesting to study the effects of international and transnational politics (UN, EU, and OSCE) on Holocaust education in Poland and
analyze the extent to which educational policies of these international organizations influence educational practices in school classes.

In 2004, as part of the European Council’s initiative, “Teaching Remembrance — Education to Prevent Crimes against Humanity,” the Stockholm Declaration by the International Task Force for Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF), currently the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), and after the minister of education’s decision, Poland introduced Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes against Humanity Day, on April 19, which is the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Earlier, the Ministry of Education announced a competition for a suggestion of the best way to celebrate Remembrance Day. In 2007, the UN declared January 27, the anniversary of the Auschwitz camp’s liberation, as the date of International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Polish membership of the ITF, which Poland headed in 2005, gave rise to an increase in the number of projects devoted to Holocaust education and remembrance.

Signing by Poland of the Stockholm Declaration helped to persuade the Ministry of Education to provide partial funding for the publication of the Holocaust education syllabus by Robert Szuchta and Piotr Trojański in April 2000. For the first time, the school curriculum treated the Holocaust not merely as an episode in the history of Poland, but as a distinct event of universal significance.

In response to growing antisemitism in Europe, the Permanent OSCE Council issued a decision (Permanent Council Decision No. 607 of April 22, 2004) requiring member countries to intensify educational activities aimed at counteracting antisemitism and increasing Holocaust remembrance activities such as the annual Holocaust Day celebrations. In June 2006, Holocaust victims were commemorated by 39 out of 56 member countries, including Poland. Poland also had a representative among the experts from 12 countries in the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights team, which, in cooperation with Yad Vashem — The Holocaust Martyrs’

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61 The signing of the Stockholm Declaration by Poland also resulted in a greater number of Holocaust education and remembrance initiatives.
62 Thanks to the financial support from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, a free publication for teachers, Dlaczego należy uczyć o Holokauście (Why We Should Teach about the Holocaust) was prepared in Poland (Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Leszek Hondo, eds., Krakow: Judaica Foundation, 2004). Altogether, 75,000 Polish and English copies of this book were printed.
and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority, developed recommendations for educators on how to organize Holocaust remembrance days. The document provides guidance on organizing remembrance days by presenting examples of successful initiatives from 12 countries, including Poland.

Holocaust remembrance days and weeks are organized by many Polish schools. For example, students in Szydłowiec in the Mazowieckie voivodeship took part in Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes against Humanity Day as part of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland project by preparing the exhibition “Didn’t I Behave...?” devoted to child Holocaust victims, and by participating in lessons about the fate of children during the Holocaust. In these lessons, individual students wrote letters to a child of their choice, and some of them also cleaned up the local Jewish cemetery, among other activities.

The OSCE, in cooperation with the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and experts from seven European countries, also prepared and published educational materials on the history of Jews and antisemitism. By the minister of Education’s decision, these materials have been added to the list of didactic tools recommended for history teaching in elementary and middle schools.

**Academic Institutions**

Several universities and other academic centers offer studies on Jewish history and culture, including the Holocaust. Courses at Jagiellonian University’s Interdepartmental Center for the Study of Jewish History and Culture

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63 The recommendations are available on the ODIHR website: www.osce.org/odihr/17827 (accessed, July 2, 2013).
64 The Polish-German Center in Kraków and the International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust at the PMAB in Oświęcim were the Polish partners in the project. The Polish versions of the materials were launched during a conference combined with methodological workshops at the National In-Service Teacher Training Center, attended by the minister of education.
65 Recommendation no. 2335/2008. In 2008, the Ministry of Education co-financed the third part of the publication project, a methodological guide, as well as reprints of parts one and two.
in Poland, established in 1986, were taken by 60 students in 1998, and by 80 in the following year. In 2002, the Department of Judaic Studies at the Jagiellonian University, established in 2000 to replace the center, already boasted about 250 students.

Apart from Kraków, there are university centers conducting research and teaching students interested in Jewish history in Warsaw, Wrocław, Lublin, and Łódź. Since 1990, the Mordechai Anielewicz Center for the Study of the History and Culture of Jews in Poland at the University of Warsaw has been offering systematic educational programs on Jewish history and culture, including the Holocaust. Similar programs have been available at the Center for the Culture and Languages of the Jews at Wrocław University, since 1993; and at the Center for Jewish Studies of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS) in Lublin, since 2000. The Center for Jewish Studies at the Polish department of Wrocław University began enrolment for the postgraduate program in Jewish Culture and the Holocaust in 2008; the Center for Jewish Studies was opened at the history department of Łódź University in 2005; and the Center for Holocaust Studies at the Jagiellonian University was established in 2008.

Since 1998, in cooperation with the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, the Pedagogical University in Kraków has been offering postgraduate studies on “Totalitarianism — Nazism — Holocaust.” A growing number of university courses devoted to the Holocaust, are offered by many non-Judaic departments, such as in Warsaw67 and Łódź Universities. Other examples include courses on the Holocaust in the history department of the Silesian University; The Holocaust in Mass Culture in the history department of the Jagiellonian University, Kraków; The Holocaust in Poland and the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Region in the history department of Kazimierz Wielki University, Bydgoszcz; and Education and Humanities in the Face of the Holocaust in the pedagogy department of Gdańsk University. There are seminars on the Holocaust at other universities, e.g., the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and Rzeszów University.

In 2003, the Polish Academy of Sciences Institute of Philosophy and Sociology in Warsaw started the Polish Center for Holocaust Research, for research, publishing, and organizing academic conferences and seminars.

67 The eighth year of journalism workshops, as part of the Chronicle-Reportage project, “Europe According to Auschwitz,” took place on September 30, 2008. The workshops are organized by the Department of Journalism’s studio of reportage, University of Warsaw.
(also available on the Internet), and other activities. The center publishes an interdisciplinary annual volume devoted to the Holocaust (partly in English), entitled *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* (Holocaust Studies and Materials).

Polish students write master’s and doctoral theses on the history and consciousness of the Holocaust, based on their individual research in local communities, as part of their studies in various departments.\(^{68}\) They ask research questions such as: “Is the memory of Jews part of the consciousness of residents in cities, towns, and villages?” or “What place does the history of Polish Jews occupy in history teaching?” Despite the great number of local initiatives, the public space is devoid of any signs commemorating the Holocaust in many localities, and the local priests, with a few exceptions, do not remind their numerous congregants about the pre-war Jewish residents in sermons delivered on the anniversaries of Jewish deportations to extermination camps.\(^{69}\) The fact that, in the 2008/2009 survey, 15 percent of young people (nine percent in high schools) agreed with the claim that contemporary Jews bore the responsibility for the crucifixion of Christ (46 percent rejected the statement, and 38 percent chose the response “I don’t know”) is a cause for concern. Among the 991 students who completed questionnaires ten years earlier, the smaller proportion of nine percent

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68 An example of such research are interviews conducted by Małgorzata Włoszycka in Maków Podhalański. These led her to the conclusion that the Holocaust memory has been neglected. As mentioned earlier, the survey carried out among young people in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki, a town that had a high proportion of Jewish residents before the war, revealed that the students in their final year of the local high school had limited knowledge about the Holocaust. This is usually associated with the treatment of Jewish heritage (e.g., the cemeteries). “There were no monuments or commemorative plaques in the town about the Jewish community that had been there before 1939, and the killing of the Jews by the Germans in 1942.” See Szumska, “Nieobecni,” p. 22.

69 There are exceptions, e.g., Archbishop Józef Życiński in the Lublin diocese, who has undertaken several initiatives, such as mourning for the murdered Jews in the towns in the region; the university chaplaincy in Lublin, which initiates many activities among university students; and individual priests, such as Rev. Mieczysław Puzewicz. The Dominican Tomasz Dodatni organizes the program, “Crossing the Walls,” in cooperation with Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, and the series of meetings “Europe, But Which Europe?” in cooperation with Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (UAM). See an evaluation of the effect of teaching religion on young people’s attitudes in Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Andrzej Mirski, “The Influence of Religious Instructors on the Attitudes of Youth from Kraków Toward Jews,” in Irena Borowik, ed., *Church-State Relationships in Central and Eastern Europe* (Krakow: Zakład Wydawniczy “Nomos,” 1999), pp. 388–402.
answered a similar question positively. Apparently, 44 years after the Second Vatican Council, young people do not know about either the Church’s position or Pope John Paul II’s teaching on this point, even though Catholic religion classes are part of the school curriculum.\textsuperscript{70}

Many Polish students not only attend university courses and write master’s theses concerning the Holocaust, but also participate in projects aimed at popularizing Jewish culture. They undertake educational and artistic activities aimed at preserving the memory of a Jewish presence in Poland. The Janusz Korczak Academic and Artistic Club at the faculty of education and art in the Kalisz branch of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, promotes such objectives. An example of long-standing international cooperation in this area is the Canadian-German-Polish Mark and Gail Appel Program in Holocaust and Antiracism Education, “Learning from the Past, Teaching for the Future,” initiated in 2003 by the Center for Jewish Studies and the Canadian Center for German and European Studies at the York University, Toronto. Two Polish universities, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, and the Pedagogical University in Kraków, also participate in this project, which aims at counteracting racism, including antisemitism.

**Secondary Education**

The Holocaust was made a compulsory subject of instruction in the high school core curriculum for the first time only in 1996,\textsuperscript{71} and implemented with considerable difficulty. Initially, only a small proportion of educators were qualified to teach the subject. The very term “Holocaust,” as research demonstrated, was still not commonly known to young Poles in 2000, especially in the small towns.\textsuperscript{72} Only one in four grammar school students in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki knew the correct definition of “the Holocaust,” and an equal number did not understand the term at all, even though most stu-

\textsuperscript{70} In research carried out by the Anti-Defamation League published in February 2009 (a phone survey of 500 respondents), 48 percent of adult Poles agreed with the statement that Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus Christ; see *Attitudes Toward Jews in Seven European Countries* (New York: ADL, February 2009).


students associated the Holocaust with the persecution of Jews.\textsuperscript{73} Despite this, there has been some progress. Holocaust education is available in schools, but its content, quantity, and quality still depend on individual teachers’ motivation, competence, and involvement. The Ministry of Education recommended the first syllabus on Holocaust education for Polish teachers,\textsuperscript{74} and co-financed publication of the textbook, \textit{Holokaust. Zrozumieć dlaczego}\textsuperscript{75} by Robert Szuchta and Piotr Trojański. However, there has not been any research on how many teachers implement this syllabus, or use the above textbook, and to what extent. Likewise, no research has been done on the book \textit{Pamięć. Historia Żydów polskich przed, w czasie, i po Zagładzie},\textsuperscript{76} published by the Shalom Foundation in 2004 and 2008, with financial support from the Ministry of Education and Sports and the International Task Force (currently IHRA).

The self-assessment of high school students in the Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki survey, who considered their knowledge of Jewish history and the Holocaust in their hometown to be unsatisfactory (31 out of 39 respondents) and, as the researcher observed, felt embarrassed about it, is significant.\textsuperscript{77}

\textbf{Exhibitions}

Holocaust awareness among Polish students is influenced by innovative educational strategies, e.g., exhibitions brought to schools by arrangement or accessed on the Internet. For instance “Żydzi w Polsce. Ocalić od zapomnienia — uczyć dla przyszłości” (Jews in Poland: Preserving the Memory — Teaching for the Future) is an educational Internet service developed for teachers and students, giving basic information on Jewish history and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{73} Szumska, “Nieobecni,” p. 38.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Robert Szuchta and Piotr Trojański, \textit{Holokaust. Program nauczania o historii i zagładzie Żydów na lekcjach przedmiotów humanistycznych w szkołach ponadpodstawowych} (Warsaw: PWN, 2000); supplemented edition, 2001.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Barbara Engelking, Feliks Tych, Andrzej Żbikowski, and Jolanta Żyndul, eds., \textit{Pamięć: Historia Żydów Polskich przed, w czasie i po Zagładzie} (Warsaw: Fundacja Shalom, 2004); 2nd edition 2008; English translation by Yale J. Reisner, Christopher Garbowksi, and Marcin Garbowski, \textit{Memory: The History of Polish Jews before, during and after the Holocaust} (Warsaw: Shalom Foundation, 2008), commissioned by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ promotions department.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Szumska, “Nieobecni,” p. 41.
\end{itemize}
culture. It consists of a multimedia presentation in the form of 24 slides from the exhibition, “Jews in Poland: Our Folks or Strangers?” devoted to the past and present of Jews in Poland. Since 1998, the exhibition has been shown in several dozen Polish and German cities and towns. In addition, the service includes a report on the exhibition, “Anne Frank — A History for Today,” and study materials on Dziennik Dawida Rubinowicza (Dawid Rubinowicz’s Diary), which is a testimony of a Jewish child’s fate during the Second World War. This website also offers numerous classroom materials for teachers and students. In the teacher’s section, there are ready-to-use educational materials and lesson plans directly referring to information provided by the service. The service also offers bibliographic suggestions and up-to-date information on seminars and training courses for teachers.

Exhibitions dedicated to the memory of Polish Jews are undeniably one of the factors behind the growing Holocaust awareness among Polish youth. Since 1994, the Museum of the Łęczna-Wlodawa Lake District, and its branch, the Museum of the Former Nazi Death Camp in Sobibór, have borrowed several exhibitions of photographs and documents from the Jewish Historical Institute, e.g., “A Day in the Warsaw Ghetto: A Birthday Trip to Hell” (1994); “The Warsaw Ghetto 1940–1942” (1996); and “Polish Society in the Face of the Holocaust (1939–1945)” (1998). In 2003, together with the Lublin branch of the Institute of National Remembrance, the museum organized the exhibition “Aktion Reinhard: The Holocaust in the Generalgouvernement.”

There have been many local initiatives, such as the exhibition of copies of old photographs, “The Jews of Gliwice,” in 2006 at the Gliwice Museum. Grammar School No. 5 in Gliwice borrowed the photographs for the meeting of its students with Jewish youth from the town of Rehovot in Israel. Over 120 Polish students and a dozen or so teachers, together with 87 Israeli students and teachers, commemorated the “death march” victims from Książenice in the Silesian voivodeship. At the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków, there is a permanent photo exhibition, “Traces of Memory,” including work by the British photographer Chris Schwarz and texts by Jonathan

78 In June 2003, for the sixtieth anniversary of the Białystok Ghetto Uprising, the local branch of the Institute of National Remembrance organized an exhibition devoted to the Righteous, “He Who Saves One Human Life, Saves the World. Assistance to the Jewish Population during the Nazi Occupation in the Białystok Voivodeship (1941–1945).”

Webber, which is the result of a 12-year journey across southern Poland undertaken by the photographer to document relics of Jewish life and culture. The museum has also displayed a number of temporary exhibitions, such as “Hitler’s List,” “Polish Heroes: Those Who Rescued Jews,” “Fighting for Dignity: Jewish Resistance in Kraków,” “March ’68 in the Kraków Press,” and “Letters to Sala: A Young Woman’s Life in Nazi Labor Camps.” A new, modified version of the main exhibition at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and an exhibition at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, now being established in Warsaw, are in preparation.

Competition

Competitions play an important role in expanding young people’s consciousness of the Holocaust and also provide information on their degree of interest in the Jewish history and culture of Poland, including the Holocaust. Since 1993, the Polish-Israeli Shalom Foundation, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Jewish Historical Institute, has been organizing a biannual competition for high school students, “The History and Culture of Polish Jews.” Since 2001, the foundation has also held a competition for elementary and middle school students, “On the Common Land.” The Holocaust is among the subjects chosen by the students. Altogether, over 12,000 children and young people have taken part in the competitions sponsored by the Shalom Foundation.

Every year since 1996, the KARTA Center has held a “Local History” competition for high school students. In 2000, the Gross-Rosen Museum organized a competition for young people on knowledge about the Holocaust and the Gross-Rosen concentration camp.

Many interesting entries (in terms of both content and form) were sent in by high school students to “The World of the Righteous” competition, organized in 2008 by the Institute of Strategic Studies in Kraków, and co-financed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs as part of the governmental program “The Foundation for Social Initiatives.”

80 About 5,300 students from 774 schools presented their projects related to the Jewish history and culture in their regions in eight competitions for high schools, while 6,735 students from 485 schools participated in four competitions for younger children. The author would like to thank Izabela Teodorkiewicz for providing this information.

81 The KARTA Center is the founding member of EUSTORY, an international network of history competitions with 22 member countries.
documented the environment where Jews and their Christian neighbors, the future Righteous, lived before the war.\(^8^2\)

For many decades after the war, the Poles who had rescued Jews were absent from Polish education and social consciousness as heroes deserving recognition and respect.\(^8^3\) Similarly, the rescued were considerably less active in Poland. However, after 1989, and especially after 2000, there were substantial changes in this attitude. Nevertheless, there is a danger of ideologizing certain projects representing a specific historical policy. The “Life for Life” campaign at the Institute of National Remembrance and the National Center of Culture became a distinct tool in shaping young people’s consciousness, which, owing to its one-sidedness, drastically obscures the diverse range of attitudes Polish society exhibited toward Jews during the Second World War, thereby distorting the actual historical facts. The set of educational materials, “The Poles Who Rescued Jews during the Second World War” should not be turned into a “kitschy reconciliation.”\(^8^4\) Therefore, as should be pointed out, the Institute of National Remembrance’s current strategy in shaping collective social memory, which consists of redefining specific elements of memory so as to enhance national self-esteem, falls far short of fully reconstructing the very complex truth.\(^8^5\)

\(^8^2\) It is worth noting the maturity of the works, which, in almost every case, document the phenomenon of Poles denouncing their neighbors who sheltered Jews.

\(^8^3\) Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak’s article, “Gratitude and Oblivion: The Attitude of Poles and Jews toward the Righteous from 1944/45 to 2007,” in this volume, writes about instrumentalization of the topic by the Communist regime and recent support of the state for the initiatives commemorating the Righteous. Irena Sendler was little known in Poland until 1999 when four schoolgirls from Uniontown near Kansas City, USA, wrote and performed their play Life in a Jar, supported by their teacher Norman Conard. Students performed the play in the USA, Canada, and several times in Poland. Awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations in 1965, Irena Sendler was awarded the highest Polish honor — the Order of the White Eagle — as late as 2003.

\(^8^4\) This expression is borrowed from Dariusz Libionka’s comment during a ŻIH seminar in 2009.

Education at Memorial Sites

Particular importance is attached to education at memorial sites. About half-a-million young people visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum annually. In 2005, over 50 percent of the 421,718 young visitors were Polish high school students. In the same year, the International Center of Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust (Międzynarodowe Centrum Edukacji o Auschwitz i Holokauscie — MCEAH) was established at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. The center is the only institution in Poland to offer postgraduate studies on the Holocaust for teachers, “Totalitarianism — Nazism — Holocaust” (in cooperation with the history department of the Pedagogical University in Kraków), which was started in 1998. The center also has numerous other educational programs for teachers (e.g., one-day seminars, training courses, workshops) and several-day seminars for university and high school students. Since February 2006, it has been running the “Spoken Memory” project, which involves collecting testimonies from former prisoners of the Auschwitz concentration camp. By 2008, the number of participants in the seminars at the center (university and high school students and teachers) reached 3,500.

Seminars for teachers are also organized by many other museums and memorial sites. In 1998, the seminar “In the Shadow of the Ghetto: Jews in the Collective Memory of Societies of Lithuania, Poland, and Germany,” organized jointly with the “Borussia” community from Olsztyn, took place at the museum in the Łęczna-Włodawa Lake District. In 2001, an international conference for teachers, “Popularizing the Knowledge about the Holocaust and the Martyrdom of Nations: The Present State and Plans for the Future,” was held at the Gross-Rosen Museum. Teachers also participate in seminars organized by Yad Vashem, the House of the Wannsee Conference, and other institutions.

The International Youth Meeting Center at the Auschwitz Museum should be perceived in the context of its close ties with the museum’s other activities. The center is a meeting place for young people, who learn about

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86 The Swedish Living History Forum was commissioned by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights to investigate the role played by historical sites and museums in teaching about the Holocaust and human rights in the European Union countries. The project has been under way since 2009.

the perpetrators, causes, and methods of genocide from the example of the crimes committed against more than one million victims at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

In 2004, the Bełżec Memorial and Museum was opened. Like other museums (e.g., the State Museum at Majdanek, and the Stutthof State Museum at Sztutowo), it organizes seminars for teachers, lessons, lectures, workshops, and meetings with former prisoners for high school children.

It should be stressed that extramural historical education at memorial sites is...based not on teaching, but rather on learning from the past. In practice, this means that educational programs implemented at museum-memorial sites should not provide ready-made knowledge, but encourage creative searching for and discovery of the past.88

As far as the current Holocaust education in Poland is concerned, the above recommendation by Wieslaw Wysok, Head of the Department of Education at the Majdanek Museum, seems to be followed most closely in projects developed by NGOs.89

Local Educational Projects by NGOs Aimed at Expanding Holocaust Awareness among Young People

The main research question addressed in this section is whether it is possible to integrate the (re)constructed Holocaust memory into Polish collective memory (at the level of national culture) and the memory of local communities (at the regional level). It is limited to case studies of several organizations, or more precisely, a few selected projects associated with social practices symbolizing the losses suffered by Polish culture after the

89 Considerable achievements of education at museums and memorial sites and the accomplishments of individual teachers in Poland are presented in the following publications: Jacek Chrobaczyński and Piotr Trojański, eds., Holokaust — lekcja historii. Zagłada Żydów w edukacji szkolnej (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej w Krakowie, 2004); Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, Krystyna Oleksy, and Piotr Trojański, eds., Jak uczyć o Holokaustie i Auschwitz. Materiały dydaktyczne (Oświecim: MCEAH PMAB, 2007); Piotr Trojański, ed., Auschwitz i Holokaust.
Holocaust, the heroes (the Righteous), and the rituals for commemorating Holocaust victims introduced into the public space by selected NGOs.

The focus in informal, non-compulsory education has similar objectives to those in formal education, but different working methods and social actors. The educators and activists are involved in informal education work in community centers, NGOs, and non-academic education centers, as well as in meetings organized as part of international exchanges. Some of them are volunteers. In specific projects, formal and informal education have been shown to complement each other. Many projects concerning the sources and mechanisms of racism, intolerance, xenophobia, and antisemitism also refer to the history and consequences of the Holocaust. Detailed evaluation is required of the programs, projects, and initiatives presented below, both in the local communities as well as of the participants’ and observers’ attitudes.90 It is important to note that projects commemorating the life and culture of Jewish residents of specific localities are frequently related to Holocaust remembrance.

In local communities, on the one hand, Holocaust memory may be absent, neglected or denied; on the other hand, there are also efforts to preserve the memory of the Jews by renovating synagogues and monuments of Jewish culture, and taking care of cemeteries, which is carried out by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, among other organizations. Informal groups, such as the Magurycz Group, active since 1988 but officially registered as an association only in 2007, also undertake such activities.91 In 2007, at the suggestion of the Jewish Historical Institute, the ambassador of Israel to Poland awarded a diploma to the group for its activities in preserving Jewish heritage there.92 Over 100 Polish citizens

90 The Stefan Batory Foundation in Warsaw takes an interest in the effectiveness of local initiatives. It commissioned the Association for Education and Culture, “Spotkania” (a partner in organizing the Program for Tolerance), to conduct a four-year research and evaluation project (from 2006 to 2009) associated with the grant competition, “The Common/The Different.” Empirical research has also been done on the effectiveness of an educational program, specifically on the meetings between Holocaust survivors and students in New York schools, conducted by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in New York. See Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Chunlou Yung, “What Is in the Way? Teaching about the Holocaust in Post-1989 Poland,” in John K. Roth and Elisabeth Maxwell, eds., Remembering for the Future. The Holocaust in an Age of Genocides (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 525–544.

91 The Magurycz Group restores not only Jewish cemeteries, but also neglected and forgotten cemeteries of other ethnic and religious minorities.

92 Szymon Modrzewski and the volunteers from the Magurycz Group have recovered,
have received this distinction, conferred for 11 years for dedication to the preservation of Jewish heritage in Poland.

Educational projects (e.g., in Gliwice, Lubaczów in the podkarpackie voivodeship, and many other localities) frequently open or conclude with taking care of neglected Jewish cemeteries. According to Szuchta, who has participated in the jury evaluating the projects submitted to competitions organized by the Stefan Batory Foundation, there are several dozen such projects every year (many of which extend beyond one year), most of them in small towns and villages of southeastern Poland.\footnote{Information acquired during a focus group interview conducted by the CEM Market & Public Opinion Research Institute among distinguished teachers from various Polish localities, which took place on April 17, 2009, in Kraków, as part of a CBH UJ survey.} However, in a national survey, only three percent of young respondents (five percent in grammar schools) mentioned projects conducted by teachers outside school hours as their main source of knowledge about Jews. Apparently, on the countrywide scale, the group of teachers involved in such creative initiatives is not large. Students of the high school in Byczyna, in the Opole voivodeship, take care of the local Jewish cemetery, carrying out maintenance work twice a year. They also hold a school assembly to commemorate the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and produce a class newsletter devoted to Jewish topics, whose authors cooperate with the local newspaper by publishing information about the former residents of Byczyna and the vicinity. Middle school students prepared classes on Jewish culture for the younger students in an elementary school. Middle school students in Jasienica Rosielna, in the Podkarpackie voivodeship, have been taking care of the local Jewish cemetery for many years.

Since 2005, the Grodzka Gate Center — NN Theater in Lublin has been carrying out the “Letters to Henio” project on Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes against Humanity Day. The project was inspired by another similar initiative of several years’ duration, “Letters to the Ghetto,” in which, every year, students of Lublin high schools send letters to specific Jewish inhabitants of Lublin who perished during the liquidation of the ghetto there. Within a few weeks, these letters are returned to the senders, marked with “addressee unknown” or “no such address.” This is how the student senders commemorate individual people from the anonymous mass murder. Since 2005, young people have been sending letters to Henio

\begin{itemize}
  \item cleaned, and glued together some matzevot (tombstones) removed from the Jewish cemetery in Jaśliska in 1943. Between 2005 and 2006, they also saved the matzevot found near the Belcza stream in Jaśliska.
\end{itemize}
Żytomirski, a Jewish boy born in Lublin in 1932, and killed by the Nazis, probably in November 1942.

As part of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland’s “Bringing Memory Back” project, middle and high school students collect information and documents related to the Jewish presence in their hometowns and regions, interview older inhabitants, take photographs, and make an inventory of surviving monuments. They acquire substantial knowledge of the Jewish tradition so as to better understand the history of Polish Jews. In 2006, the Foundation held 26 workshops for high school students, and, in 2008, the third year of the project, mobilized 140 schools, associations, and informal groups to rediscover cultural diversity in many regions of Poland.

The heritage of Polish Jews is an important component of many projects conducted by local organizers of cultural activities and teachers, e.g., “Ballads about Szydłowiec” in Szydłowiec or “To Restore the Memory” in Skwierzyna. High school students in Radomysł Wielki, in the Podkarpackie voivodeship, expand their knowledge about Polish Jews during history classes. While collecting information on the history of Jews in the region, they discovered someone who had been awarded the medal of “Righteous Among the Nations of the World”; they also tidied up the Jewish cemetery. In 2007, they participated in the project “Without the Sin of Omission,” initiated by “Our District” Association (Stowarzyszenie “Nasza Gmina”) and co-ordinated by Maria Przybyszewska. As part of the project, aimed at the local rural community, a memorial obelisk was erected to commemorate pacification on the part of the Podborze village residents, who were punished for assisting Jews. Middle school students from Włodawa participate as volunteers in organizing the Festival of Three Cultures, held ten times so far. They also took part in the national competition announced by the Stefan Batory Foundation and the KARTA Center: In 2004, they were awarded third prize for the research study “The Jews of Włodawa. Difficult

94 The unveiling ceremony of the obelisk on September 22, 2007, with about 800 participants, including the Ambassador of Israel to Poland, David Peleg, the Chief Rabbi of Galicia, Edgar Gluck, and representatives of the local government and the Catholic Church, was accompanied by such events as a scholarly panel discussion, a performance by the Grodzka Gate — NN Theater from Lublin, a literary competition, publication of the memoirs by the survivor Antoni Balaryna, and an exhibition from the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. The project was financed by the Stefan Batory Foundation and the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture. The author would like to thank Maria Przybyszewska for providing this information.
Homecomings. They joined in the events of Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes against Humanity Day by holding a book-reading competition, a letter-writing campaign to their pre-war Jewish peers, and “The Chain of Remembrance” march through the town’s streets around the former Włodawa Ghetto. They also built a mound of pebbles to commemorate the Holocaust victims.

In 2007, thanks to the financial support from the School of Leaders Association of Warsaw, an inter-school educational project, “Mutual Past. Mutual Memory,” was launched in the town of Murowana Gośлина. It included a theatrical performance based on Isaac Bashevis Singer’s short story “A Hanukkah Evening at My Parents’ House.” The middle school students also participated in a training course in the Poznań Jewish community office and the Eleventh Day of Judaism events — an annual day of Christian-Jewish reflection — in Poznań. As part of joint workshops with Jewish and German youth, local young people clean and tidy up the grounds of the former Jewish and Lutheran cemeteries.95

The Jan Karski Association, established in Kielce in 2005 to promote openness and respect toward individuals and groups of a different racial, ethnic, national, religious, and cultural identity, conducts an educational program for high school students entitled, “The Righteous Among the Nations of the World.” Its participants seek out people who rescued Jews during the Second World War, collect documents testifying to such noble conduct, as well as providing care for the rescuers. The Jan Karski Association was also the main organizer of the Sixtieth Anniversary Commemoration of the Kielce Pogrom. Every year on these anniversaries, prayers for the murdered are held in front of a house at 7 Planty Street, and the March of Memory sets off from there to the Jewish cemetery.

Consciousness of the Holocaust among Polish youth is also influenced by web portals and websites, e.g., the Museum of the History of Polish Jews established by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute; the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, covering over 400 localities (1,200 will eventually be included) with 9,000 photographs and nearly 90 films; Jewish Cemeteries in Poland;96 the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which offers many programs, such as youth exchanges, “Study in Israel,” “My Muranów, My Praga,” and “The Polish Righteous — Recalling

96 Krzysztof Bielawski is the website’s Chief Editor.
Forgotten History.” Another website of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, devoted to the Jewish history of Polish cities and towns, is a source of information on 800 localities, offering access to 10,000 photographs of monuments, memorial sites, synagogues, houses of prayer, and cemeteries, as well as dozens of films. Any Internet user can contribute to the interactive website by uploading photographs, recordings or texts.

Particularly noteworthy are the initiatives of the Institute of Tolerance in Łódź. Joanna Podolska, Co-founder and President since 2003, who works as a journalist and has been giving classes to students of journalism at Łódź University for several years, initiated a campaign to remove antisemitic and racist graffiti, called “Colorful Tolerance,” in 2000. On the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, held annually on March 21, meetings with representatives of various nationalities, cultures, and religions, film screenings, concerts, and lectures in churches and synagogues are held.

In 2000, in Oświęcim, the Auschwitz Jewish Center was opened in the only surviving, fully restored synagogue in town, Chevra Lomdei Mishnayot. The Center’s mission is to commemorate Holocaust victims by teaching about the life and culture of the town’s Jewish inhabitants: On the eve of the Second World War, there were 7,000 Jews in Oświęcim, i.e., nearly 60 percent of the population. Groups of Polish high school students visit the center, which also organizes interactive meetings between non-Jewish Polish and German youth and Jewish youth, as well as lectures and seminars for teachers, including the “Talks on Tolerance” series.

Meetings Between Polish and Jewish Youth

The Forum for Dialog Among Nations (FDMN), the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and many schools have organized meetings between non-Jewish Polish youth and Jewish youth. Since 2004, Polish high schools, with support from the Center for Education Development (Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji) (formerly CODN — Centralny Ośrodek Doskonalenia Nauczycieli — a national in-service teacher training center in Warsaw), Yad Vashem, the Polish Institute in Tel Aviv, as well as the Polish and Israeli ministries of education, have been implementing the “Closer to Each Other” program. The program, taking into account the Polish-Jewish history of the specific locality, includes sightseeing, cleaning and tidying up Jewish cemeteries, visiting witnesses of history, group discussions, and artistic presentations.
The program is intended to give young people from Poland and Israel an opportunity to get acquainted, establish contacts, and cooperation, but the Holocaust is always in the background, since it is the Holocaust that brings the groups of Jewish youth from Israel to Poland.\(^97\) Between 2004 and 2008, meetings with students from 100 Polish schools took place, but students from only six schools visited Israel. Regular youth exchange has not yet been established. Polish and Israeli youth commemorate Holocaust victims together, e.g., on October 15, 2007, such an event was held at the Radegast Station in Łódź during a visit of 130 high school students from Tel Aviv and their teachers and guides to High School No. 1 in Zgierz, as part of the project “Preserving the Memory: The History and Culture of Two Nations.”

Many educational projects related to Holocaust memory, as well as the history and culture of Polish Jews, are implemented with support from, for example, the In-Service Teacher Training Center in Łódź, local governments, city museums, and even private companies.

The Forum for Dialog Among Nations, which has been organizing meetings of Polish and Israeli youth for years, also carried out a survey on their effectiveness.\(^98\) Statistical improvement in attitudes was observed after meetings about the present situation, but not when the meetings focused on the past. Another survey consisted of collecting sensitive questions about Polish-Jewish relations from young people. The survey resulted in a publication,\(^99\) on which workshops for high school students are based. The questions of Polish youth referred to Jewish accusations levelled against Poles, the “competition in suffering,” and the ways of commemorating the Holocaust. An analysis of these questions seems to lead to the conclusions that the Holocaust is not treated by Polish youth as “their” history, who think of Polish identity in national rather than civic terms. The Holocaust is not treated as part of “their” memory.\(^100\)


\(^99\) Trudne pytania w dialogu polsko-żydowskim (Warsaw: Jacek Santorski & Co. Agencja Wydawnicza, FDMN, AJC, 2006). In this publication, eminent Jewish and Polish intellectuals answer the young people’s questions.

Teachers As Social Actors

The students’ consciousness is, and certainly should be, shaped by their teachers. For years, teachers have been trying to answer the question “how” (and not “whether”) to teach about the Holocaust. The Jewish Historical Institute started the first one-week training courses for high school teachers, called “The Summer School on the History and Culture of Polish Jews,” in 1992. Later, the institute expanded this initiative, e.g., by organizing museum lessons for high school students, based on its collection. The institute’s educational activities places particular emphasis on popularizing knowledge about the Holocaust in Poland, holding conferences for teachers, organized in cooperation with the Spiro Institute in London, now the London Jewish Cultural Center. Thanks to a grant from the Task Force, the institute carried out the project, “Teaching about the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish Relations,” consisting of eight training courses for teachers. In 2008, in cooperation with the Municipal Council of Warsaw, the institute launched the educational program, “Closer to the Ghetto” for Warsaw high school students and teachers. Since 1992, 882 teachers have been involved in the institute’s activities.

In the mid-1990s, the Spiro Institute organized seminars in cooperation with Polish institutions, such as the Pedagogical University in Kraków, now the Pedagogical University, and the Center of Jewish Culture in the Kazimierz district of Kraków. For 15 years, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, in cooperation with Yad Vashem, has been organizing seminars and study trips, initially for museum guides, later for teachers as well, and recently also for priests.

Currently, Polish teachers show great interest in seminars, training courses, post-graduate studies, and other forms of education. They also develop their own original projects. In 2006, over 350 teachers applied for the 60 places at the summer school, held for the first time at the Jagiellonian University, in cooperation with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum.

101 The author would like to thank Edyta Kurek from the Jewish Historical Institute for this information. She pointed out that some teachers participated several times in various seminars, and so it is impossible to provide exact statistical data.

102 A project worth noting is based on memorial sites left by the Jewish community of Kalisz. See Danuta Konieczka-Sliwińska and Izabela Skórzyńska, “Lekcje ocalania śladów. Historia Żydów we współczesnej szkolnej edukacji humanistycznej,” in Aleksandra Boroń and Grażyna Grajewska, eds., Holokaust w sieci dyskursów (Gniezno: Wydawnictwo Fundacji Collegium Europaeum Gnesnense UAM, 2005), pp. 74–85.
in cooperation with Yad Vashem in Jerusalem at the suggestion of the Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida. In 2007, the number of candidates exceeded 250. During the following, third year of the school, in 2008, the number of applicants again surpassed the number of available places. Seminars for teachers have been held for years by the Institute of National Remembrance's public education office, and the National In-Service Teacher Training Center, both in Warsaw. Teachers participate in courses and seminars offered by the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous in New York (a program run by the United States Embassy in Poland), Yad Vashem, the House of the Wannsee Conference, the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, and other organizations.

A group of teachers implement innovative educational programs and projects related to the Holocaust and its consequences. However, most educators have too little time to devote to the subject outside of their school hours, and sometimes do not even feel like doing so. In the survey carried out in late 2008 and early 2009, only three percent of students named projects conducted by teachers outside school hours as a source of knowledge about Jews.

Driven by a deep personal conviction that young people should know about the fate that befell the Jewish residents of their country, several

103 The third year of the school was organized jointly with the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, the Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida, the CSU Chico Research Foundation at California State University, and the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York. The fourth year of the school in 2009 was organized jointly with the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, Skokie, Illinois, USA. CBHUJ summer schools are co-financed by the Claims Conference (The Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany and private sponsors).


105 The center cooperates with the Israeli Ministry of Education and Yad Vashem in training the Holocaust education methodology consultants.

106 Eight teachers from Middle School No. 3 in Gdynia, on their own initiative, participated in the seminar on "History of the Holocaust and Holocaust Education," specifically organized for them in the House of the Wannsee Conference, in 2009.

107 The teachers surveyed by the author in 2008 in Kraków reported that most of the projects related to the Holocaust had been self-initiated and that they were not paid for the extra hours of work with students.
teachers implement their own curricula aimed at raising Holocaust awareness among their students. Particularly distinguished in this area were the following teachers: Robert Szuchta from High School No. 64 in Warsaw, the author of over 50 historical and methodological articles published in Polish and foreign journals; Wiesława Mnłynczyk, who, in cooperation with the history teacher Bogusław Jędruszczyk, uses the drama method at High School No. 81 in Warsaw; Arkadiusz Walczak, a former teacher at Stanisław Staszic High School No. 1 in Zgierz, who, while teaching students with a particular interest in totalitarianism, Nazism, and the Holocaust from 1995 to 2008, implemented his original syllabuses in history and introduction to philosophy. This was supplemented with the module “Values and Violence: The Holocaust and Its Legacy,” as well as his original extracurricular program of classes and study trips, as part of the project “How Was It Humanly Possible? Totalitarianism, Nazism, and the Holocaust.”

At university level, the influence exerted by college professors on their students, especially the future teachers of history, Polish literature, and civics, is particularly important. According to a survey conducted in December 2008, 22 out of 29 third-year history students, who attended a seminar conducted by Piotr Trojański at the Pedagogical University in Kraków, considered Holocaust memory as an issue of personal significance. In a representative sample of 17- and 18-year-old students in schools, 38 percent of respondents (46 percent of the high school students, 33 percent of the technical high school students, and 21 percent of vocational school students) gave a positive response to this question.

The statement that Jews enjoy too much influence in this country in the areas of politics, economic life, and the media, which are traditionally treated as hallmarks of modern antisemitism, was accepted by 11–15 percent of the young people surveyed. The most frequent answer, accepted by 29–37 percent of high school students, was “I do not know, and I am not interested,” which is a sign that the origin of people active in politics, economy, and media is not relevant to them. This may be a sign that Jewish issues are not so important to them, which is not necessarily negative.

However, the picture in Polish schools would be incomplete without mentioning the antisemitic attitudes of some young people, such as

108 Only one student responded negatively to this statement, and five chose the response, “It is difficult to say.” The research conducted by the CBH UJ in 2008/2009, apart from a national survey, also includes research into the attitudes of selected groups of young people exposed to Holocaust education.
Młodzież Wszechpolska (All-Polish Youth), and their hostile actions against teachers known for their involvement in instruction about the Holocaust. Anna Janina Kloza, a teacher from Białystok, was persecuted by neo-fascist groups, including Redwatch, for this reason. In a southeastern Polish town, a teacher, who asked to remain anonymous, received phone threats but never contacted the police or brought the case to court, since she was concerned about the safety of her family. There are certainly more such incidents.

The attitudes of some young people are influenced by the ideology of such political groups and their publications, such as the above-mentioned Młodzież Wszechpolska with its periodical Wszechpolak; Liga Polskich Rodzin (The League of Polish Families) with Racja Polska, Opoka w Kraju; Unia Polityki Realnej (Real Politics Union) with Najwyższy Czas!; Ruch Katolicko-Narodowy (Catholic-National Movement) with Tygodnik Katolicko-Narodowy Głos; Polska Wspólnota Narodowa — Polskie Stronnictwo Narodowe (Polish National Union — Polish National Camp) with Wspólnota; Polska Partia Narodowa (Polish National Party) with Tylko Polska; Ruch Przełomu Narodowego (National Breakthrough Movement); Odrodzenie Polski (The Revival of Poland) with Szczerbiec; and Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny (National Radical Camp) with Sztafeta. Young people are exposed to printed and electronic media, as well as publishers who create and distribute antisemitic literature, mostly from the media group centered around Father Tadeusz Rydzyk (Radio Maryja, TV Trwam, and the daily newspaper Nasz Dziennik) and the antisemitic propagandists associated with these media, some of whom even hold the highest academic degrees. Such is also the scope of limited edition journals, including Najjaśniejsza Rzeczpospolita or Nasza Polska and publishing houses, such as Ostoja, Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza, Ojczyzna, Retro, among others. These circles are characterized by “the syndrome of closed memory, which protects the vision of the mythologized past and reacts with panic to any attempts at its verification,” as well as by “questioning the existence of Polish antisemitism and classifying it as fiction fabricated and publicized by enemies of the Polish national community. Such activities (described as anti-Polonism) are supposedly undertaken by enemies of Polishness, who either do not identify with Poland and are not Polish citizens, or only seemingly belong to the Polish nation (Jewish agents, goyim [non-Jews] in the service of international Zionism, pseudo-Poles, and “Jews”).”

109 Łukasz Opozda, “Rola antysemityzmu w konstruowaniu światopoglądu skrajnie...”
According to the 2008–2009 survey, only two percent of young respondents believe that the problem of antisemitism does not exist in contemporary Poland (40 percent of those polled think that “the problem of antisemitism exists and is serious,” while 38 percent respond that “the problem of antisemitism exists but is marginal”). The degree of antisemitism, banned from official circulation, is not known, but ethnographic research reveals its underlying patterns. In an interview for the journal *W drodze*, published by the Dominican Order, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, author of the book *Legenda o krwi. Antropologia przesądu*, published in 2008, declares: “Personally, I believe that the Church, and the Church alone, can solve the problem of antisemitism and hatred in Poland; I see no other force that could undertake a similar role.” The Association against Antisemitism and Xenophobia “Otwarta Rzeczpospolita” (Open Republic) endeavors to assess the scale of this phenomenon, e.g., by monitoring hate speech and the public manifestation of the fascist political system, punishable by law in Poland as well as in other European countries.

**Educational Tasks, Challenges, and Expectations**

The Holocaust is part of Polish history, but the knowledge about this catastrophe is not always conveyed by schools in a way that stirs the imagination and leaves an imprint on students’ memory. Numbers, even if they are large, do not say everything. On the one hand, some teachers and students perceive teaching about the Holocaust as something that only concerns Jews and therefore does not directly relate to themselves and the national group to which they belong. On the other hand, there are many students who are...
interested in the subject. The effectiveness of educational activities relating to Holocaust memory in Poland, which is not sufficiently researched, is currently being examined by the Center for Holocaust Studies at the Jagiellonian University.

Everything seems to suggest that generational changes have some positive effect on Holocaust consciousness. An important question is why this effect is not permanent. The conclusions from empirical research into Holocaust education in Poland lead in several directions. Kucia believes that information about Auschwitz and the Holocaust should be included in the syllabuses not only of history and Polish literature courses, but also of other school subjects. He also calls for a greater role of the intellect rather than emotion in the educational message, for example, including visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau and other memorial sites, so as to make its effects more lasting.114 On the one hand, some teachers are critical of the predominant strategy of Holocaust education in Poland, which they perceive as overloaded with historical facts, dates, etc.115 On the other hand, as Bilewicz points out:

Holocaust education that is equal to the challenge of the social memory of Polish youth must...begin not with communicating information about events of that time, but rather with including the victims in the common national category that transcends the ethnic community, as a result of which young Poles would feel obliged to remember the Jewish Poles of that time to the same extent as they remember the ethnic Poles.116

In order to achieve this goal, nevertheless, changes in the consciousness of

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114 Kucia, “Optymistyczne dane.”
115 A focus group interview in Kraków, April 17, 2009.
116 Bilewicz, “Społeczna pamięć,” p. 34.
teachers and social actors responsible for the education system and training future educators are necessary.

According to an outstanding historian of Polish literature, Maria Janion, the loss of the Jews is the most crucial loss for Poland and Poles, after the loss of Slavic identity. In her opinion, the memory of Jews, our dead, and empathy for them are of fundamental importance. Nevertheless, the awareness that “we will never be purified” and mourning the Holocaust117 is constantly accompanied by the conviction that “the chance is not lost, and it is worth talking, especially to young people.”118

117 The mourning and the return, or the impossibility of return, to banished elements of consciousness have been subjects of theoretical reflection in material relating to work on memory in Germany. The author would like to thank Professor Joanna Tokarska-Bakir for pointing out that, in Poland, attempts at restoring banished memories relating to attitudes toward the Holocaust can be observed, and for warning against the danger involved in stopping the mourning process too early. See Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, Rzeczy mgliste. Eseje i studia (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2004); Marianne Hirsch, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

What Remains
The Contemporary Jewish Community in Poland and the Holocaust

HELENA DATNER

The relationship between the contemporary Jewish community in Poland and the Holocaust can be considered from the historiosophical perspective: Questions may be asked not only about the very existence of this community and its chances of survival, but also about its “duty” to live on. The last question was briefly and lucidly formulated by Emil Fackenheim in his 614th commandment: Thou shalt not grant Hitler a posthumous victory by allowing the Jews to die as a people. From this perspective, the existence of this community is of value in itself. In this case, Polish Jews have a particular role to play, since they used to be the most numerous group of Jews in Europe before the Second World War. Another important question relates to the consequences of the Holocaust for European thought — the concept of totalitarianism, and the place of Holocaust remembrance in the construction of national self-images. As far as the presence of the Holocaust and antisemitism in the history of European thought is concerned, the 1990s and thereafter are of particular significance in spreading knowledge about the Holocaust in the public sphere: the Vatican declarations, the establishment of International Holocaust Remembrance Day by the United Nations, historical debates, public acts of contrition made by statesmen in the name of their countries, and the establishment of European institutions to support Holocaust education. According to Tony Judt, the Holocaust stands at the center of European historical and philosophical reflection, and the “recovered memory of Europe’s dead Jews” is a “guarantee of the continent’s

1 Emil Fackenheim “The 614th Commandment: Not to Grant Hitler Posthumous Victories,” in Joseph Telushkin, Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know about the Jewish Religion, Its People and Its History (New York: William Morrow, 1991). The Zionist implications of Fackenheim’s message are left aside as less relevant to the discussion in this article.
restored humanity."² A question of great significance is the form of Jewish presence (memory of Jews) in Poland, and its consequences. The articles in this book are a collective answer to this question. Apparently, Judt’s opinion is not widely accepted in Poland, where the Holocaust, to a large extent, is a poorly or primarily defensive assimilated experience.³ As Maria Janion puts it, “Although we are not always aware of the fact, the Holocaust determines the whole system of contemporary culture, all the questions and dilemmas of postmodernity. In Poland, ways of thinking grounded in the lessons of the Holocaust, which, by an unfortunate twist of history took place mostly on ’Polish soil,’ have not yet taken root in many fields.”⁴ Joanna Tokarska-Bakir’s essays contain a similar reflection.⁵ As the sociologist Zdzisław Mach suggests, part of Polish society finds it difficult to accept the Holocaust experience, the causes of which lie in the concept of Polish national identity, which is ethnic rather than civic.⁶

From the religious point of view, the disappearance of Jews would be a theological disaster with unimaginable consequences due to the theological role of their covenant with God.⁷ From the psychological perspective, considering the impact of the Holocaust on the survivors, it is possible to speculate as to the persistence or gradual alleviation of the consequences of the Holocaust a few decades after the war. The psychotherapeutic activities of the Polish “Children of the Holocaust” Association, as well as literature on the subject in Poland and abroad, leave no doubts of the persistence of such consequences.

From the individual perspective, an attempt is made to ascertain to what extent the Holocaust affects the Jewish identity of members of the contemporary community.⁸ This question may be expanded to include the

³ This refers not only to the knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust, but also to post-war antisemitism, which, in the most general sense, could be regarded as a failure to assimilate the experience of the Holocaust. It is not an exclusively Polish problem, though Poland is specific in this respect.
⁸ This question is discussed in Małgorzata Melchior’s article, “The Place of the Holocaust in the Consciousness of Polish Jews,” in this volume.
identity of groups as a whole, such as in the American Jewish community. According to some scholars, the Holocaust functions as the source of a "substitute identity," which is nevertheless the most important identity factor.\(^9\)

From the educational perspective, broadly understood, it is important to ask what the place of the Holocaust is, and should be, in school curricula and the upbringing of young people. This article is limited to Holocaust-related educational programs implemented by Jewish institutions as part of their activities.

From the perspective of the material basis of Jewish life, the impact of the complete wartime loss of property, which had been accumulated over generations, and changes in this area resulting from the restitution of Jewish property, which was initiated in the 1990s, are investigated. It seems important to treat the restitution as a powerful community-building factor.

This article focuses on the institutional dimension of the Jewish community in Poland. In this book, identity constitutes a separate, independent research problem, although it cannot be completely divorced even from the "institutional" description of a community.

Factors Favoring Development of the Jewish Community in Poland after Introduction of a Democratic Political System

The year 1968 was a crucial turning point in the social history of Jews in Poland. The brutal antisemitic campaign organized by the Communist authorities, an event unprecedented in post-war Europe, resulted not only in rapid contraction of the Jewish community, but also in a break in passing on the tradition to future generations. Jewish life went into hibernation for over a decade.\(^{10}\) At the same time, in the wake of the shock of March 1968, 

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\(^{10}\) Signs of the revival of Jewish life became apparent at the end of the 1970s. The establishment of the so-called Jewish Flying University in 1979, the return of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC — Joint) in 1982, and the “Solidarity” period, which re-introduced Jewish topics into the public discourse, led to the revival of institutions from the past in the second half of the 1980s. These included the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, and, to some extent, the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith, which, in 1989, engaged the first rabbi there in several decades. In 1989, the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation organized its first recreational and educational camp for young people in Poland.
some assimilated Jews began to take an interest in Jewish tradition and history, involving “reconstruction,” or even, as some scholars would have it, “construction” of tradition. After 1989, the distinction between the “old” Jews and the “new” Jews (i.e., those with “regained” Jewish identity) became an informal division within the Jewish community.11

The factor with the strongest and most direct effect on the transformation of the Jewish community was the change in the political system in 1989. The regained freedom in the countries of Eastern Europe also altered the position of the national minorities there. Some of the changes were a consequence of the new legal system, which allowed unrestricted registration of all kinds of associations, while others resulted from the abolition of ideological coercion, which enabled the return of religion and, in some countries, Zionist organizations. The renewal, as manifested by the involvement of young people in the Jewish community in all post-Communist countries,12 led to some movement away from assimilation. It meant a return to, or “discovery” of, Jewishness, broadly understood, by people who had not described themselves as Jews ever before,13 or for a long time.14 In the second half of the “20 years of freedom,” religious options diversified: the emergence of both a Hassidic trend, and a radically liberal form of Judaism, which was a historical novelty in Central-Eastern Europe.15

As already mentioned, there was revived interest in the memories of the Jews in contemporary Europe (which largely means interest in the Holocaust). Poland has a great variety of Jewish cultural forms, created principally by non-Jews (the term “culture” also includes a rich academic life and many publications on Jewish culture and history).16

11 From the author’s observations and participation in endless discussions about the “old” and “new” Jews.

12 Signs of organizational renewal and revival of the Jewish community in Poland could already be observed in the 1980s. See August Grabski, “Współczesne życie religijne Żydów,” in Studia z dziejów i kultury Żydów w Polsce po 1945 roku (Warsaw: Trio, 1997).

13 In this context, it is worth noting that well-known personalities, such as Michał Głowiński, Henryk Markiewicz, and Agata Tuszyńska “came out” as Jews; and also Krzysztof Teodor Toepplitz, Maria Orwid, and Joanna Olczak-Ronikier wrote extensive memoirs.

14 This primarily applies to young people.

15 Beit Warszawa and Chabad-Lubavitch are discussed further on in the article.

16 See Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska and Magdalena Ruta’s article, “From Jewish Culture to Culture about Jews,” in this volume.
The Jewish Community after 1989

In Poland in the 1990s, the restoration of justice took two different forms: partial restitution of the property of former Jewish religious communities to the existing communities,17 and German compensation payments to ghetto and concentration camp prisoners. The latter should be treated as a “restoration of justice,” since Jews outside the Soviet Bloc had been receiving such compensation payments from the German government since the 1950s.

The 1997 Act, “On the Attitude of the State towards Jewish Religious Congregations” (O stosunku państwa do gmin wyznaniowych żydowskich), led to a moral and practical controversy over who should be considered as the heir of property that belonged to the huge Jewish community before 1939. The process of drafting the bill revealed considerable tension between Jewish organizations in Poland, especially between the Union of Jewish Religious Communities (UJRC) and the organizations united in the World Jewish Restitution Organization.18 The World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) insisted that the very few Jews living in Poland should assign the right to restitution to the WJRO, since it represented all Polish Jews who had survived the Holocaust. The conflict also had an ideological dimension: Some of the organization’s representatives denied the leaders of Polish-Jewish organizations the right to call themselves Jews on account of the non-halakhic origin (according to Jewish law) of some of them, and because they branded Jewish community leaders and members who had not left Poland after the war as “traitors.”19 This controversy could be treated as a dispute not only over legitimacy to represent the Polish Jews’ interests, but even over the very existence of the Jewish community in Poland. The first part of this controversy is linked to the Holocaust, while the other harks back to the post-war history of the Jews. Characteristically, during

17 This process took place under the Act of Parliament of 1997, “O stosunku państwa do gmin wyznaniowych żydowskich” (On the Attitude of the State towards Jewish Religious Congregations). Similar acts were passed for all institutions with church status in Poland.
18 A coalition of Jewish organizations was established in 1993 in order to regain Jewish communal property and heirless property, as well as to facilitate the return of private property. Israeli Jewish Agency (Sochnut) representatives were particularly active in the negotiations with Poland. The author thanks the Union of Jewish Religious Communities leadership for allowing access to minutes from meetings of the World Jewish Restitution Organization and the Union.
19 The author was a witness to such statements in the course of those negotiations.
the debate on the bill in the Polish Sejm, some voices opposed granting such extensive restitution rights to Polish Jews as unjustified in view of the community’s size. There were also protests against granting such rights to Jewish groups outside Poland.²⁰

The act, whereby the right to restitution was ultimately divided between the Jewish communities in Poland and the World Jewish Restitution Organization, also had some important “side effects.” It altered the power distribution in the Jewish community, and precipitated changes in some of its organizations. It created the foundations for the financial self-sufficiency of Jewish communities, which is an important prerequisite for the autonomy of Jewish institutions.²¹ The act increased the role of the UJRC, compared to the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, which had ruled the hearts and minds of Polish Jews since the 1950s, and which the authorities treated as the only representative body of Jewish life, thereby increasing the competition between these organizations.²² It also speeded up the transformation of existing religious Jewish communities. Since the act strengthened the position of the communities by making them the targets of restitution, they had to be modernized, so as to make the restitution possible. Indeed, the statute of the UJRC and the newly established Warsaw community were reformed, making them de jure liberal structures. In the UJRC, a generational change of elites took place. The initiating group who created the Warsaw community also wished to transform it into an institution which, following the example of pre-war Jewish kehillot, would not only cater to its members’ religious needs. Covers of all issues of Biuletyn Gminy (Community Bulletin), since 1998, include the following message: “The congregation is open: Those who join are not asked about their personal religiousness. Any person of Jewish origin can become a member, provided

²⁰ See the stenographic record of the Sejm session on May 31, 1996.
²¹ Financial self-sufficiency (independence from foreign aid) was an important demand voiced during discussions within the community. See the discussion at the symposium on the future of Polish Jews on January 26, 1997, Przyszłość Żydów polskich (Warsaw: AJDC, 1997), among others. At present, only two out of nine Jewish communities (in Legnica and Szczecin) are financed by the Union of Jewish Religious Communities, since they do not have income from restitutions.
he or she does not follow another religion. The community is also open in the sense that, following the example of pre-war Jewish kehillot in Poland..., its statutory objectives include fulfilling its members’ social and cultural needs.” (The last sentence was deleted from the bulletin in 2010). Structural and generational changes in leadership practically and psychologically facilitated the accession of new members and made Jewish communities an active social actor after years of virtual absence from public life.

The community’s situation remains paradoxical, in a sense: According to the statute, although it is liberal, it has an Orthodox synagogue and rabbi. After the unification in 2005, the statutes of Jewish communities retained both the liberal membership criteria and the Orthodox chief rabbi of Poland.

Recent years have brought the normalization of relations between the WJRO and the UJRC, which jointly established the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, with objectives including the restitution and management of property, as well as the preservation of particularly valuable monuments.24

Community Size and Members’ Education

According to a census prepared by the Joint, in the late 1990s, there were 4,500 Polish Jews, of whom lived in Warsaw, 51 percent over 66 years of age, five percent under 25, ten percent between 26 and 40, and 34 percent aged between 41 and 65. Despite all the valid reservations about

23 The liberalism of the community is expressed primarily in the membership criteria, reflecting the feelings of the Jewish community members. In a survey conducted between 1998 and 1999 (see note 39), over 80 percent of the respondents declared they would (“definitely” or “rather”) consider as a Jew a person whose father was a Jew; by contrast, according to a survey in 2007 (see note 40), the majority, with varying degrees of conviction, believed that “it is possible to become a Jew, since Jewishness combines [both] culture and upbringing.”

24 On the strength of an agreement between these organizations, the foundation will become the owner and administrator of the property regained in 27 out of 49 former voivodeships (existing before 1999). At present, it also implements an extensive educational program in cooperation with schools and NGOs in various towns and villages.

25 The census was carried out by asking people with good knowledge of the situation in particular towns and villages to count people associated in some way with Jewish organizations, drawing on their personal information and membership lists (which would be verified during the census). Unpublished material from the AJDC.
these data, they provide a good estimate of the number of Jews remaining within the orbit of Jewish institutions in the late 1990s.

The national census carried out in 2002 is one source of interesting information. For the first time in post-war history, respondents were asked about their nationality, but representatives of the national minorities criticized the formulation of the question. Almost all minorities regarded the figures in the census as understated, allegedly resulting both from difficulties in clear self-identification (“Polish” or “non-Polish” nationality) in cases of double cultural identity and a common fear of declaring non-Polish identity.26 Those 1,137 Jews who declared Jewish identity in the census can safely be regarded as people with a very strong sense of identity. Most of them (about 40 percent) lived in the Mazowieckie voivodeship in Warsaw; the second-largest center is the Lower Silesian voivodeship (almost 20 percent), followed by the Silesian voivodeship (nine percent) and the Łódź voivodeship (six percent).27 Presumably such a distinctly Warsaw-centric geographical distribution began to take shape after the 1957–1958 wave of emigration, and was ultimately sealed by the March 1968 emigration. Jews are among the oldest members of national minorities in Poland in terms of age: They include the smallest percentage of young people and the highest percentage of very old senior citizens.28 Generally, minority groups (except for the Romani) are “older” than Polish society, which indicates they are “disappearing,” or the assimilation process is advanced. However, it should be borne in mind that this analysis applies principally to people of strong and clear national identification (the author assumes that such people declared themselves as Jewish in the census), whereas contemporary “nation-forming” processes are characterized by a multiplicity of identities. This means that the Jewish community, identified by a method other than a census, would be more numerous and younger.

In the second half of the 1990s, Jewish communities, and certainly the

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28 Ibid., p. 117. The Lithuanian minority is among the “youngest.”
one in Warsaw, were growing. Compared to the UJRC, the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, whose program and leadership had not undergone any changes, was a declining organization.

According to the most recent statistics on Jewish organizations, there were 700 “children of the Holocaust” and 800 war veterans; the Warsaw community, the largest in Poland, had 450 members in 2008. Today, they are smaller. The “Children of the Holocaust” and war veterans organizations, with decreasing membership, are practically “closed.” In this sense, the others are open institutions. At present, the number of Jews is practically unaffected by such factors as immigration, which is practically nonexistent, and emigration (according to the Sochnut [Jewish Agency], the number of Jews leaving Poland for Israel ranges between 20 and 40 a year).

According to the national census data, Jews are the most well educated ethnic group. Almost 50 percent of the participants in the census have higher education, and about 80 percent have at least secondary education. This very high level of education in the Jewish community, also confirmed by other data, deserves attention. To begin with, since their emancipation in the nineteenth century, the educational level of Jews has been much higher than of the societies where they lived. Moreover, in post-war Poland, the democratization of education offered opportunities, which were widely taken up by Jews. At the same time, this might be a paradoxical result of the Holocaust: After the war, the survivors showed an enormous drive for knowledge, as their memoirs and foreign research show. “Children of the Holocaust” are frequently successful people. As research has demonstrated, human beings are not helpless in the face of traumatic experiences, which can be creative and can release immense powers of adaptation.

29 Between 1999 and 2001, the Warsaw community was joined by 45 people, reaching a membership of 334 in 2001. Raport z działalności Zarządu Gminy Wyznaniowej Żydowskiej w Warszawie za lata 1999–2001 (Report on the Activities of the Executive Committee of the Jewish Religious Congregations in Warsaw for the Years 1999–2001). According to a congregation executive committee member, in subsequent years, the membership grew even more rapidly, which is indicative of the organization’s vitality. By contrast, the demographic situation of communities in small centers, such as Szczecin, is not good: Their membership, as well as that of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, is falling. See Róża Król, “Niektóre problemy środowiska Żydów szczecińskich,” Słowo Żydowskie, vols. 20/21/22 (2003).

30 Gudaszewski, “Demograficzno-społeczna charakterystyka,” p. 135, 137. Among Polish citizens as a whole, ten percent had higher education and 42 percent at least secondary education.

31 Jacek Bomba referred to Aaron Antonovsky’s research during the session on “Psycho-
scholars refer to “positive selection” in terms of the superior inner resources of those who survived. Although these are still only research hypotheses, they are very interesting. It is worth noting the post-war phenomenon that in the United States the same generation also achieved higher education to a greater extent than their parents.

There is a strong social tendency to inherit a level of education, which means that Polish Jews are likely to remain a highly educated group. In that sense, they are a group of intelligentsia, diametrically opposed professionally to the pre-war trader-artisan community and, to some extent, immediately afterward.

Whether it is possible to speak of “renaissance” and “rebuilding” Jewish life in Poland or only its continuation, albeit in a different form, is a moot point. One way or another, the Jewish community’s existence in Poland is an undeniable fact, with the large number of Jewish institutions demonstrating its vitality.

**The Shape of the Community**

Researchers probing the changes that have been taking place in national minority communities since 1989 describe the following stages with respect to the institutions: adapting the old structures to the new situation; emergence of new organizations; and attempts to integrate the community by developing umbrella organizations. In the Jewish community, the “old” organiza-
tion (the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland) did not implement any effective changes, which, as already noted, led to internal tensions and a certain loss of significance. However, new organizations were created, including an umbrella organization, for certain periods of time. Already in the early 1990s, the first to emerge were organizations representing the needs and interests of specific Jewish groups. After years of relative marginalization, Judaism emerged as a dimension of social life and an identification factor. Initially, religious activities were supported by the American Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, and, later, by the “revived” communities. In time, the religious options became more diversified: The liberal Beit Warszawa was established in 1999 and registered as the Jewish Cultural Association in 2004; and the Orthodox Hassidic Chabad-Lubavitch, which has the legal status of a foundation in Poland, commenced activity in the same year. The establishment of the office of the chief rabbi of Poland by the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in 2004 can be perceived as an attempt at organizing the religious domain in the face of growing and diversified religious options as well as the increasing number of rabbis active in Poland.

The Polish branch of B’nai-B’rith, a rather exclusive organization joined by some Jewish intelligentsia, was established in 2007. “Czulent,” an independent club for Jewish youth, was registered in Kraków in 2008. As would

35 The Coordination Commission of Jewish Organizations operated in the mid-1990s.
36 The first half of the 1990s saw the establishment of the Association of Jewish War Veterans and Victims of Persecution during the Second World War (1991), the “Children of the Holocaust” Association (1991), the Jewish Forum for Integration and Education of the Jewish Middle Generation (1994), the Jewish Helpline, and the Polish Union of Jewish Students (1992, which was dissolved in 2007 and replaced with the All-Polish Jewish Youth Organization). The Jewish Lauder-Morasha School was established in Warsaw, in 1994, and the Lauder-Etz Chaim School in Wrocław, in 1997.
37 The association was established in 2000 by Szymon Aszkenazy, his son Adrian, and a group of Polish Jews who returned from the USA. In 2004, Beit Warszawa became affiliated with the World Union for Progressive Judaism.
38 Chabad-Lubavitch is a Hassidic group founded at the end of the seventeenth century in the village of Lyubavichi near Smolensk, in Russia. Since 1950, and especially since 1994 (when the movement’s charismatic leader died), Chabad has expanded both in the USA and other countries, particularly in the former USSR. The movement’s expansion is based on the excellent religious and secular education it offers, as well as its volunteer nonprofit work, see www.myjewishlearning.com. Public appearances of Chabad’s activities with representatives of the authorities are characteristic (e.g., lighting Hanukkah [Jewish Festival of Lights] candles in the Sejm in December 2008).
be expected, not a single Zionist organization was established, since, as confirmed by other data, the community is “non-Zionist.”

Despite the variety of religious options and their social prominence, Jewish life in Poland largely centers around secular Jewish identity. Alongside the small “center” with a strong identity, most of the community is characterized by a relatively “lukewarm” identity (following the general trend in the world), which is evidenced, for instance, by the great popularity of “one-time” Jewish events that do not require a long or strong involvement. To a large section of young people, the “social” aspect of Jewishness is one of the most important. Youth organizations adopt a broad, liberal definition of their members’ Jewishness, but also increase membership by admitting

39 In the years 1998–1999, Paweł Śpiewak and the author of this article conducted a survey on a broad spectrum of attitudes presented by Polish Jews. The survey, carried out in the major centers of Jewish life (Warsaw, Wrocław, Kraków, Katowice, Poznań, Gdańsk, Łódź), was in the form of a questionnaire sent by mail. Out of 600 questionnaires distributed, 161 were returned. The survey can be treated as a form of exploratory research. The author has the unpublished typescript analysis of the results. Asked whether they agree with the view, “eventually all Jews should come to live in Israel,” the vast majority (almost 80 percent) of the respondents answered negatively.

40 This fact has been confirmed by the author’s observations over many years, as well as, for example, by the results of exploratory research commissioned in 2007 by the Union of Jewish Religious Communities (150 questionnaires were returned). One of the questions was, “What is the most important element in your Jewish identity?” “Religion” took a distant place as the answer behind “sensitivity to antisemitism,” “the Holocaust experience,” “Jewish descent,” “culture (literature and music),” “acquaintance with other Jews,” and “Jewish symbolism.” Przemysław Krawczyński, Gmina Żydowska w Polsce. Raport z badań, in collaboration with Joanna Kierczyńska, Michał Bilewicz, and Adrian Wójcik, of which the author has a typescript.

41 An example was a two-day educational program, Limmud, held in October 2008 in Wawer near Warsaw and attended by over 300 participants from all over Poland. Fifty lecturers spoke on a variety of topics, including non-Jewish ones. The program was enthusiastically received by the participants. “At Limmud, we do not impose anything on anyone. What counts is that we are Jews. We would like to spend time together in a nice atmosphere and enjoy ourselves,” summed up a representative of the Joint, the sponsor of Limmud. “Limud keszet od kuchni. Relacja z pierwszego spotkania w Polsce,” Biuletyn Gminy Wyznaniowej Żydowskiej w Warszawie, October–November 2008. In the years that followed, the program attracted even more participants.

42 The foremost objective of the All-Polish Jewish Youth Organization, established in 2007 in place of the dissolved Polish Union of Jewish Students, is “uniting Jewish youth.” For the organization’s statute and outline of activities, see www.zoom.edu.pl.

43 The “Czulent” Association states: “Our association does not adopt any predetermined, ‘exclusively correct’ definition of Jewishness. We accept everyone’s right to search for their personal path. We are open to both the religious-minded and those whose
non-Jews and granting them the status of member-sympathizers. Jewish schools, established in Warsaw in 1994 and Wrocław in 1997, also have broad acceptance criteria: They admit all children whose parents agree with the school curriculum and principles, but give precedence to Jewish children. Jewish aspects of the curriculum are evident, though limited: There are two hours a week of Jewish tradition and history, Hebrew language, and all Jewish holidays are celebrated.

Two characteristic features of Jewish life that negatively affect both its development and public representation are the absence of an umbrella organization which would integrate the entire Jewish community. One of the symptoms of a weak social life of Polish Jews is the lack of public disputes and discussions: In recent years, the author observed only one relating to whether the basis of Jewish identity is religious or secular.

Thus, Jewish life in Poland is concentrated in several of the largest cities, primarily in Warsaw and Wrocław, with Kraków having a growing role in recent years. Contemporary Polish Jews are a highly educated, largely secular group, although their return to Jewishness via religion has been increasingly observed since the early 1990s. However, the social visibility of young religious Jews does not reflect their number, and the secular (and sometimes also religious) Jewish identity is characteristic of those born in Poland after the war. This is demonstrated by empirical studies. Thus, An-

Jewishness has a more secular dimension, since our association is founded upon pluralism, diversity, openness, and tolerance.” See http://independent.pl/zydowskie_stowarzyszenie_czulent (accessed, May 13, 2013).

44 For the All-Polish Jewish Youth Organization’s statute, see www.zoom.edu.pl.
45 See the author’s article, “Children in the Polish-Jewish Community from 1944 to 1968,” in this volume.
47 Melchior’s studies present the development of “Polishness” and “Jewishness,” as well as their role in individual identity. See Małgorzata Melchior, Społeczna tożsamość jednostki: (W świetle wywiadów z Polakami pochodzenia żydowskiego w latach 1944–1955) (Warsaw: Wydział Profilaktyki, Resocjaliacji i Problemów Społecznych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1990). On the one hand, according to the survey (see note 39), the most frequently selected self-descriptions were: “I am a Pole of Jewish descent” or “I am a Polish Jew.” Members of Jewish religious communities usually chose the latter, and members of the “Children of the Holocaust” Association the former. On the other hand, in the 2007 exploratory research (see note 40), one-third of the respondents claimed that both the Polish and Jewish components of their identity were equally important to them, while, at the same time, almost 50 percent claimed that the Jewish component was, to varying extents, more important than the Polish one.
tonina Kłoskowska, the author of an important work on the root of the multiplicity of national identities, considers that, at the individual level, intolerance of multiple identities reflects closed attitudes. On the one hand, frequent appeals to Jews such as, “We like you, but state clearly who you are,” are an expression of such a closed attitude. On the other hand, Jews themselves often demand such declarations. People generally find cultural ambiguity difficult to accept.

While the assessment of the extent of Jewish life in Poland is subject to controversy, the “presence of Jews,” understood as Jewish issues in people's consciousness and the public discourse, is evident. This is both a “negative presence,” manifesting itself in various forms of antisemitism, and a positive one, with an impressive wealth of publications on Jewish topics, a growing number of studies on Jewish culture and history, and activities of NGOs aimed at reviving the memory of Jews in many towns and villages and establishing Jewish culture festivals. However, it is fairly obvious that the existing Jewish community in Poland is hardly necessary for the manifestation of antisemitism or the revival of memory of Jews.

**Psychological Consequences of the Holocaust**

Two Jewish organizations in Poland have been established specifically for people directly affected by the war: the Association of “Children of the Holocaust” in Poland; and the Association of Jewish War Veterans and Victims of Persecution during the Second World War. Long before the political breakthrough in 1989, a group of Jewish war veterans launched an appeal in *Folks-Shtime* calling to “rebuild Jewish war veteran circles.” The authors directly referred to the post-war Jewish League of Fighters for Democracy,

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48 Antonina Kłoskowska, *Kultury narodowe u korzeni* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1977). A conceptual framework is also developed, which is very useful in describing multiplicity of identity.

49 For more on the activities of NGOs, see, for example, *Tolerancyjni. To się dzieje!* (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Inicjatyw Twórczych “ę,” 2009).

50 The appeal, published on November 28, 1987, includes the following passage: “Each of us has a great deal to relate about experiences during the occupation and the rebuilding of Poland and the Jewish community in the years that followed. We wish to rebuild the milieu, which is essential to you, our fellow veterans,” quoted after: Bolesław Janowski, in Marian Turski, ed., *Losy żydowskie: Świadectwo żywych*, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Żydów Kombatantów i Poszkodowanych w II Wojnie Światowej, 1996), p. 299.
which was dissolved in 1950 under pressure from the state authorities. The primary objective of the revived organization was to provide a platform for its members to relate wartime and early post-war experiences. The appeal concluded with the words: “Let us leave a mark of our struggle and work.”51 Since the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy did not accept the idea of a separate Jewish organization, the Jewish war veterans decided to form their own circle at the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, which was registered as an organization in 1991.52

The establishment of the Association of “Children of the Holocaust” was directly connected with the first international congress of Jewish children survivors of the war, which was held in May 1991, in New York. A group from Poland, including 19 “children” and three Righteous Among the Nations, attended the convention.53 Already in June that year, about 70 people, who had learned about the event from a press announcement, attended the first meeting of the “children,” in Warsaw. The association was registered in the same year.54 The issues raised at the congress characterize the problems of the “children of the Holocaust.”55 The congress also honored the memory of the Righteous. Taking care of the Righteous, which from the very beginning was one of the association’s statutory objectives, with time, has become one of its most important everyday tasks.

In the 1990s, the “children of the Holocaust” entered a period in their lives favoring retrospection, and greater emergence of psychological problems. The psychological support56 program initially encountered strong re-

51 Ibid.
52 At the time, the organization had 1,800 members, 650 of whom previously belonged to the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy.
53 Halina Grubowska, “Pierwszy światowy kongres ‘The Hidden Child’ w Nowy Jorku. Dlaczego tu jesteśmy?” Folks-Sztime, August 23, 1991. The film, Comme si c’etait hier (As If It Were Yesterday), directed by Miriam Abramowicz and Ester Hoffenberg, was supposedly the direct motivation for the congress. Some 2,000 participants from all over the world attended the congress. The author is indebted to Halina Grubowska for drawing her attention to this article.
55 Examples of such questions/problems are the following: “Who am I: A Christian or a Jew?,” “Lost childhood,” “The fear of the abandoned,” and “The guilt and loneliness of the survivors,” Grubowska, “Pierwszy światowy kongres.”
56 In 1997, the team who held therapeutic group meetings included Maria Orwid, Ewa Domagalska-Kurdziel, Maria Kamińska, Katarzyna Prot, and Łukasz Biedka. See the “Psychotherapy” at www.dziecihoocaustu.org.pl.
sistance. “Association colleagues themselves put up resistance, claiming that we wanted to drive them to become pathology cases,” wrote Maria Orwid.57 Problems of those who survived the Holocaust were sometimes ignored; the survivors were even suspected of exploiting Holocaust trauma as an instrument of moral blackmail. In a rather shocking article, Zygmunt Bauman accused the survivors of searching for the source of all their problems in the Holocaust, blackmailing the world by constantly discovering threats of antisemitism where they did not exist, and a sense of moral impunity in harming others.58 In Poland, Bauman received a resolute response from Henryk Grynberg and Jakub Gutenbaum.59 They pointed out the difference between the experiences of Bauman, who lived in the USSR throughout the war, and those who remained under the German occupation, but this was neither the only nor the most important argument. It is an interesting and somewhat unexpected fact that hiding on the Aryan side, which frequently necessitated “lying about one’s identity,” possibly involving several psychological or even existential consequences,60 has also become the subject of moral judgment. There are those who claim that every lie is evil and subject to moral evaluation.61

57 “I remember those discussions, the problem was very delicate, the same as with the former prisoners of Auschwitz: Aren’t you trying to make us into sick people. We explained that we were not talking in psychiatric terms, in terms of a psychopathology, and we somehow came to an agreement. It turned out that everyone wanted to talk on that subject.” See “Pamięć trzeba otworzyć. Z Profesor Marią Orwid rozmawia Ewa Kożmińska-Frejlak,” Midrasz, July–August, 2005, p. 19.
58 Among other things, Bauman wrote as follows: “To the directly interested, the conviction [about the trauma] instilled by the psychiatrists and reinforced during ‘self-help’ sessions, offered all kinds of benefits. In the USA, children of the Holocaust formed ‘self-help groups.’ Discussions in these groups not only boosted the spirit of their members, but also introduced another dimension: ...collective interpretation (that is, the community’s authority) in a persistent search for Holocaust trauma, which, if found, could provide meaning for individuals’ personal problems. What is doing harm to others is harming the Palestinians.” See Zygmunt Bauman, “Widmo Zagłady,” Midrasz, September 1999, p. 35.
61 Janion wrote on the subject, describing moralistic judgments on “lies about identity” as “ethical arrogance,” following Slavoj Žižek’s example. Janion, Bohater, spisek, śmierć, pp. 71–76.
Describing the survivors’ specific psychological situation and impact on their later life, Orwid pointed out that after the liberation former Polish prisoners of Auschwitz supported one another very strongly, since they shared a common experience. However, Jews often survived in utter isolation, with a feeling of overwhelming loneliness, which also continued after the war. While their loneliness was psychological, it was also quite literal, and physical: In most cases, all their family and friends were dead.62

For “children of the Holocaust” who survived the war in a Polish environment, the question, “Who am I?” can be a source of a painful emotional conflict. In such cases, psychological help aimed to develop acceptance of their own multiplicity of identities and the conviction that no one requires a “true Jew” model of behavior. According to Orwid, such therapeutic efforts can be supported by contemporary cultural trends, which treat ambiguity or ambivalence as an acceptable, normal condition. She said, “I always have the impression that I am taking part in the emergence of a new European identity of sorts.”63 Another form of the question, “Who am I?” consists of attempts to discover their own past. Lack of any knowledge about their families can be most painful. In Poland, all the fears originating in the Holocaust were compounded with the fear of revealing their Jewish origin, which considerably increased the survivors’ loneliness.64 As demonstrated by life experiences and studies conducted in Poland and other countries, Holocaust trauma can be passed on to the next generation.65

The Association of “Children of the Holocaust” has been giving therapeutic sessions since 1997, usually twice a year. Its psychological support has a particular character. According to Orwid, standard psychotherapeutic procedures have failed: “There is no therapeutic school capable of resolving all the dilemmas which we all experience.”66 However, “We are slowly succeeding in implementing the goal that we have been aiming at: emotional changes from ‘being a victim’ to being a strong and responsible person.”67

62 “Pamięć trzeba otworzyć,” p. 20.
64 In the survey discussed, carried out from 1998 to 1999 (note 39), the majority (over 80 percent) of the respondents answered in the affirmative the question: “Do you think that there are many people in Poland who conceal their Jewish origin?”
66 Orwid, “Psychotherapy.”
67 Ibid.
Until recently, the Association of Jewish War Veterans did not offer psychological support to its members. However, the Association recently held a conference on the consequences of wartime experiences to the physical and mental health of survivors, formulating its objectives as follows: “We will discuss the problems resulting from the wartime trauma in the context of the survivors’ aging process, as well as the challenges, needs, and possibilities of helping the victims of wartime persecution.”68 The above announcement contains an important message, confirmed by personal experience of numerous people: The past does not become more remote as people age; on the contrary, it frequently returns with a vengeance, bringing despair along.

Apparently, the sense of loneliness among Holocaust survivors, especially those who survived as children, is deepened by the fact that the people around them are not aware of the intensity of their suffering,69 and probably lessens the effectiveness of the Holocaust lesson. Could it be otherwise?

The Role of the Holocaust in Forming the Views of Community Representatives

Sociological research on the Jewish community supports the claim that the “personal or ancestral” experience of the Holocaust and “sensitivity to antisemitism” are very important elements of the respondents’ Jewish identity, although this applies primarily to the older generation.70 Almost 70 percent of the respondents think the problem of antisemitism still exists and is serious in Poland, although a considerably smaller proportion feels that this phenomenon may threaten them personally; 25 percent of the respondents have been exposed to “antisemitic behavior or comments...a number


70 The 2007 questionnaire, see note 40. The figures provided here should be approached with caution: The surveys of the community referred to in this article are exploratory research and unrepresentative. Even so, they do seem to reflect important characteristics or relationships.
of times.” At the same time, most of them “definitely” or “rather” disagree with the view, “the creation of death camps in Poland was no accident.” The vast majority also believe that the Polish nation “has been cruelly treated by history,” and “has a rich and interesting culture.”

A review of the Jewish press supports the claim that the Holocaust is an important phenomenon to Polish Jews. Browsing through several randomly selected annual volumes of Słowo Żydowskie and Midrasz from the last decade leaves hardly any doubt as to the enduring significance of the Holocaust to Polish Jews. In the 1990s, every issue of Słowo Żydowskie contained at least one article — and frequently more — on the Holocaust.

The prevalence of topics related to the Holocaust, and the awareness that it somehow defines contemporary Polish Jews does not determine which information and experience should be given priority for passing on to the next generation of Jews. In the 1998–1999 survey, the respondents indicated Jewish history and Judaism as fundamental values. Characteristically, those who chose one of them, as a rule, did not choose the other. “Holocaust education,” took third place in the hierarchy of choices. Values accorded the greatest importance in the education of the young generation could be classified into characteristic packages or models: “secular-national” with Jewish history as the central value; “religious”; “Zionist,” with the history of Israel as the fundamental element; and “martyrdom,” consisting primarily of Holocaust education. The “martyrdom” and “religious” models have a diverse “social basis”: in the survey sample, but also in the Polish reality, especially the young people are religious. “The Holocaust” as an educational value was chosen primarily by those who were survivors: members of the Association of “Children of the Holocaust.” Will this pattern in any way determine future interest in the Holocaust among the Jewish community in Poland?

Activists in Jewish organizations have a complex attitude to the Holocaust as an educational value. According to representatives of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, the Holocaust should not, and does not, dominate the organization’s everyday activities. This is both because

71 The cited data comes from the 1998–1999 survey; see note 39.
72 The author looked through the following annual volumes of both magazines: 1998, 1999, 2003, 2005, and 2007. The spectrum of topics is broad: In Słowo Żydowskie, it covers anniversary events, book and film reviews, reports from symposia, and historical articles.
73 The question was: “What is most important in the education of the young generation of Polish Jews?” The respondents could choose from the following answers: the history of Jews in Poland, Judaism, Jewish literature, the history of Israel, Yiddish, Hebrew, the history of Polish-Jewish relations, Holocaust education, and the history of antisemitism.
the picture of the Holocaust would be incomplete without knowledge of earlier Jewish life, and, in their view, because it is impossible to build the future of Jewish life principally on the basis of the tragic past. Finally, as they admit with some diffidence, young people are confronted with a surfeit of Holocaust-related questions. Indeed, young people holding various posts in Jewish organizations approach such issues with caution. However, it is not the “surfeit” that is important here.

A representative of the Joint, which, apart from its traditional welfare and sponsoring activities, has also been trying to organize Jewish social life since the 1990s, points out the conflict between the perception of Poland as the nation’s cemetery and the needs of the evolving Jewish community. The identity of American Jews, irrespective of the caricaturized portrayals, is determined by the Holocaust to a considerable degree. In Poland, they search for traces of the Holocaust, which is understandable: In their perception, the cemetery overshadows the present day or at least makes it less important. This focus on the past has practical implications measured by the funds collected for particular causes, for example, by the Joint among American Jews. It also has moral consequences, since, in such a perspective, the efforts to build a Jewish life in contemporary Poland seem relatively unimportant. Another factor worth noting is that many Jews outside Poland continue to believe that Jewish life in Poland either does not exist or is inauthentic, because of the Holocaust as well as the past and present Polish antisemitism, which they consider as ubiquitous. One way or another, in programs run by the Joint, which are the most developed secular ones for young members of the Jewish community in Poland, there are almost no activities related to the Holocaust, except for events marking anniversaries of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In a sense, this is perhaps an unintended kind of polemic with American Jews. However, there are also other reasons: Those who run the programs, mostly young people, shun the subject of the Holocaust as extreme, which, moreover, is sometimes taboo in their homes, as it is often associated with deep trauma. Apart from the general difficulties and questions involved in transmitting information about the Holocaust, this is a specifically Jewish problem: fear intensified by family experiences,

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74 Based on a conversation with Artur Hoffman, Chairman of the central executive committee of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, and Henryk Albert, the committee’s secretary, February 18, 2009.
75 Conversation with Karina Sokołowska, January 7, 2009.
76 See, for example, Novick, The Holocaust in American Life.
and, in some cases, the existential fear of confronting the Jewish fate. There is also another perpetual problem: how to teach about the Holocaust. The methodical difficulties involved increase the unwillingness to take up this subject. The head of a Warsaw club for children and youth, sponsored by the Joint, expressed a similar feeling. She stressed the tendency of young educators to avoid difficult subjects because of their own inadequate “background,” the unsuitable circumstances in which they are supposed to mold young minds, mostly at summer camps, as well as difficulties in choosing methods. The “shock” approach to Holocaust education proves inappropriate. Judging by past experiences, the best path is via art and literature, presenting positive attitudes, such as those of the Righteous Among the Nations, and reflection on human nature, which is not “essentially” good. An important task for educators is to create a safe environment, in which young people are not afraid to ask questions. Nevertheless, Holocaust education is a problem with the young generation of Jews.

As those who care deeply about building or re-building the Jewish community claim, it is impossible to build on a tragedy, since despair is not a building force. This view, expressed by a Joint representative, is also shared by leaders of Jewish organizations. This is not to say that the Holocaust has been excluded from Jewish organizations’ sphere of interest; in their view, the point is rather to treat this subject in a life-serving manner.

According to some, there is a danger that the Holocaust might actually eclipse the Jewish contribution to civilization. To a great many Jews, Jewish culture is less attractive than secular Christian culture. This situation is frequently the result of their poor knowledge of the former. “Being Jewish is not only tears and despair,” or even the fact that “I am always on the side of the persecuted.” It is a culture. In Poland, we have difficulties coming up with an idea of secular Jewish culture. In the eyes of Polish society, the image of Jews is undesirably one-sided: A Jew is someone who is persecuted or who wears sidelocks.

77 Conversation with Agata Rakowicka, January 19, 2009, in the author’s collection.
78 Conversation with Piotr Kadlcik, Chairman of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities, January 17, 2009, and the previously cited conversation with representatives of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland.
79 Conversation with Piotr Paziński, on December 10, 2008. Jewish culture is entirely different from the Christian view. It is based on hermeneutics, a specific idea of progress, and the desire to “repair the world” (tikkun olam). It boasts excellent literature and has made a considerable contribution to modernism.
80 Conversation with Bella Szwarcman, editor of Midrasz, December 10, 2008.
As demonstrated by the above discussion, the answer to the question, “How much should Jews themselves be preoccupied with the Holocaust?” is complex.

The leaders of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland point out that what is important in Holocaust education is not so much to target the Jews themselves, but rather to get through to a wider public. Until now, the idea of reaching out to the public was implemented most often by some of the local branches as opposed to the central office — but the situation is changing. Memory of the Holocaust has been conveyed primarily through anniversary events, mainly of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which is always commemorated by all the association’s branches. It is treated as a memorial day, honoring both the murdered civilians and heroes in the armed struggle. For decades, to many Jews, meetings at the Memorial to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto were the only sign of belonging to the Jewish people. It was also the most visible and, for a long time, the only form of education about the Holocaust available to Polish society.

There is still much to convey to the society at large: all the things that could not be said during the years of censorship, and the incomparable suffering of Jews condemned to death just for being born Jewish. It should be stressed that the rescuers’ heroism was immeasurably greater than it would seem because of the attitudes around them. People should be made to realize that the Holocaust meant the end of Jewish civilization in Poland, whereas Polish civilization was not destroyed. They should be shown that equating Nazism with Communism leads to relativization of the Holocaust. It is important in Holocaust education today not so much to portray the victims’ experiences, but rather to analyze the murderers’ profiles:

81 Conversation with the association’s chairman, A. Hoffman, and executive committee’s secretary, H. Albert, February 18, 2009.
82 In November 2008, the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, together with the Congress of Russian Jews in Germany and the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, organized events to mark the seventieth anniversary of Kristallnacht with an open-air exhibition in Warsaw and an “open” event on the anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War. In keeping with long-standing practice, the association branches outside Warsaw cooperated with local Polish organizations.
84 Above-quoted conversation with Szwarcman.
85 Above-quoted conversation with Paziński.
an “ordinary,” “normal” human being could become a criminal. Human solidarity is the most important value to teach young people.87

In statutes and manifestos of Jewish institutions, the Holocaust is present either as a direct subject of education or as a duty to teach sensitivity, so as to prevent or fight antisemitism. The place of the Holocaust among the objectives of Jewish organizations and the character of the message of the Holocaust can be deduced through analysis of official documents of organizations, their statutes, policy statements and publications, as well as from their practical activities.

The principal statutory objectives of the Association of “Children of the Holocaust” are “the advancement and popularization of knowledge about Nazi crimes,” “commemorating the victims of the Holocaust” and those who “risked their lives to save the persecuted,” as well as “condemning various forms of intolerance” and antisemitism, in particular. Members of the Association of Jewish War Veterans and Victims of Persecution during the Second World War, as the name suggests, include both those who fought and those who were persecuted during the war. The association’s main aims are “preserving and promoting the memory of Jewish military actions and the struggle for freedom and human dignity during the Second World War.” The clause on the methods of pursuing the association’s aims begins with a passage on “counteracting and opposing” any insults to the Holocaust victims’ memory, and “propagating the truth about Jewish participation in fighting on all fronts during the Second World War, in partisan units and ghettos.” The second part refers to spreading the truth about “the martyrdom of Jews inside and outside the ghettos: in hiding, concentration camps, Soviet forced-labor camps, and in exile.” Another way of pursuing the association’s main objective is “fighting hatred, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and various forms of antisemitism...”

87 The above-quoted conversation with Piotr Kadlcik and a written response from Gustaw Kerszman. The latter wrote: “I attach a great deal of importance to the perpetrators’ testimonies for several reasons: It is not difficult to understand how you can become a victim. It is much more difficult to explain the process that transforms an ordinary man into a murderer or even someone who only approves of such a crime. The victims’ experiences are much better known than the murderers’ lives and mentalities. The murderers’ testimonies enable us to understand clearly the route from a simple dislike of Jews and banal nationalism to crime. I think this is important for overcoming the Polish incomprehension of the connection between a ‘mild antisemite’ and an ‘antisemitic thug.’ During the war, I perceived Nazis as kind of murderous martians. Later, they were presented in Polish, Russian, and English books and films in a mostly shallow and superficial way.”
The somewhat polemical character of certain expressions in the declaration of the Association of Jewish War Veterans’ aims is striking. This is primarily a response to accusations against Jews of passive acceptance of their fate, cowardice, and failure to resist evil. Jewish war veterans wish to deny this image by showing that Jews did fight.

A decade or so after the Association of Jewish War Veterans was established and its aims written down, the chairman, opening the conference “Jewish Participation in Armed Struggle against Fascism,” said: “When there is talk of the Holocaust in Poland, the usual image is of starved, haggard, terrorized, and helpless Jews being herded without protest to destruction. This is only part of the historical truth. We need to change this stereotype, which is based on ignorance, or perhaps even antisemitism, and the ill-will of some historians, who, although they are not dominant in Poland, offend the Jewish people’s feelings and make Jewish-Polish relations more difficult. Time is short, since there are only a few living ‘witnesses of history’ left.”

Jewish war veterans feel that the passage of time has done nothing to change the stereotype of the Jew in Polish society, which, according to members of their organization, is based on Jewish passivity. This is insulting to Jews and damaging to Polish-Jewish relations. The information about the Holocaust, which should be conveyed to society, is, above all, about the Jewish resistance.

It is interesting to note that the role of the Association of War Veterans was formulated in a similar manner in the 1940s. As a matter of fact, in the second half of that decade, the emphasis on military heroism, as opposed to the martyred victims’ fate, became an ideological requirement for describing the fate of all the victims.

The association has one more aim: to present the truth about the martyrdom of Jews not only in ghettos and concentration camps, but also in “Soviet forced-labor camps and in exile.” The formula of presenting as-


89 The formulation of such a message by former soldiers is entirely understandable. However, from a broader perspective, both moral and educational, heroization of the Holocaust, if not carried out with sufficient caution, may also cause damage. There is ample literature on the subject, see, for example, Maria Janion, “Śmierć ‘godna’ i ‘niegodna’,” in Janion, Bohater, spisek, śmierć, pp. 64–71.

sociation members as “victims of persecution during the Second World War,” obviously also covers those who suffered in the USSR. However, the question remains as to what extent this equation of the martyrdom in the USSR and the Holocaust reflects its members’ and leaders’ actual attitudes, or merely describes the association’s aims as such.

The association pursues its educational goals directly through meetings of its members with Polish youth, and over the last few years, with German youth, organized via the Maksymilian Kolbe Werk, an association founded by German Catholic activists with the aim of offering help to survivors of ghettos and concentration camps. The Ghetto Uprising medal awarded by the association can be perceived as yet another way of educating society. On anniversaries of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which is now also Holocaust Remembrance Day in Poland, the medal is awarded to social activists, artists, scholars, and politicians. The common denominator of their activities is described in general terms as “demonstrating good will toward the cause we represent.” So far, the medal has been awarded to about 300 people. This is an interesting transposition: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising has become a symbol of all noble causes, or simply any causes important to the association or the Jewish community.

The Association of “Children of the Holocaust” started systematic educational activities at the beginning of 2000. The time was ripe for such activities both for the association members, who had already received some psychological assistance and were also increasingly aware of being the last witnesses, as well as in the outside world. Research, education, and Holocaust remembrance were given international support. On the initiative of the prime minister of Sweden, the International Task Force for Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research was established in 1998, and formulated its objectives and plan of action two years later, in Stockholm. Poland is one of the founding members of this organization.

According to a report on the activities of the Association of Jewish War Veterans and Victims of Persecution during the Second World War, prepared in 2008. The author is greatly obliged to the association’s leadership for giving her access to this and other documents.

The full text inscribed in the diploma accompanying the medal is as follows: “Please accept this modest token of our gratitude for your interest and good will demonstrated towards us and the cause that we represent,” in the association’s collection.

The author received this information from the association’s chairman.

The full text of the Stockholm Declaration can be found, for instance, in the electronic magazine for teachers, Zagłada, Pamięć, Edukacja. Biuletyn Nauczycieli, vol. 4.
In 2005, the General Assembly of the UN established the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. In 2003, ministers of education of the EU countries expressed their “pleasure at the progress in implementing history teaching projects in the twenty-first century, including the Day of Holocaust Remembrance and the Prevention of Crimes against Humanity.” These international initiatives provided impetus for wider introduction of Holocaust education programs into the Polish education system. In 2004, the minister of education designated April 19 as Holocaust Remembrance Day, and introduced it into Polish schools.95 Thus, Holocaust education, in general, and in schools, in particular, received institutional support. The efficacy of this support and the actual results are separate issues. Since the 2003/2004 school year, the Association of “Children of the Holocaust,” in cooperation with the National In-Service Teacher Training Center, a specialized agency in the Ministry of Education, has been running the education program, “Memory for the Future,” which has been linked with the Holocaust Remembrance Day since 2004/2005. These programs have some common features: teacher training; preparation of projects by young people, supervised by their teachers; and a project competition with an exhibition and prizes. Preparing projects aims to provide information about the Holocaust and promote attitudes of openness and sensitivity to otherness, as well as to involve as many people as possible. Active participation of survivors as “witnesses of history” in the project provides the “emotional component,” which, according to evaluation questionnaires filled out by teachers after the training course,96 and to the “children of the Holocaust,” is what matters most. Above all, this reflects the strength of the interaction between “children of the Holocaust” and teachers in these training courses. Later, during the program’s implementation with young people, it leads to the potential emergence of open attitudes and sensitivity to otherness. The “reciprocal”

(2005). In the introduction to this issue, the editors wrote: “Unfortunately, for reasons unknown to us, neither this group’s basic documents nor its activities are generally known in Poland.” Reports of the Task Force’s Polish section have also not been made public.

95 The date is meant to combine the remembrance of the tragedy of the Holocaust and the promotion of active resistance to evil: www.dzieciholocaustu.org.pl. To Polish Jews, April 19 has always symbolized these two aspects.

96 Ibid., “edukacja” (education) in the first version of the “Pamięć dla przyszłości” (Memory for the Future) program. Psychological research provides ample support for the claim that attitudes cannot be shaped purely through conveying knowledge, without involving emotions.
effect of contacts between “children of the Holocaust,” young people, and teachers, as a “side effect” of these encounters, is also very important. As a result of such meetings, some “children of the Holocaust” claim to have definitively rid themselves of phobias and fears. This miracle must be ascribed to genuine, long-term interest by “others” in the experiences of the “children of the Holocaust.” Shortcomings pointed out during evaluation of these programs, which involve about 50 schools every year, included the following: treating the activities as a project or one-time event; lack of class time; the activities were guided by intuition rather than thoroughly grounded knowledge; politicization of the activities; and lack of evaluation of the programs.97 One of the most important and common shortcomings of these educational activities is the failure to evaluate their efficacy, which, in view of the complex subject matter of Holocaust education, is particularly acute.99 Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs’s work on experimental educational programs on ethnic prejudice provides some important insights on this subject.100 The teachers’ personality and attitude to the material is of crucial importance to the program’s success. Moreover, there are certain system factors at work: In the countries of Central-Eastern Europe, schools are frequently not tolerant institutions, which makes teaching tolerance more difficult; maintaining “the teachers’ enthusiasm,” which is the most important, requires cooperation between the school, local government organizations, and NGOs; and Polish society is nationally and culturally homogeneous, which makes it more difficult to teach about “others” through everyday realities.101 These are only some of the factors that determine the efficacy of programs aimed at teaching tolerance and openness. These studies were conducted and conclusions formulated before Poland’s accession to the European Union, which does not seem to have reduced their validity to any great extent.

97 Most likely, this refers to the politicization of the National In-Service Teacher Training Center under Minister of Education Roman Giertych, although in Poland, Jewish topics never seem to be politically neutral.

98 Tomasz Krawczyk, “Prezentacja programów edukacyjnych Stowarzyszenia DzieciHolocaustu” (Presentation of Educational Programs by the Association of “Children of the Holocaust”). The author of this article is greatly obliged to Tomasz Krawczyk for sharing this presentation with her.


100 Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, We Us Them. Ethnic Prejudices among Youth and Alternative Methods of Education. The Case of Poland (Krakow: Universitas, 2003).

101 Ibid., pp. 239–246.
“Watchdog” Objectives

All Jewish organizations include the so-called “watchdog” functions. The statutory objectives of these “non-survivor” organizations also include “fighting” or “opposing” discrimination and/or antisemitism. Irrespective of the dispute between historians and philosophers of society on the relationship between the Holocaust and antisemitism, and the unanswerable question about how “dangerous” contemporary antisemitism is, post-Holocaust Jewish organizations consider it their duty to oppose it wherever it appears. Rather, the question is which forms should such “opposition” take? Education on the causes and types of antisemitism is also a form of opposition, as is the very existence and development of the community, in a broader perspective.

The most extensive “watchdog” aims are outlined in the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland’s statute. According to this document, “vital interests” of the Jewish community in Poland include respecting “civil rights and liberties” and “preserving national identity” (clause 2 of the statute); other important objectives are to “defend national dignity” (clause 3), fight antisemitism and discrimination (clause 5), as well as to preserve historical Jewish heritage, including “in particular, the monuments of material culture and martyrdom” (clause 11). The association’s policy paper emphasized the importance of continued Jewish existence (preserving, as well as restoring and cultivating, national identity among the younger generation) and defending national dignity through respecting civil rights and opposing antisemitism, among other things.

According to representatives of Jewish organizations, they have an important role to play in educational and polemical activities, which they do not carry out to a sufficient degree. Recently, the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland and the Association of “Children of the Holocaust” took direct “watchdog” action, lodging a complaint about antisemitic behavior by members of a sports club with the public prosecutor’s office. There are plans to establish a joint agency with the Congress of Russian Jews, which would monitor antisemitism. So far, however, there have been hardly any systematic moves in this direction.

The statute of the All-Polish Jewish Youth Organization, whose members are 16–35 years old, includes Clause 4 on “opposing any discrimination.” The forerunner of this Organization, the Polish Union of Jewish Students, and the “Czulent” club in Kraków, published a leaflet protesting against the ban imposed by the President of Warsaw on organizing an
“Equality Parade” in the city. Invoking the inalienable character of human rights, the young people wrote: “This is civilization’s greatest achievement — a victory over a series of tragic experiences of putting abstract systems and state violence before human freedom, which led to the greatest crimes in the history of humanity.” This statement is also significant because members of Jewish organizations do not often make public declarations.

In the statute of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities, the list of religious aims is followed by a passage on “opposing antisemitism” (Clause 12). The Jewish religious congregation in Warsaw notified the prosecutor’s office of several violations of law, including the “Antyk” library, which sold blatantly antisemitic literature.

The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland monitors antisemitism, primarily reporting offences against Jewish material heritage. These mostly include various antisemitic inscriptions and vandalism at cemeteries, but also fascist gatherings in small towns, distribution of leaflets by the Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski (The National Revival of Poland) movement, and antisemitic websites. Between 2006 and 2007, the Foundation notified the public prosecutor of ten or so such cases a year, mostly in small towns or villages. According to an established Polish judiciary tradition, the great majority of such cases are dismissed by the prosecutor. In 2005, the foundation presented a unique report describing the atmosphere around the restitution of communal Jewish property and the difficulties created by local authorities. As the report states, “Only in a few towns and villages can we count on positive cooperation both in the area of the conservation of monuments, as well as when it comes to the restitution of the property of pre-war religious congregations.” Such general statements are illustrated with examples.

The existence and at least limited development of the Jewish com-

103 See www.fodz.pl. Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that one of the most serious weaknesses of NGOs in Poland is inadequate cooperation between similar organizations. The same applies to Jewish organizations.
panion community in Poland after 1989 is an incontrovertible fact. Recent years have confirmed the community’s vitality: the small number of Jews boasts a growing number of diversified institutions, which should be regarded as a sign of life, rather than undesirable fragmentation. Work on restoring the memory of Jews, especially the large number of local initiatives, demonstrates the power of “better Poland,” and reduces the social anxiety of Polish Jews. The persistence of a community depends on its inner resources, which may be bolstered or undermined by external circumstances.

The consequences of the Holocaust are a permanent feature of the Jewish community in Poland. The hope is that the psychological effects can be minimized, while the intellectual and spiritual outcomes will endure.
The Effect of the Legal Status of Jewish Property in Post-War Poland on Polish-Jewish Relations

MONIKA KRAWCZYK

Preliminary Remarks

Before September 1, 1939, some 3.4 million Polish Jews (Jews with Polish citizenship) lived within the borders of the Second Republic of Poland. Most of them, probably around 90 percent, and their natural heirs, both testamentary and legal, perished.

In the case of real property, establishing an exact record of the Polish Jews’ assets would require years of research using title deeds in pre-war real property registers and/or inventories compiled after 1945 by the District Liquidation Offices (Okręgowy Urząd Likwidacyjny — OUL) that operated pursuant to the Decree on Abandoned and Formerly German Properties, April 19, 1946.¹ For property to qualify as belonging to Jews, it would be possible to rely on given names and surnames alone. OUL inventories of abandoned real property often have “formerly Jewish” in place of a name (analogous to “formerly German” in the decree’s title). The only feasible method of producing a more complete inventory of real properties belonging to Jews in Poland would be to create an Internet platform consisting of a database in which property owned by Holocaust victims would be registered on the basis of testimonies of surviving family members.

“Jewish property,” as understood in Article 44 of the Civil Code (ownership and other property rights), covers the following categories:

- Real property
- Movable property (including means of transport, cultural assets, libraries, and cash in bank accounts)
- Enterprises and their components (Article 55 of the Civil Code)

¹ Journal of Laws, April 19, 1946. This decree cited the act of January 3, 1945.
• Intellectual property rights (copyrights, patent rights)
• Receivables (including funds in bank accounts and amounts due from insurance policies)
• Securities (shares and bonds, bills of exchange, checks)

These categories refer to property belonging to natural persons and legal persons (partnerships and limited companies, associations, foundations, and Jewish religious community organizations).

In addition, from the perspective of compensation claims, it would be expedient to add the value of unrealized profits in future periods (lost benefits), as well as the value of work performed under conditions of forced labor. The value of human losses is not calculable materially.2

Expropriation of the Jews in Pre-September 1939 Polish Territory by the Occupying German Forces in Areas Annexed to the Third Reich

In areas incorporated into the Third Reich,3 the Reich’s legislation was binding. It gradually became increasingly honed to enable the German state to acquire Jewish property. This culminated in the Eleventh Ordinance to the Reich Citizenship Act, November 25, 1941, which basically dispossessed both emigrating Jews and those transported to death camps for extermination. In formal terms, Jews were stripped of their German citizenship. Prior to this, expropriation of the Jews took the form of seizure, confiscation, and forfeiture of property, as well as a 25-percent emigration tax and levy consisting of one-off tribute payments, particularly after the Kristallnacht events in 1938.4

In former Polish territories subsumed into the Reich, the property of Jews with Polish citizenship was, for a time, included within the broad concept of “property of the Polish nation.”5 The legal mechanics of this were based on

5 Karol Marian Pospieszalski cites the contents of a secret memorandum from Heinrich
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a set of provisional ordinances that ultimately deprived the Jews of all their rights and protection. The fundamental legal enactments regulating private ownership were the Ordinance on Public Administration of Agricultural and Forestry Enterprises and Real Property, February 12, 1940; and the Ordinance on the Treatment of Assets of Former Citizens of the Polish State, September 17, 1940. The term “assets” covered real property, movable property, receivables, shares, and all types of rights. Appropriation of assets was mandatory if they belonged to Jews or absentees (e.g., people who fled or were even temporarily absent). Assets seized could be confiscated and transferred to the Reich. Procedures regarding the appropriation of assets were overseen by the Central Trusteeship Office (Haupttreuhandstelle), established on November 1, 1939, and headed by Herman Göring, the government plenipotentiary for the Four-Year Plan. This ordinance was published a year after the first decrees relating to assets issued by the military authorities and the new civilian authorities. In the interim, all manner of regulations were exploited as justification for confiscation and seizure of assets.6

Agricultural and forestry properties were administered under the control of the Trusteeship Office, subsequently passed on to the “general administrator” (Generalverwalter) of the Ostdeutsche Landbewirtschaftungsgesellschaft m.b.H (commonly known as Ostland) company, established for this purpose. In this way, as of October 4, 1939, this area also came under the jurisdiction of Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler, who assumed the additional function of Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germandom. Later on, several smaller spin-off companies from Ostland, specialized by type of administered property (e.g., land for residential development, agricultural property, and hotel-restaurant-catering enterprises), were formed7 and, subsequently, separate regional companies were also set up in various provinces.8

Himmler, Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germandom, containing the information that a total of 610,000 Jews lived in the lands incorporated into the Reich (including the Free City of Gdansk). Karol Marian Pospieszalski, Polska pod niemieckim prawem 1939–1945 (Ziemie Zachodnie) (Poznan: Instytut Zachodni, 1946), p. 47.
6 Ibid., pp. 78, 80–81, 87.
7 Ibid., pp. 80, 97–100.
8 The documents of the Ostdeutsche Landbewirtschaftungsgesellschaft (land administration company) have only survived in Polish archives in a few regions: These cover the province of Upper Silesia (the state archive in Katowice, Bielsko-Biała branch) and the area around Leszno. Among these are detailed descriptions of confiscated Polish and Jewish assets, classified separately, and inventories of their owners’ names. In Bielsko, for instance, 323 real properties belonging to Jews were confiscated, 19 in Andrychów,
The new Reichsführer SS in the area of expropriation was responsible for issuing a large number of secret memoranda assigning significant powers to the administrative structure, which he also controlled. There was definite rivalry between this and the bodies run by the minister of the economy, which sometimes led to chaotic decision-making and a modus operandi based on preempting each other’s operations. In the context of Jewish property, a memorandum sent by Himmler and dated December 16, 1939, is of particular significance. The Reichsführer SS stipulate therein that the Central Trusteeship Office appropriated all antiques, documents, libraries, valuables, and artworks of historical and cultural importance on his behalf. As Alfons Klafkowski notes, the Reichskanzler’s speeches were a central source for interpreting the German law of the Third Reich. Published in three volumes, under the title, Der grossdeutsche Freiheitskampf, this work was marked “for official use” and considered by German lawyers of the time not only as the most important source of law, but also its most profound interpretation.

Expropriation of the Jews in Pre-September 1939 Polish Territory by the Occupying German Forces: The General Government

As in the territory annexed to the Reich, the German occupiers did not clearly set out the legal position of Polish citizens in their legislation, except for Jews, ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche), and Ukrainians. With regard to the two latter groups, various regulations endowed them with privileges. In the case of the Jews, even early in the occupation, a series of ordinances were issued with the express purpose of unequivocally separating this group from the others. A selection of documents on the actions of the occupying Nazi powers with regard to the Jews’ property is given in Tatiana Berenstein, Artur Eisenbach, and Adam Rutkowski, eds., Eksterminacja Żydów na ziemiach polskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny [ZIH], 1957), pp. 143–163.
from the rest of society and imposing a separate organizational structure on it. This body of legislation was far more detailed than that governing other groups of citizens, and designed to lead to the eventual elimination of the Jews from this region, and, in the subsequent decision-making phase, to their extermination. This population group never surrendered its Polish citizenship, which is significant for analyzing the issue of citizenship and its relationship to plans for the restitution of private property, an issue in ongoing discussions since the 1990s.

The question of the legal fate of property belonging to Jews may be traced on the basis of legislation published in the General Governor’s Journal of Ordinances for this part of occupied Polish territory. Section 5.1 of the Decree of the Führer and Chancellor of the German Reich on Administration of the Occupied Polish Territories, October 12, 1939, is the primary legislative enactment. The first Journal of Ordinances was published on October 26, 1939, and even at that stage contained an Ordinance on the Implementation of Forced Labor in the Jewish Population. On November 15, 1939, an Ordinance on the Establishment of a Trusteeship Office for the General Government (GG — Generalne Gubernatorstwo) was published,
a document that is crucial in terms of tracing the fortunes of Jewish assets. On November 20, 1939, an Ordinance on General Measures for Securing Jewish Assets was issued. On November 23, 1939, tax exemptions were abolished for Jewish corporations. On December 16, 1939, a universal campaign to confiscate artworks was implemented. On January 24, 1940, the order specifying that Jewish assets were to be declared on special forms was announced.\textsuperscript{15} The declarations were very detailed, including information on domestic and foreign bank accounts, domestic and foreign claims, inheritances, shares, other securities (e.g., bonds), real property and stakes therein, mortgages, inventories of goods, motor vehicles, horse-drawn vehicles, horses, cash, precious stones, interior furnishings such as furniture, rugs, clothing, and furs, and other personal items. Similar forms were to be filled out by enterprises with legal personality. Jewish assets were defined as “from Jews if they possessed Polish citizenship as of January 1, 1939, or obtained it thereafter, as well as from stateless Jews; for these purposes, the non-Jewish spouse of a Jew is treated as a Jew.” Business partnerships were treated as Jewish if more than half of the partners were Jews. Limited liability companies were treated as Jewish if more than 25 percent of the shares were owned by Jews, their governing bodies “included a Jew,” or “there is another form of significant Jewish influence.” Assets included all real and movable property, as well as receivables, shares, rights, “and other interests.”\textsuperscript{16} Undeclared assets were ruled ownerless and subject to confiscation pursuant to the regulations as discussed below.

On January 4, 1940, a further Ordinance on Confiscation of Private Assets was issued.\textsuperscript{17} One implication of this confiscation of assets was a ban on the sale of possessions by their owners, which, however, was circumvented by entering into arbitration to resolve fictitious conflicts of ownership.\textsuperscript{18} The scale of this form of property disposal is not known. Assets confiscated by the occupiers were administered (leased or sold) by trustees (\textit{Treuhanden}), often Poles, appointed by the relevant agencies put in place by the

\textsuperscript{15} Investigating the survival and content of such forms is an open field of research; access to them would certainly permit approximately accurate determination of the value of assets seized from Jews during the war. This would be of particular importance for establishing the value of movable property.

\textsuperscript{16} Verordnungsblatt, part I (1940), p. 31, par. 2.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 23.

Trusteeship Office. This led to many instances of abuse even in relation to regulations put in place by the occupying authorities.19

**Circulation of Money and the Functioning of Jewish Businesses**

The legal definition of the term “Jew” in the GG was set down in an ordinance of July 24, 1940, establishing “a Jew” as a person who “is...considered to be a Jew” within the meaning of the Reich’s law. Analogously, a company was considered to be “Jewish” if its owner was “a Jew” in the above sense. Partnership enterprises were considered to be “Jewish” if at least one of the personally liable partners was “a Jew.” In limited liability companies (and also foundations and associations), the decisive factor was the presence of “a Jew” on the executive or the supervisory board, or if over one-quarter of the capital belonged to “Jews,” and if “the enterprise was in effect under the predominant influence of Jews.”20

Order No. 4 of November 20, 1939, issued by the head of the Currencies Department in the Office of the General Governor,21 ruled that Jews could be paid 500 złoty a month in business dealings, banks could pay out 250 złoty a week to Jews, and a family could have up to 2,000 złoty outside a bank account, which would have been frozen, in any case. From March 1, 1940, frozen accounts of “domestic Jews” were labeled as “limited disposability security accounts.”22 In addition to bank accounts, there were postal checking accounts before the war, which were not treated in the same way as bank accounts, i.e., they were not frozen, but cash withdrawals from such accounts by Jews always required the permission of the German Currencies Office in Kraków. Similar permission had to be sought by Jews buying gold and other precious metals.23

20 Verordnungsblatt, part I (1940), p. 31, 231.
21 Journal of Commands by the chief of the civil administration in Kraków no. 2, memorandum from the Ringelblum Archive II (AZIH, Ring II, file no. 126). Quoted from Tatiana Berenstein, Artur Eisenbach, and Adam Rutkowski, *Eksterminacja Żydów*, p. 158; Verordnungsblatt (1939), p. 44, 57.
22 Order No. 6 of the head of the Currencies Department at the Office of the General Governor, Verordnungsblatt, part II (1940), p. 139.
23 Order No. 7 of the head of the Currencies Department at the Office of the General Governor, Verordnungsblatt, part II (1940), p. 141.
The above regulations effectively rendered any kind of trade exchange impossible, and hundreds of Jewish enterprises were forced to close down, especially since, under the occupation conditions, transactions involving credit ceased altogether. New businesses could be established, and old ones re-registered, only if the person forming the company for entry into the commercial register could prove Aryan descent. Regulations referring to the implementation of official administration, which, pursuant to the order of September 29, 1939, were supposed to be applicable only to companies with authorized legal representatives abroad or if rational business operations were impossible for other extraordinary reasons. These regulations were used, in practice, to appoint official administrators or trustees in many Jewish firms to which the above criteria were not applicable. Often, the first move the new administrators made was to dismiss Jews, sometimes at the demand of the headquarters supplying the raw materials. This caused major unemployment among both white- and blue-collar Jewish workers. Jews lost ownership of pharmacies during the first weeks of the occupation. Jews were banned from trading in gold and other precious metals, stones, and pearls. Jewish artisans were subject to forced labor rules, which meant they no longer had free use of their tools, and, as a result of tenancy policies and resettlement into the ghettos, they lost their workshops. Moreover, because of restrictions on domestic travel, Jewish entrepreneurs could not do business with partners in other towns. Furthermore, Jews were banned from sending letters and packages by mail. Jewish lawyers were struck off the list and thus prevented from practicing their profession at all. Street vending was only permitted inside the ghettos. This policy of the German authorities undermined the economic foundations among Polish Jews. In most cases, Poles took on the positions of administrators of Jewish assets. This sometimes made the German authorities uneasy. The following remark was made by the governor of the town of Tarnów: “I am of the opinion that any unplanned Aryanization of Jewish enterprises is a risky undertaking, since it is creating a middle class in the Polish nation that it never had before.”

24 Ordinance on the establishment of commercial companies in the GG of November 15, 1939, Verordnungsblatt (1939), p. 37.
26 AZIH, Ring II, file no. 126.
28 Report by the governor of Tarnów, dated October 1940. Quoted from Berenstein, Eisenbach, and Rutkowski, Eksterminacja Żydów, p. 162.
Promissory Notes and Bills of Exchange

The promissory note is a specific form of pecuniary obligation by which a certain sum of money must be paid by a particular date to the holder. Pursuant to the Polish Law on Bills of Exchange, April 28, 1936, Article 96, a person (drawer) who lost a promissory note (bill of exchange) may demand its cancellation. A motion to that effect had to be filed with a general jurisdiction court, which then published announcements calling on the note or bill holder to present it in court. This act remained binding under the German occupation, and the cancellation procedure described above was exploited on a wide scale by Polish debtors against their Jewish creditors. Jews were restricted in their means to find out about the need to confirm whether a particular receivable debt was still current, or to appear in court, because special permits were required to leave the ghettos. This led to abuses benefitting Aryan (Polish) debtors.

Forced Labor

Forced labor for the Jewish population of the GG was introduced on October 26, 1939. The executive regulations were issued by the supreme commander of the SS and the police on December 11 and 12, 1939. Pursuant to these Ordinances, Jews were banned from moving to live outside a given district and from going out of their houses between the hours of midnight and 5 a.m. All Jews aged between 14 and 60 were subject to forced labor for at least two years, and could be interned in camps for this purpose. Public notices to report for labor were issued by mayors “by special appointment from the German authorities,” and the Jewish councils (Judenrat) were responsible for organizing workers. Craftspeople had to report for work with their tools, which they were not allowed to sell, buy, pledge or dispose of in any other way without permission. Failure to adhere to these regulations by Jews subject to the forced labor rules or by members of Jewish councils was punishable by extended periods of increased incarceration (up to ten years).

30 Grabowski, “Żydzi przed obliczem,” p. 113.
and the confiscation of assets. Forced labor was used in scores of labor camps supplying German industry and the SS.

Real and Movable Property

The Ordinance on Confiscation of Private Assets in the GG (GG — Generalne Gubernatorstwo), January 24, 1940, was the most significant piece of legislation issued under the occupation in terms of stripping the Jews of their possessions. Administration and use of confiscated property was the domain of the local departments of the GG Trusteeship Office. Confiscation of agricultural and forestry property was effected in collaboration with the directorate of the Department of Food and Agriculture, or the Forestry Department within the Office of the General Governor (civil administration). The decision to confiscate specific property was taken by the head of the local Trusteeship Office. A confiscation order engendered a ban on selling the asset in question and had to be entered in the land register (Grundbuch). Movable property designed for personal use, and not luxury goods, was not subject to confiscation. The rights of third parties to confiscated assets were suspended (e.g., mortgages securing receivables did not have to be paid off). The authorities could appoint a trustee to manage the confiscated property, who would carry out all standard administrative acts, but a permit from the Trusteeship Office had to be obtained to sell or close down an enterprise. The costs of administration by a trustee came out of the confiscated assets. Aside from the civil administration, the other authorities with confiscation powers were: the military authorities, if confiscation was in the interests of defense of the Reich or reinforcing armamentation; the Order Police (Ordnungspolizei); the armed SS (Waffen-SS), “with the aim of increasing the attacking power of these formations”; and the Security Police (Sicherheitspolizei) for assets connected with criminal acts. The Trusteeship Office controlled confiscated property only in cases where trustees were appointed. Before this enactment was enforced, confiscations and appointment of trustees had to be declared at the local Trusteeship Office.  

32 Verordnungsblatt (1939), p. 231, 246.  
33 Verordnungsblatt (1940), p. 23.  
34 Ibid.
Jewish property not declared to the county governor of applicable jurisdiction, according to the Ordinance on the Requirement to Declare Jewish Assets in the GG, January 24, 1940, was confiscated *ex officio*.

The Ordinance on Trade in Real Property in the GG, March 27, 1940, and the related Implementation Ordinance, March 28, 1940, required permits from the county governor of local jurisdiction for all sale or encumbrance transactions, on pain of invalidity, and, for agricultural or forestry property, also from the Department of Food and Agriculture or Forestry. For industrial properties, the permit had to be approved by the Department of the Economy. If the motion was filed by a trustee, the Trusteeship Office also had to take a stance.35

A document from the Ringelblum Archive (i.e., a Jewish account) describes what happened in practice: "We have learned from a public announcement that Department II [of the Municipal Office] is to Aryanize Jewish houses and real property. Execution of this plan began in June [1940]; over 5,000 administrators were sacked; Jewish home owners, some 25,000 people, now in effect no longer have control of their own assets; and the newly appointed administrators are even starting to sack former Jewish employees in such homes, such as locksmiths and tinsmiths. Altogether, this has robbed 70,000–80,000 Jewish families of their earnings. In addition, confiscation of Jewish assets occurs frequently. Ordinances...rule that private property may only be confiscated when necessary for the authorities' public use; and a procedure has been designated for this.... In reality, this is not observed in relation to Jewish residents: In many cases merchandise and money are confiscated in Jewish shops and workshops without any inventory record...and without [issuing] any form of receipt. Furniture, clothing, and food are often taken from Jewish homes, even from the homes of very poor people."36

According to the reports of Ludwig Fischer, Chief of the Warsaw District, seizures of Jewish real property took place between July 1940 and the summer of 1941, and resulted in the confiscation of 14,275 houses, 3,788 of them within the 1939 borders of Warsaw. The trustees appointed were "trusted Aryans," with Poles among them. The rents generated by these assets in 1941 totaled 87,800,000 złoty.37

Some Poles were interested in the opportunity to make money, naturally presented by the institution of trustees. Examples of applications and

35 Verordnungsblatt, part I (1940) p. 115; part II, p. 187.
the justifications given are cited by Jan Grabowski, such as: “I am a Pole of the Roman Catholic faith, of Aryan descent.”

**Works of Art**
The ordinance of December 16, 1939, initiated confiscation of all kinds of works of art, both private and religious communities’ collections, including those in synagogues, with the exception of items required for the day-to-day liturgical activities. This was termed the “public possession of works of art.” In order to check eligibility, every owner of works of art predating 1850 was required to declare such historical items at a special commissioner’s office for the purpose of drawing up an inventory. Items to be inventoried included paintings, sculptures, and decorative art (furniture, porcelain, glass, gold and silver items, tapestries, rugs, embroidery, drawings, etchings, woodcuts, arms, armor, coins, medals, and signet rings).

**Assets of United States Citizens**
Pursuant to the ordinance of April 1, 1942, assets belonging to citizens of the United States of North America at the disposal of natural and legal persons (including industrial rights such as patents and copyrights) had to be declared and registered. This is mentioned because, at the outbreak of the Second World War, many Jews with American citizenship who had emigrated from Poland were back there for various reasons. They had a different status under international public law than Jews with German citizenship or in any other occupied countries.

**Associations and Foundations**
On November 23, 1939, all Jewish communities, foundations, charitable or educational establishments, and associations lost their previous entitlements to tax relief (as public service organizations). Pursuant to the Ordinance on Associations in the GG, July 23, 1940, all associations were dissolved and their assets confiscated and given over to the GG. Foundations pursuant to an analogous Ordinance of August 1, 1940, suffered a similar fate.

38 Ibid., p. 107.
40 Ibid.
41 Ordinance on the Abolition of Tax Relief and Tax Privileges for Jewish Corporations, Verordnungsblatt (1939), p. 60.
42 Verordnungsblatt (1940), p. 225.
43 Verordnungsblatt, part I (1940), p. 224.
War Damage and Compensation
Pursuant to the Ordinance, April 22, 1941, Germans and those “who belong to the German Nation” resident in the GG were entitled to compensation for “war and national” material damage (the latter could be claimed for periods after April 1, 1939), if at the time of the incidents, they were German citizens or became Volksdeutsche thereafter. Jewish natural and legal persons were explicitly excluded from the eligible population. This point was probably included in view of the fact that some people might still have had German citizenship (and were thus subjects and residents of the German state), even though their status was defined as Jewish by the Nuremberg Laws (Jews had been stripped of their political rights, but not their public rights), and might also have been due to the over-zealous nature of Nazi legislation.

Ghettos
It is no exaggeration to say that the system for exploiting the Jewish people was programed to drain them of all their assets at every stage. Enclosing the Jews in ghettos and implementing regulations based on a philosophy focused on annihilating them meant that they were forced by legal measures to finance the apparatus of their own oppression. The commissioner for the Jewish quarter headed an administrative body known as the “transfer point” (Transferstelle), which was self-financing, with “the budget of the Jewish quarter” and various fees as the chief sources of revenue. The transfer point regulated “economic relations between the Jewish quarter and the outside world.” Since the budget for the Jewish quarter was the responsibility of the chairman of the Jewish Council (Judenrat), who, pursuant to regulations, was subordinate to the commissioner and had to obey all his instructions, spending at the transfer point was entirely arbitrary. Enclosed in the ghettos, the Jews ceased to be individuals who were allowed to own anything, and became a collectivity that could be pumped of all possible resources and then killed. The Germans openly exacted all manner of tribute payments using blackmail (e.g., under threat of being killed against a certain number of Jews, or specific individuals). The Juden-

44 Verordnungsblatt (1941), p. 232.
45 For more information on this subject, see Hannah Arendt, Eichmann w Jerozolimie (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1998), pp. 51–54.
46 For example, Verordnungsblatt (1941), p. 211, Ordinance on the Jewish Quarter in Warsaw of April 19, 1941.
rat was responsible for collecting the sums of money demanded. Leaving the ghetto in many instances rendered people vulnerable to blackmail by extortionists (szmalcownicy) and to denunciation, involving a further drain on their material resources. Being in ghettos involved condemnation to a gradual decline into misery, living off dwindling capital, the black market, begging, and, ultimately, acts of desperation and death by starvation. When the ghettos were liquidated and the residents deported to death camps, the next phase of “disposal” of Jewish property began. Particularly macabre incidents occurred during “Aktion Reinhardt,” an operation that covered the GG and the numerous transit ghettos there, in which Jews from Austria, Germany, and Czechoslovakia were also held. At this stage, the looting of Jewish property became particularly brutal; never before had mass plunder and murder been so closely linked. In addition to the SS and subordinate collaborative formations, in particular, the battalions trained in the Trawniki concentration camp in the Lublin region, and the Germans often also involved the local population in such operations. The Jewish property seized during resettlement operations and deportation to death camps was stored in warehouses that stood waiting; and deportees to the camps could take no more than 20 kilos of luggage with them.

47 The sum total of tribute payments forcibly levied on the Jews by the German occupants still requires comprehensive research. Reminiscences and testimonies of Jewish Council members and data in yizker books serve as sources of information on this issue. The author is aware of a study by the economist Adam Aptowicz on the Bochnia Ghetto (in the author’s collection. See also his article “Letter to the Editor” in Midrasz, Dec. 2005, pp. 54–55). Aptowicz believes that the Germans took a total of $6,281,821 from the Jews in that ghetto. Such data obviously require further verification and calculations.

48 “Victims are brutally robbed of everything they possess, of cash, valuables, clothing, linen, and other valuable items. As a result, the victims of blackmail lose their homes and become a burden on their relatives and friends....” Report on the work of the Polish Council for Aid to Jews, from December 1942 to October 1943, in sources including Teresa Prekerowa, Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie 1942–1945 (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982), p. 390. For specific acts by extortionists, see also Prekerowa, Konspiracyjna Rada, pp. 265–287.


Concentration Camps
The final stage of organized looting took place inside the death camps and concentration camps, where the prisoners’ luggage was taken from them. After sorting, it was sent to the Reich, where some items were sold, swelling the SS coffers, and some were passed on to German charities operating within the Reich. In addition, the hair shorn from heads was collected for industrial use, and gold teeth were extracted from the dead victims. The SS also sold prisoner labor to German industrial plants: suffice it to mention the numerous subsidiary camps linked to Auschwitz-Birkenau, such as Monowitz, where prisoners labored to build a huge chemical plant for the German IG Farbenindustrie, in which a large proportion of the subsequent work force also consisted of Jewish prisoners. Relations between German industry and the SS system may be described as symbiotic; the flow of forced laborers and their supervision by the SS was balanced by payments made by the enterprises to the SS.

This incontrovertibly rapacious process of expropriation and common theft, which was initiated and perpetrated by the occupying Germans, persisted from the outbreak until the end of the war. It had no foundation in either the Third Reich’s legal system or international legislation. The system of ghettos, labor camps, and extermination camps, in place from 1940 and 1941, facilitated the looting by the occupying Germans and their collaborators of the Jewish population’s remaining real property. The main beneficiaries of these acts were the Treasury of the Third Reich, army units, and, above all, the SS, but individual Germans also shared the benefits, by plundering, in the form of shares of the war booty, tribute payments, and “Aryanization” of assets, i.e., the transfer of property from Jewish hands to the occupying Germans. To a certain extent, Polish residents of the GG also stood to gain from this redistribution of property and the looting that took place as the

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., p. 196; see also Gideon Greif, “Plakaliśmy bez łez”: Relacje byłych więźniów żydowskiego Sonderkommando z Auschwitz (Warsaw: ŻIH/Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2001), pp. 35–36.
ghettos were liquidated and the Jewish population was deported. The full extent of this phenomenon is yet to be researched.

Expropriation of the Jews in Pre-September 1939 Polish Territory Occupied by the USSR between September 1939 and the Summer of 1941 by the USSR and Captured by the Germans after their Invasion of the Soviet Union

Under the Soviet occupation, Jewish property in these regions shared the fate of all private property: After nationalization, it became “socialist state property.” Most of this land was not returned to Poland after 1945. In 1944–1945, the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego — PKWN) and the Provisional Government of National Unity concluded population evacuation pacts with the Soviet Socialist Republics of Belarus, Ukraine, and Lithuania, and the USSR, which provided for compensation for real property abandoned beyond 1945 Polish borders. No comprehensive solution to the problem of compensation for people from “beyond the River Bug” was found until 2005, when the Sejm passed the Act on the Exercise of the Right to Redress for Abandoned Real

53 Photographic documentation in an album showing the liquidation of the Szydłowiec Ghetto recorded by a German participant at the crime shows the deportation of the Jews, fatalities, the empty town, and then carts piled high with furniture and articles for everyday use, and something like a market or a “division of the spoils,” with civilians and soldiers (i.e., only soldiers are wearing uniforms) in German uniforms present. The latter photographs have the caption “Volksdeutsche sammeln den Rest der Habe im Ghetto” (Volksdeutsche collect the remainder of the [Jewish] property in the ghetto). See Bella Guterman and Nina Shpringer-Aharoni, HaSof. Das Ende! Szydlowiec in the Eyes of a German Photographer (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2008). In “Organizacja i realizacja ‘akcji Reinhardt’ w dystrykcie radomskim” (see note 50), Młynarczyk cites a report by the government delegation for Poland, dated October 27, 1942, describing the Polish civilians’ actions in Piotrków Trybunalski: “In connection with the liquidation of the ghetto, our people are behaving scandalously, looting, stealing, breaking into empty houses, and taking out whatever they can,” p. 191.

54 In recent years, Polish historians published new research on this subject. See, for example, Jan Grabowski, Judenjagd: Polowanie na Żydów 1942–1945. Studium z dziejów pewnego powiatu (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011); Barbara Engelking, “Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień”: Losy Żydów szukających ratunku na wsi polskiej 1942–1945 (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011).
Property beyond the Present-Day Borders of the Republic of Poland. The value of such compensation is 20 percent, and eligibility extends to those who were Polish citizens both on September 1, 1939, and on the day they submitted their applications. This prevents all Polish Jews from beyond the River Bug, who no longer have Polish citizenship, from taking advantage of the benefits engendered by this piece of legislation.

Polish Post-War Legislation up to 1989 and What Was Returned to the Jews

The 1944 PKWN manifesto included the following declaration: “Property plundered by the Germans from individual citizens, farmers, merchants, artisans, small- and medium-scale industrialists, institutions, and the church will be returned to its rightful owners. German assets will be confiscated. Jews, brutally persecuted by the occupiers, will be assured the [ability] to rebuild their lives, and legal and real equality. National assets, concentrated today in the hands of the German state and individual German capitalists, major industrial, commercial, banking, transport enterprises, and the forests will be passed on to the provisional state administration. As economic relations are regulated, ownership of property will be restored.” The new authorities cited the principles of protection of private ownership, as expressed in the Polish “March” Constitution of March 17, 1921, stating that ownership could only be abolished or restricted in instances provided for by the law and for due compensation. This did not prevent the state from acting in blatant violation of the law.

Execution of the above declaration essentially meant that, for a brief period after liberation until around 1948, post-war legislation attempted to reverse the effects of the unlawful legal solutions (also unlawful under international law), which were implemented by the occupiers in cases concerning real property only. It is important to stress that the legislative enactments issued by the Polish authorities essentially contain no legally defined category of Jewish property. The files only mention the broad category of

former owners stripped of their estates by the Germans. In the context of historical events and in connection with the ideological battle over the future system that would operate in the Polish state, the Communist option won. This led to legislation nationalizing the vast majority of private property or property previously seized by the Treasury or Third Reich trustees. Before the property expropriated during the Occupation could be restored, in accordance with the universally accepted legal principles of democratic states, it was nationalized, or effectively reseized by the Polish State Treasury.

Until 1989, individual nationalization decisions were issued on the basis of about ten enactments; “appropriations on behalf of the State Treasury” were also carried out without any legal grounds. Expropriation decisions were issued on the basis of the following legislative provisions:

1) Article 1 of the Decree of the Chief of State on Forced Administration of Assets by the State, December 16, 1918.58
2) Article 2 of Clause 1 (e) of the PKWN Decree on Implementation of Agricultural Reform, September 6, 1944,59 and regulations issued on the basis of this Decree.
3) Article 1 of the PKWN Decree on the Appropriation of Certain Forests as the Property of the State Treasury, December 12, 1944.60
4) The Decree on the Establishment of the “Film Polski”61 State Enterprise, November 13, 1945.
5) The Decree on the Appropriation of Certain Landed Estates for the Purposes of Agricultural Reform and Human Settlement, November 28, 1945.62
6) Article 3 of the Act on State Appropriation of the Main Branches of the National Economy, January 3, 1946.63

58 Legislation Journal of the State of Poland, no. 21, item 67 (1918); no. 49, item 437 (1927).
59 Journal of Laws, no. 3, item 13 (1945); no. 49, item 279 (1946); no. 39, item 172 (1957); no. 3, item 6 (1968).
60 Journal of Laws, no. 15, item 82 (1944); no. 57, item 456 (1948); no. 3, item 6 (1968); no. 13, item 95 (1969).
61 Journal of Laws, no. 55, item 308 (1945).
63 Journal of Laws, no. 3, item 17 (1946); no. 71, item 389 (1946); no. 72, item 394 (1958); no. 45, item 224 (1958); no. 13, item 95 (1969).
7) Article 34, Clauses 1 and 3 of the Decree on Abandoned and Formerly German Estates/Assets, March 8, 1946.64
8) Article 41, Clause 1, and Article 42 of the Decree on the Agricultural System and Residential Settlement in the Recovered Territories and the Former Free City of Gdańsk, September 6, 1946.65
9) The Decree on the Expropriation of Assets Seized for Public Use during the 1939–1945 War, April 7, 1948.66
10) The Decree on State Appropriation of Landed Estates Situated in Various Districts of the Białystok, Lublin, Rzeszów, and Kraków Voivodeships (which were not actually in the possession of their owners), July 27, 1949.67
11) The Act on State Appropriation of Pharmacies, January 8, 1951.68
12) The decree on State Appropriation of Inland Shipping Assets, February 2, 1955.69
13) The Act Amending the Decree of April 18, 1955, on Appropriation and Regulation of Other Matters Connected with Agricultural Reform and Settlement, July 13, 1957.70
14) The Act on the Regulation of the Legal Status of Property under State Administration, February 25, 1958.71
15) Article 16 of the Act on the State Land Fund's Sale of Real Property; and the Regulation of Certain Matters Connected with the Implementation of Agricultural Reform and Agricultural Settlement, March 12, 1958.72
17) The Decree on Ownership and Usufruct of Land in the Capital City of Warsaw, October 26, 1945.74

64 Journal of Laws, no. 13, item 87 (1946); no. 49, item 279 (1946); no. 71, item 389 (1946); no. 72, item 395 (1946); no. 19, item 77 (1947); no. 66, item 402 (1947); no. 57, item 454 (1948); no. 13, item 95 (1969).
65 Journal of Laws, no. 49, item 279 (1946); no. 66, item 410 (1947); no. 17, item 71 (1958); no. 13, item 95 (1969); no. 27, item 250 (1971); no. 106, item 668 (1998).
66 Journal of Laws, no. 20, item 138 (1948); no. 65, item 527 (1949).
67 Journal of Laws, no. 46, item 339 (1949); no. 17, item 71 (1958).
68 Journal of Laws, no. 1, item 1 (1951); no. 3, item 6 (1968); no. 13, item 95 (1969).
69 Journal of Laws, no. 6, item 36 (1955); no. 3, item 6 (1968).
70 Journal of Laws, no. 39, item 174 (1957 no. 32, item 161 (1961); no. 11, item 79 (1982).
71 Journal of Laws, no. 11, item 37 (1958); no. 3, item 6 (1968).
72 Journal of Laws, no. 58, item 348 (1989); no. 34, item 198 (1990); no. 107, item 464 (1991).
73 Journal of Laws, no. 34, item 158 (1962); no. 12, item 115 (1971).
74 Journal of Laws, no. 50, item 279 (1945).
No estimates have ever been made as to the percentage and value of property formerly owned by Jews that was appropriated pursuant to the various enactments listed above.

**The Warsaw Decree**

The situation of real property in the capital, Warsaw (within the 1939 municipal boundaries), was regulated by the Decree on Ownership andUsufruct of Land in the Capital City of Warsaw, October 26, 1945, known as the “Bierut Decree.” It stated that six months from the day on which the municipal borough (and from April 13, 1950, for the State Treasury) took possession of a piece of land, ownership of all real property in Warsaw passed to the municipal borough of the Capital City of Warsaw. Pursuant to Article 7, the owner could file an application for a perpetual lease or the right to build on the land (which is currently the right of perpetual usufruct), if the land use was compatible with its designated purpose according to the zoning plan.

The applications filed had various outcomes. The majority were rejected in the first or second instance, while others were never even processed. The latter retained the status of administrative procedure in progress, and could be processed after 1989. Rejections could be questioned through an administrative procedure initiated by applying to have the decision ruled invalid on the grounds of Article 165 of the Administrative Procedure Code. Owing to changes in the jurisdiction of these bodies, applications to have that decision ruled invalid should be filed with the Local Authority Appeals Court for rejections issued by the Presidium of the National Council for the Capital City of Warsaw, and final decisions are now made by the construction minister (previously the president of the Office of Residential Affairs and Urban Development) for rejections sustained, in the second instance, by the former minister for public utilities.75

Since 1989, the procedural practice of the Mayor of Warsaw has involved issuing the right of perpetual usufruct to the property in question, i.e., restitution in kind. The Warsaw Decree provided for suitable compensation if it was impossible to issue a perpetual lease, but this has never been paid out to anyone. Article 8 of the decree is significant inasmuch as it provided for compensation even if an application for the issue of rights to the land was not filed. However, ordinances establishing the way in which the

value of compensation should be estimated or methods of calculating it have never been issued. At present, this is the reason why compensation is not awarded, but it is important to note that, given political goodwill, such ordinances could be adopted.

A partial attempt at neutralizing the restrictions arising from the Warsaw Decree came in the form of Articles 214 and 215 of the Act on Administration of Real Property, August 27, 1997. These entitlements accrued to the former owners of small residential buildings (up to 20 rooms), farmland, construction lots, and single-family houses, which were taken from their former owners (without compensation) after April 5, 1958.

On the basis of the Cała Warszawa (All Warsaw) Address Book, published in 1930, going by Jewish-sounding personal names and names of organizations, it may be assumed that about one-third of the 15,605 real properties listed belonged to Jews. There are entire streets in the book (e.g., Gęśia, Graniczna, and Grzybowska) without a single Christian-sounding surname. Itamar Levin, in his book, Walls Around: The Plunder of Warsaw Jewry during World War II and Its Aftermath, assessed the material situation of Warsaw’s Jews and expropriation mechanisms.

Owing to the statutory time limits and population movements, few Holocaust survivors were able to file their applications as and when required by the decree and then effectively seek justice after they left Poland.

Decree on Abandoned and Former German Assets

The Decree on Abandoned and Forsaken Assets, March 2, 1945, and the Act on Abandoned and Forsaken Assets, May 6, 1945, were the forerunners of the Decree on Abandoned and Former German Assets, March 8, 1946.

78 Photocopy of a publication in the author’s collections; the Cała Warszawa editorial offices were at ul. Szpitalna 1.
79 The author believes that, given the lack of other documents stating the owners’ nationalities, this is now the only method for estimating how much real property belonged to the Jews.
81 Journal of Laws, no. 17, item 97 (1945).
The definition of abandoned assets covered real and movable abandoned property not in the possession of its owners or their legal heirs when the war began on September 1, 1939, and also assets in the possession of third parties under contract, with the purpose of protecting them from losses during the war and occupation. By definition, such contracts were a sham and annulled by the decree. In the situation in which Polish Jews found themselves during the war, contracts with Poles (or others not affected by the criminal strategy of the occupying Germans, i.e., with Aryans) were the only means and hope of protecting their assets. Of course, they did not realize that 90 percent of the Jewish population would be exterminated, and hence that, in many cases, property “sold” on paper would remain in the hands of the purchasers. Moreover, problems with evidence were also major obstacles in seeking the restitution of assets.

Abandoned property belonged to the German state, German citizens, and people who defected to the enemy. In subsequent legislative enactments, this group of properties was defined as “formerly German.”

The Decree on Abandoned and Former German Assets, March 8, 1946, remained in force until August 1, 1985. The idea underpinning this enactment was based on appropriation by the Polish State Treasury of real property acquired by its previous owners by adverse possession after ten years’ nonuse.

Administration of abandoned and formerly German assets was initially in the domain of the liquidation department of the Treasury, and subsequently in the central office for provisional state administration with district liquidation offices around the country. The need to seek answers to the question of the scale of abandoned assets belonging to Polish Jews would be the research in the documents remaining in the archives of these institutions.

82 With regard to sham contracts, in the author’s practice as a lawyer, she came across a very interesting instance of the “opposite” process. An entrepreneur with a manufacturing outlet in the Warsaw Ghetto, who became rich, bought properties through Polish “front men,” which, after surviving the camps and the death march, he reclaimed after the war, on the grounds of the above-mentioned act. Since some of these cases are still subject to restitution procedures, the details, though fascinating, cannot yet be published.

83 Journal of Laws, no. 17, item 97 (1945).

Civil Law Transactions Carried Out during the Occupation

In addition to enactments effecting nationalization, civil law transactions (contracts) were also addressed. Between 1939 and 1945, Polish courts and notaries operated in the GG, with German courts and notaries functioning alongside them. Pursuant to the Decree on the Binding Force of Court Rulings Issued during the Period of the German Occupation in the Territory of the Republic of Poland, June 6, 1945, decisions by German courts (with some exceptions) and juridical acts executed or witnessed by German notaries were ruled invalid. Formally speaking, transfer of ownership of real property required a notarial deed, pursuant to the 1933 Law on Notarial Services. After the war, administrators of unlawfully seized real properties of Polish citizens who purchased real property in German notarial chambers, and from trustees appointed by the occupiers, were considered to have acted in bad faith, and their contracts became statutorily invalid. Nevertheless, this required the former owner to initiate court proceedings to invalidate a disputed contract. Yet, only a small proportion of Jewish property owners could take advantage of this option. In order to investigate the scale of this phenomenon, it would be necessary to study the files of the civil divisions of municipal courts, in particular. In the case of Jewish property, the majority of the Jews either perished, emigrated immediately after the war, or never returned to Poland at all, and could not file for restitution. In such cases, there was actual sanctioning and perpetuation of the occupiers’ unlawful actions in the legal orders of the Polish state, especially if real property was listed in the real property register with an entry regarding ownership.

In the early years of independence, often using false witnesses to confirm the death of former Jewish owners, documents were obtained and then used in probate proceedings to obtain confirmation of acquisition of the estate for people who were not the inheritors. In turn, these false inheritors, immediately on obtaining the title, would sell estates, which essentially prevented the true heirs from pursuing their rights. A similar situation arose in the 1990s in connection with the much-publicized case of the fraudulent

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85 Journal of Laws, no. 25, item 151 (1945), as amended.
86 Breyer, _Przeniesienie_, pp. 37–38, 41; Articles 3 and 4 of the Decree on Abandoned and Formerly German Assets, March 8, 1948.
87 Breyer, _Przeniesienie_, p. 41.
acquisition of Jewish tenements in Kraków on the basis of false testimonies and documents authenticated by Ukrainian government offices.88

Examples of Specific Cases Involving the Fate of Jewish Assets after 1945

After liberation from the German occupation, assets lost by the Jews during the war could be reclaimed. This was facilitated formally by the legislation passed in the early years of independence. However, it was far easier, in practical terms, for Jews returning from the camps or from hiding to regain possession of their property in large towns and cities than in small towns and villages. Jews returning to their family homes tended to find other families already living there, and they were often met with aggression, death threats or even murder.89 Exhuming mass graves and stripping corpses was the final form of plunder of Jewish property by their Polish neighbors.90 Terrified by such behavior, Polish Jews would often decide to leave the country in search of a new future abroad.

The Legal Situation with Regard to Private Property after 1989

After the political changes and the passing of a new constitution upholding the principle of a democratic state law, and the ratification by Poland of the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights on January 19, 1993, attempts ensued to right the wrongs resulting from the earlier nationalization of property. It is important to note that after 1989, the focus shifted to ownership changes between 1945 and 1989, without considering returning to the pre-war period. At the same time, the act of 1990, amending the act of 1985 on land administration and expropriation of real property,91 in

88 This related to material held by the state archive in Lviv, where there is extensive documentation from Galicia, some of which dates back to partition periods. The public prosecutor’s investigation in connection with the use and falsification of documents from these archives is still under way.
89 Such situations have been described in detail in Jan Tomasz Gross, Fear. Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

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force until January 1, 1998, bestowed on state legal entities (including state-owned enterprises) the statutory entitlement to obtain, free of charge, the perpetual usufruct right to land (and ownership of buildings) they were administering. This enfranchisement could not ensue if third-party rights would be infringed, i.e., if claims by former owners had been lodged on the date of the enfranchisement, December 5, 1990. Again, however, the time period granted for presenting the appropriate applications was too short for the former Jewish owners to be able to take advantage of this option on a broader scale.

Moreover, in many cases of privatization, municipalization, and implementation of a free market economy, the State Treasury, especially between 1994 and 1997, sold many assets to third parties, bypassing previous owners. In light of the principles of the new system, these assets should not even have been at the disposal of the State Treasury, but the laws in force at the time made this possible.

There have been repeated attempts to address the issue of reprivatization of private property. The act of 1997 was the closest to success; it was passed by the Sejm, but vetoed by the president because it restricted the beneficiaries to current citizens of Poland. To date, it has proved impossible to implement a solution to this problem.92

The fifth Sejm [since the fall of Communism — translator’s note] worked on a government bill “on compensation for real property and certain other assets seized by the state.”93 The bill provided cash compensation to the tune of 15 percent of the total value of the assets on September 1, 1939, and covered assets seized by the occupying German authorities and, subsequently, the Polish state. In this form, it would meet the principle for the compensation program for Jewish property not restituted until today, provided, of course, that the discriminatory clause restricting beneficiaries to those holding Polish citizenship on the day of submission of the application would not be introduced in the subsequent legislative process. Such voices were heard in the Sejm debate following the first reading of the proposed act. Aspects of the bill that provoked criticism were the low percentage of the compensation, the complicated nature of the procedure, the lack of provision for restitution in kind, and the renationalization of works of art.

93 Sejm form no. 133.
More recently, after September 2008, the government worked on another, new compensation bill, which would be the closest to the solutions adopted in the 2001 act formulated by the government under Jerzy Buzek and vetoed by President Kwaśniewski due to the requirement for applicants to have Polish citizenship. This decision by the then president may well have been influenced by the stance of international Jewish organizations, since the act disqualified those Jews who did not have Polish citizenship, i.e., the vast majority of former property owners and their heirs. With the veto, a chance was lost to implement the restitution program, which would have offered the possibility of obtaining 50-percent compensation. Lobbying by foreign Jewish organizations is a separate issue worthy of study, since it provides insights into the feelings of people denied their possessions in Poland following both the liberation from the German occupation after the Second World War and after the fall of Communism in 1989. For the electorate and members of these organizations, the lack of effective solutions for the former owners of nationalized property in Poland indicated that Poles are negatively disposed toward Jews.94

With regard to the level of recompense (the terms “compensation” or “damages” are formally no longer in use, and have been superseded by a symbolic redress), officials at the Ministry of the State Treasury stated that it

94 The author worked with the Claims Conference, the World Jewish Restitution Organization, the Holocaust Restitution Committee, and other organizations representing Polish Jews who used to own real property. She noted that, owing to their experiences in Poland in the war and the brief post-war period, some members of these organizations do not grasp the difference between the nationalization pursuant to the law of the People’s Republic of Poland and the confiscations effected according to German law during the occupation. They do not take into account that, during the Second World War, Poland was not a sovereign state and hence is not formally accountable for the wartime losses of its citizens. Therefore, Poland cannot and, according to international public law, does not have to recompense for the consequences of the Holocaust. Unaware of and unable to grasp these legal nuances, Polish Jews are demanding that Poland compensate them for their lost assets from September 1, 1939, onward. For the same reason, demands by Jewish organizations for compensation for Jewish assets that were left without inheritors, because they were murdered by the Nazis, are groundless on any principles other than justice arising from higher morality. Nevertheless, such assets did fall into somebody’s hands. Among the beneficiaries were the State Treasury, which is often, to this day, pursuant to Article 935 of the Civil Code, the ultimate inheritor, where no testament was left by the owner, other natural or legal persons by adverse possession, or through acts of nationalization mentioned above and subsequent transformations in the ownership structure. It is estimated that only ten percent of the beneficiaries of current restitution programs would be Polish Jews.
might be around 20 percent. Theoretically, this level of compensation might be found inequitable and could effectively be challenged before the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. However, the problem is the present financial potential of the state budget. The bill, as published on the State Treasury Ministry website on October 22, 2008, would be implemented in a two-stage procedure. First, the value of claims submitted would be calculated, and then compensation would be allocated to individual owners or their heirs, as calculated mathematically on the basis of all the applications for compensation and the resources of the State Treasury (PLN 20 billion from the Reprivatization Fund created in the early 1990s, plus annual subsidies from the state budget). The compensation payouts would be made in equal portions over 15 years, starting from 2009. Procedural complications would also be expected in connection with the requirement to submit evidence (in the form of documents) confirming ownership title and inheritance. Given that the majority of former Jewish citizens of the Second Republic of Poland do not live in Poland, and their children, and now also grandchildren, do not speak Polish, it would prove too costly or even impossible for them to negotiate independently to benefit from this act. This being the case, the attempt at regulation, as outlined above, would once again become a source of frustration for former Polish Jews who were property owners, and not a tool for seeking accord in mutual relations, owing to the lack of the real possibility of taking advantage of this entitlement.95

Regulations Relating to the Assets Owned by Pre-War Jewish Religious Communities

After military action ceased, the liberation, and the first repatriation of Polish citizens from the USSR, the Jewish population of Poland, which was around 250,000 in July 1946, attempted to rebuild Jewish life, including the religious aspects. However, the pre-war Jewish community organizations were not reactivated. In the summer of 1944, a representative body was established in Lublin, which was named the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, in November, with a legal department and a repossession department. The latter, in particular, worked to document the assets that had been

95 Given these facts, there may be grounds for establishing an additional state fund designated to save and secure Jewish cemeteries and mass graves. This latter issue, in particular, is a very serious undertaking.
owned by the pre-war Jewish community and religious organizations. In some places where synagogues were intact and there were concentrations of Jews who had survived the Holocaust, some buildings and Jewish cemeteries were reclaimed, although not with their legal title.96 In some towns, Jewish community organizations began to operate spontaneously. These were later incorporated into the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith in the People's Republic of Poland, but this organization was only the user of the buildings designated for religious purposes. The Office for Denominational Affairs, a department in the Ministry of Public Administration, and subsequently the Ministry of Internal Affairs, was responsible for disposing of the former Jewish community organizations’ assets. The Decree on Abandoned and Formerly German Assets, March 8, 1946, decided upon the legal status of these assets.97

Essentially, until 1997, the issue of the pre-war Jewish community’s and religious organizations’ property was left to the discretion of the state administration, including the Office for Denominational Affairs. This was particularly so with regard to the cemeteries. As many as a third of the original total of around 1,200 are thought to have been razed pursuant to permits for construction projects at those sites.98

On February 20, 1997, the Sejm passed the Act on the Relationship of the State to Jewish Religious Communities in the Republic of Poland, pursuant to which Jewish communities, as defined by the act — members of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities (UJRC) (see www.jewish.org.pl) — may apply for the return of such real property or the parts thereof seized by the state, which belonged to Jewish community organizations and other Jewish religious legal persons on September 1, 1939. Properties subject to restitution include sites at which Jewish cemeteries were located, but only if the ownership title still belongs to the State Treasury or a local authority; and synagogues and buildings that housed the headquarters of Jewish community organizations, or had religious, educational or charitable/welfare functions. There is limited scope for including in these regulations proceedings for real properties that, as of January 30, 1933, belonged to Jewish

97 Memorandum of the Office for Denominational Affairs of June 1957, no. 18 b/16/57, directed to the Presidiums of the Voivodeship National Councils (copy in the author’s archives).
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communities on land now in western Poland that was part of Germany before the outbreak of the Second World War, the so-called Recovered Territories. There are no legal means of demanding compensation for the assets of pre-war Jewish communities beyond Poland’s eastern border, which did not become part of the Polish state in 1945.99

Applications for inclusion in the regulation proceedings were open for submission until May 11, 2002. Not until 2000 did the UJRC and individual Jewish communities come to an agreement with the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) and obtain loans to conduct archival research and take legal steps enabling them to take advantage of this act. Another element of this agreement was the joint establishment by the UJRC and the WJRO of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (www.fodz.pl), provision for which had been made in the act of February 20, 1997. The foundation’s primary objective is to use funds from the regulation process to renovate historical buildings and monuments of exceptional significance to the history of Poland’s Jews, and to secure (chiefly by erecting fences) Jewish cemeteries, a supreme priority in Judaism in view of the requirement to take care of burial places. The foundation is also active in the field of history education with the program, “To Bring Memory Back,”100 which seeks to nurture the cognitive values of a multicultural civic society. It also monitors and actively participates in criminal trials of cases involving damage to, and destruction of, Jewish monuments motivated by antisemitism. It is now the most active Jewish organization in the area of Jewish property. Indeed, it would be fair to state that the funds received by the Act of February 20, 1997, are the driving force behind both the foundation activities and the work of the Jewish religious communities in Poland.

By the statutory deadline, 5,504 restitution applications were received. As of October 2008, only 26 percent of them had been processed and closed. Half of these decisions were positive, granting the Jewish religious party real property or compensation; and the remainder were rejections. Cemeteries and historical synagogues accounted for half of the real properties restituted. At present, there is no way of establishing the value of the assets subject to these restitution applications, despite the fact that such estimates were attempted to be made in the early 1990s, which, as it transpired, were based on the imaginary assessment of groups of Polish Jews not resident

in Poland. Moreover, at that time, account was not taken of the costs of renovating the Jewish cemeteries, which, in view of their significance for the history of Poland’s Jews, should be restored and preserved for future generations.

Based on the act of February 20, 1997, as an example, clearly with all its limitations and the criticism voiced over the principles whereby the rules of the regulation procedure were interpreted, implementation of a program to restitute assets to their rightful owners has been a positive step for Polish society. Not least, it has provided the opportunity to work on joint projects commemorating Poland’s pre-war Jewish community, many of which have contributed to improving Polish-Jewish relations, and repudiating stereotypes and negative opinions of Jews in many communities.101

From the moral standpoint, there is also movable property in museums and libraries, which used to serve as prayer houses or belong to Jewish community organizations. As there is no way of proving private ownership or documenting the provenance of individual items, this issue is closed.

Conclusion

The Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust began attempting to assert their property rights as soon as the war ended. However, owing to the legal restrictions outlined above, aside from the regulation of Jewish community property (the main beneficiaries of which today are Jews permanently resident in Poland), they have had little success in terms of either individual or collective claims (i.e., through the agency of the above-mentioned WJRO, the Claims Conference, and the World Jewish Congress, among others). The few successful ones are those who were able to amass the relevant documents proving ownership title and legal succession from previous owners, file their restitution applications with the courts and other administrative

101 A project undertaken by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland with the support of the Batory Foundation, “A Study of Attitudes toward Jews,” completed in 2009, has shown decided distance from, and antipathy toward, Jews, especially in small towns and villages where there have been no Jews for half a century. Yet, in places where joint remembrance projects are undertaken, a “thaw” in attitudes is evident. Such places include Sławatyczce, Ciechanowiec, Mogilno, Kolno, Dobra, and Wysokie Mazowieckie. Among the many initiators of these initiatives are various private individuals, associations, parishes, other faith-based congregations, and foreign Jewish organizations.
bodies relatively rapidly, and were willing and financially able to take full advantage of professional legal assistance.

In the Polish public discourse after 1989, the issue of “Jewish ownership” was absent as a distinct category; the restitution program, reprivatization scheme, and compensation system are addressed to all citizens of Poland (including the Jews). Groups and organizations representing restitution interests of Polish Jews from outside of Poland, usually do not grasp this difference and pursue restitution of “Jewish properties” in abstraction from the context that Communist authorities wrenched ownership from all sectors of Polish society.

Calculation of the value of assets lost by Polish Jews as a consequence of the Holocaust is possible, but because the sources are so scattered and the issue so vast, it would require phenomenal resources and full cooperation with the public administrative bodies in control of the archival material of various institutions. On the basis of experiences of restitution according to the Act on the Relationship of the State with Jewish Religious Communities, there are grounds for expecting that it would be extremely difficult, and hampered by the fears and phobias arising from the stereotypes and xenophobia of large sectors of society.

At present, the issue of claims by Polish Jews remains unregulated, hindering progress in Polish-Jewish relations. The legal measures taken, give no moral satisfaction to Jews who lost their property twice over — once during the Holocaust and again under the Communists — who feel, as expressed in the Bible, “Have you not murdered a man and taken his property?”


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In his novella *Victory* (*Zwycięstwo*), Henryk Grynberg, referring to Jewish cultural life in post-war Łódź, includes the following description:

There were tears whenever Jews assembled.... It didn’t matter whether the songs were sad or happy, people cried. But no other time did things ever reach the extremes they did one Sunday morning when, instead of having a concert, they showed a pre-war Jewish film *The Town of Bełz*. It’s hard to say how many Jews were in Łódź at that time. Seven hundred and seventy had survived in the ghetto. Maybe a few hundred more had returned from the concentration camps. A few hundred had arrived with the Polish-Russian army. There were also some 2,000 survivors from other cities and towns, people like us. And all of them wanted to get into the hall, which could not hold more than 500 people. They broke the doors, all the mirrors, railings, and windows.... All the space around the walls and between the rows was filled.... The lights went out and, for a moment, complete silence reigned. But, when the well-known song came on — “Oh Bełz, my beloved Bełz, my little shtetele where all of my family...” — terrible cries burst from everyone. Not weeping, not wailing, but a great collective groan and cry of pain. As if a mass execution had taken place. You couldn’t hear the words of the song or the melody. You couldn’t even see the screen because everyone had risen, standing on tiptoe to see. But at the same time, people covered their eyes and faces with their hands. This went on until the film was over.¹

The above description can be compared to accounts of contemporary

concerts performed by acclaimed, professional artists from Poland and abroad, such as Gołda Tencer or Theodore Bikel, on the one hand, and, for example, to Traveland travel agency’s offer, of a “Cossack Evening,” a “Warmia-Style Kumsitz,” a “Colorful Gypsy Evening,” and a “Jewish Supper” with the following program:

A klezmer greets the diners as they arrive, and the guests are presented with scarves and skullcaps and seated by tables brimming with Jewish delicacies. By candlelight, a “Jewish” klezmer band entertains the guests with songs and jokes. Skits and songs performed by the klezmer band include, among others: “The Jewess,” “The Town of Belz,” “Bubilczki,” “Rebecca,” “Spiel, Klezmer, Spiel,” “Shabbes All over the World,” “If I Were a Rich Man,” “The Gang,” and “Seven Jews.” If they wish, the guests are photographed in the company of the band and delicacies of the Jewish cuisine are available.2

Several popular artists with well-established reputations, for example, Andre Ochodlo, sometimes bordering on kitsch, also appear. As Dorota Szwarcman observes:

Quite often, in public renditions of Yiddish songs by women singers, a hint of Rachel from *The Wedding* [the well-known Polish neo-Romantic play by Stanisław Wyspiański — M.A.-G., M.R.] or Rebecca from the song by Wlast and Białostocki (dark-colored dress, scarf draped over the head and eyes raised toward the sky) can be detected. Whereas male renditions are marked by Tevye the Milkman’s style (wearing a hat or cap and dancing around with raised forearms). Add a little Yiddish-inflected Polish and all this philosemitism appears to be antisemitic.3

It goes without saying that this phenomenon does not apply exclusively to music, and the above-mentioned quotations explicitly show how the audience and reception of such material have changed over a period of 60 years. In much the same way as Jewish Holocaust survivors were the main recipients of Jewish culture after the Second World War, most cultural events are aimed at local gentiles, and tourists from abroad, who are not necessarily

Jewish, nowadays. The organizers from the Traveland agency, aware of the semi-folksy and fake character of “the supper,” put the word “Jewish,” when describing the band, in quotation marks (see above), since most klezmer bands that now perform in Poland do not include any musicians of Jewish origin, and most Yiddish singers do not understand the language and neither does the audience. It is hardly surprising, then, that people who know Yiddish might be shocked to hear lively renditions of Mordechaj Gebirtig’s “Mayn shtetl brent” (My Town Is on Fire) by performers who assume that a Yiddish song is supposed to be lively, but do not take the trouble to familiarize themselves with its contents and the circumstances in which it was written.\(^4\)

What changes occurred over the last 60 years that have elapsed between these two descriptions?

### Before the Second World War

Until the Second World War, the non-Jewish audience for Jewish culture was very limited. Consequently, translations of Yiddish literature only reached Polish readers very rarely. The first such attempts were made during the Positivist period (from the 1860s to the 1890s). Only a few Polish writers took an interest in Yiddish literature, such as Klemens Junosza Szaniawski, who adapted into Polish some works by Mendele; or Eliza Orzeszkowa, who studied the tenets of Judaism, driven by a genuine need to familiarize herself with Jewish culture and achieve a rapprochement between Jews and Poles. Later on, a shift occurred in certain publishing enterprises and some translations from Yiddish were done so as to get to know the “enemy” (for example, the Polish edition of A Shtetl by Sholem Asch in 1911).\(^5\) This also applied to the authors of certain Yiddish textbooks published in the interwar period, who were notorious for their antisemitic views.\(^6\)

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4 This true account, from two Jewish women tourists from the United States, was passed on to one of the authors in 2004.


Most of the literary works translated from Yiddish into Polish in the inter-war period, as well as Jewish literature in Polish, which was mainly published in the Polish-language Jewish press, were aimed at assimilated Jews. Polish viewers attracted by Jewish theater and movies were few and far between, with the possible exception of the stage and film versions of The Dybbuk. In this context, it is also worth mentioning the antisemitic approach to Jewish literature by critics with nationalist leanings, who claimed to be unmasking the "true face of the enemy." They attempted to make clear to Polish readers that "the authors concerned were Jewish and their work was...‘a projection of the entirety of the traits of Jewish character,’ and, consequently, endangered the reader’s national identity."

After the Second World War

Compared to the pre-war scene, the Jewish community’s situation in Poland changed drastically after the war. During the war, not only did a great many artists and writers perish, but so did the vast mass of art and culture consumers. At the same time, after the Communist state’s takeover of all culture-related institutions, the post-war period saw the emergence of more conducive conditions to culture production, albeit limited in scope by censorship. These two factors, alongside the constraints resulting from the new political situation, had a crucial impact on the form and character of Yiddish culture that developed for more than two decades after the war. Until 1968, Yiddish culture functioned in a separate circuit, safeguarded by institutions, including Yiddish publishing houses, literature, press, theater, etc. This culture is outlined in a separate article in this volume. As far as popularization of Yiddish literature among Polish readers is concerned, it should be noted that the first Polish-language book dealing with the history of Yiddish literature did not appear until 1992. The first study on Yiddish film in Polish was even

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8 Urbanowski, Nacionalistyczna, p. 58.
9 See Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikov and Magdalena Ruta’s article, “Yiddish Culture in Poland after the Holocaust,” in this volume.
10 Chone Shmeruk, Historia literatury jidysz (Wroclaw: Ossolineum, 1992). In 2007, a
longer in the making, first appearing in 2002.\textsuperscript{11} Both works were written by Polish Jews who settled in Israel after the Second World War.

\textbf{Between 1945 and 1956}, relatively few translations from Yiddish were made, and interest in Yiddish literature was rather sporadic. Information about Yiddish literature would appear in various periodicals in connection with official anniversaries and jubilee celebrations, for example, the articles on Y. L. Peretz published in the press since 1945. As Eugenia Prokop-Janieck\textsuperscript{12} notes, “The Thirtieth Anniversary of Peretz’s Death” (\textit{Gazeta Lubelska}, no. 51, 1945, p. 6) was one of the first publications on Yiddish literature to appear after the war. Interpretations of various works, especially of the classics, published in articles and reviews during that period, were characterized by an extensive ideological slant:

Works of literary criticism and literary history published in the period of the PRL are characterized as well by interpretations shaped significantly by ideology. This concerns not only publications from before 1956, although of course at the time, the intensity of the ideological language of literary criticism is the strongest. In the anniversary article, “On the Centennial of the Birth of Y.L. Peretz,” in the weekly \textit{Nowa Kultura} it was possible in 1952 to read, for example, that in the works of Peretz: “The Jewish national form merges harmoniously in one whole with the universal socialist idea of international solidarity” [Bernard Mark, “W stulecie urodzin I. L. Pereca,” \textit{Nowa Kultura}, no. 25, 1951 — M.A.-G., M.R.], ...Bontshe Shvayg turned out to be the type of “hardened worker who...endured class exploitation, not protesting with even a word,” and confinement and imprisonment in the X pavilion of the Warsaw citadel “together with Rosa Luxemburg” was cited as one of the key facts in the biography of the writer.\textsuperscript{13}

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11 Natan Gross, \textit{Film żydowski w Polsce} (Krakow: Rabid, 2002).
13 Ibid., p. 104.
Between 1956 and 1968, several works by Peretz, Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Asch, and Efraim Kaganowski were translated, mainly aimed at Polish readers. These translations clearly contributed to a growing interest on the part of Polish critics in Yiddish literature. Jewish writers in Polish also targeted Polish readers. An interesting case in point is the bilingual works of Kalman Segal, a writer who presumably was aware of the shift in literary communication between Yiddish writers and their readers, as a consequence of the war and the change in the political system. The borderline area of Polish and Yiddish literature was home to such Polish-Jewish authors as Arnold Słucki and Stanisław Wygodzki, who translated Yiddish literature as well as writing original works in Polish, and Julian Stryjkowski, who was the first author to put up a literary monument commemorating the annihilated shtetl in Polish literature.

Somewhat later, in 1982, Artur Sandauer would criticize Julian Stryjkowski as a “eulogist of the language manglers,” a reference to his use of Yiddishisms, putting the wide acclaim of his books down to:

...[being] imitations of an authentic item. Included in the calculation are the “goy’s perspective,” his ignorance, his greed for exoticism, his...


15 On Słucki’s literary writing, see Sławomir J. Żurek, “... lotny trud półistnienia”. O motywach judaistycznych w poezji Arnolda Słuckiego (Krakow: Księgarnia Akademicka, 1999).


17 On Stryjkowski’s literary writing, see, for example, Polonsky and Adamczyk-Garbowska, Contemporary Jewish Writing in Poland; Ireneusz Piekarski, Z cienności. O twórczości Juliana Stryjkowskiego (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2010), and Krzysztof Dariusz Szatrawski, “Odkrywałem ślad po śladzie utracony...” Ideowe uwarunkowania twórczości Juliana Stryjkowskiego (Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, 2010).
notion — possibly well intentioned but rooted in the era of contempt — of Jews as simpletons, and of their language as a jargon that is flawed by nature and lacks grammar and an established vocabulary and, in addition, is rather nauseating. In a word, it all adds up to an attempt to create a philosemitic whole out of allosemic notions.\(^{18}\)

Sandauer’s view is obviously extreme, but some of his comments may apply to contemporary phenomena, and even more so in the light of the paramount significance of the addressee’s role, in his critical assessment. Moreover, nowadays, certain authors’ descriptions of “Jewish culture” are characterized by making ignorant, albeit frequently well-meaning, references to blatant and oversimplified associations, if not outright stereotypes.

As a consequence of demographic changes in the milieu of Jewish-culture consumers, the number of Yiddish speakers sharply decreased. Therefore, more often than not, Jewish culture was propagated in the Polish language. In 1956, for example, the emergence of a younger generation, who did not understand their parents’ language, Yiddish, led to the publication of *Nasz Głos* — the Polish-language supplement to the Yiddish daily, *Folks-Shtime*.

**In the 1970s**, Jewish themes were practically nonexistent due to the zeal of censorship, which became particularly sensitive to Jewish issues in the wake of the March 1968 events.\(^{19}\) Jewish culture was cultivated mainly by the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów — TSKŻ) in the form of frequent out-of-town performances by actors of the Jewish Theater in Warsaw for rather restricted audiences. The Jewish Flying University (Żydowski Uniwersytet Latający) also began its activities in the late 1970s. On the national scale, it catered to a narrow group of young Jews and their friends interested in broadening their knowledge of the history and culture of the Jewish people. The meetings and lectures were held in Polish.\(^{20}\) Comments by western authors

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19 On the antisemitic campaign instigated by the Polish authorities that culminated in the March 1968 events and mass emigration of Jews, see Feliks Tych’s article, “The "March ’68" Antisemitic Campaign: Onset, Development, and Consequences,” in this volume.

20 On the activities of the Jewish Flying University, see, for example, Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory: The Jew in Contemporary Poland* (New Brunswick-
confirm their conviction about the impending end of Jewish life in Poland. For example, in 1978, Ruth Wisse, a prominent scholar of Jewish literature, in her travel report for *Commentary*, wrote:

"Inquire at the many bookstores of Warsaw or Cracow for any volume on the Jews of Poland, either of the past or present, in any region of the north or south, in any aspect of ethnography or economics, and even the dullest student of language will quickly learn the words for “there are none,” *nie ma*, and “nothing,” *nic*. A trip to Poland in search of a Jewish presence is a journey of the mind alone."21

At the end of 1978, when Isaac Bashevis Singer was awarded the Nobel Prize, a certain leniency on the part of the Polish censorship set in. Both these facts contributed to the appearance of the first “Jewish” plays in Polish theaters, such as “Fiddler on the Roof,” directed by Maria Fołtyn, with Bernard Ładysz playing the part of Tevye the Milkman, at the Teatr Muzyczny (Musical Theater) in Łódź, with a preview on May 5, 1983; and “The Magician from Lublin,” directed by Jan Szurmiej, with songs by Agnieszka Osiecka, at the Teatr Współczesny (Contemporary Theater) in Wrocław, with a preview on December 12, 1986. These plays, which were also subsequently performed in other cities, moved only very few members of the audience to a similar extent as described by Henryk Grynberg (above), but they were applauded by the audience as a novelty and a sign of greater openness and freedom. They were also a harbinger of the slowly developing fashion for Jewish themes.

The 1980s were characterized by a gradual opening up to Jewish topics,
as the outcome of a general slackening of censorship after 1980. In 1983, after the end of the martial law in Poland, a significant double edition of the Znak monthly was published at the same time as an anthology of Jewish poetry, 15 years after being prepared for publication. Małgorzata Niezabitowska and Tomasz Tomaszewski described the process of “discovering” the remains of Jewish life in Poland in their book, Remnants: The Last Jews of Poland, and an exhibition with the same title was held in 1985. As Eugenia Prokop-Janiec observed:

Remembering Yiddish literature and culture...becomes an element of filling in the “blanks” as well as recognizing “an almost untouched literary field” [Jerzy Biernacki, “Tu biło jej źródło,” Literatura na Świecie, no. 4, 1988, p. 344] and acquiring the right to speak about that which had been excluded until then from official discourse.... It is characteristic as well that the wave of publications dedicated to Yiddish culture appears in the 1980s in publications such as Znak, Przegląd Powszechny or Tygodnik Powszechny; literary translations from Yiddish, meanwhile, are published as well in the underground circulation (The Dybbuk by An-sky [translated by Ernest Bryll, foreword and notes by Stanisław Warecki, Wydawnictwo Społeczne KOS, 1988]). In the 1980s, Yiddish undoubtedly acquires the status of one of the signs of a code of politically independent culture, and publications on the topic of Yiddish literature are treated as a kind of political repossession.

For the first time in several decades, Polish and Jewish academic circles had a chance to establish initial ties. Scholars from Israel started visiting Poland, as exemplified by the lectures and activities organized by Professors Chone Shmeruk, Jakub Goldberg, and Yisrael Gutman. In Great Britain, an international editorial board, headed by Professor Antony Polonsky, started the yearbook Polin, and conferences took place at Oxford, Brandeis University in the United States, in Jerusalem, and Kraków. With the intention of conducting as yet neglected studies on the history of Polish Jewry, the Research Center on Jewish History and Culture in Poland was set up at the

Jagiellonian University. Academic initiatives had an impact on publishing, popularization, and educational ventures all over Poland.

In the late 1980s, the Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie publishing house in Wrocław published the first volumes in a series of Yiddish classics (the first book, the story of Tevye the Milkman, appeared in 1989 in an edition of 150,000 copies). Other publishers came up with a number of reprints at that time, as well as a significant number of translations from English and other languages (often quite sloppy). The period of transition to a free market economy at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s gave rise to a “Jewish is fashionable” trend, manifesting itself most clearly through the wide distribution of kosher food products and, especially, alcoholic beverages, in Polish shops. This was the beginning of the commercialization of Jewish issues.

In the 1990s, after the collapse of the Communist regime, Poland’s borders were “thrown wide open,” and the model of a democratic society receptive to other cultures was advocated. This gave a boost to interest in Jewish culture and was conducive to its revival. This phenomenon was bilateral: Interest in Jewish topics on the part of gentiles stimulated activity in the Jewish milieu, aspiring to rebirth. This trend was supported by the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation and the Joint through educational initiatives. In addition, new publishing houses and periodicals were developed, and summer Yiddish courses organized. In both gentile and Jewish circles, various organizations and foundations supporting the development of Jewish culture emerged. In 1995, the Polish Association for Jewish Studies (Polskie Towarzystwo Studiów Żydowskich — PTSŻ) was formed, based in Kraków.

The fate of the Folks-Shtime newspaper, which had a Polish-language supplement from 1956, may be viewed as symbolizing the changes at that time. After the change of the political system in 1989, the newspaper’s profile underwent yet another transformation and, from 1992, it appeared as a bimonthly, and, from 2002, as a monthly, in a smaller format and under the new name

26 Michał Friedman, indefatigable translator, teacher, and propagator of Yiddish literature, was the driving force behind this impressive translation effort, which resulted in the publication of 14 Yiddish classics, up to 2003.

27 See, for example, Michael Steinlauf, Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), p. 126. The author enumerates positive developments, for example, the Kraków Jewish Culture Festival, alongside phenomena triggering mixed feelings, such as “Jewish” restaurants and competing brands of kosher vodka. He also quotes a joke that was making the rounds at the time about “Germans paying to see Poles disguised as Jews.”

28 See the website of the PTSŻ: www.jewishstudies.pl.
FROM JEWISH CULTURE TO CULTURE ABOUT JEWS

Słowo Żydowskie/Dos Yidishe Vort. Characteristically, the Polish-language part took up more than half of the editorial space. Originally, about equal numbers of writers living in Poland and abroad authored the contributions in Yiddish. Some articles were published in two language versions: Polish and Yiddish.

The Jewish Theater in Warsaw evolved in a similar fashion. In the 1990's, it began to stage an ever-increasing number of performances for an audience without any command of Yiddish. The shows included musicals, such as “Fiddler on the Roof,” among others, linguistic-musical medleys, such as “Tenement on Nalewki Street,” and also classics with which Polish viewers were familiar through other Polish-language productions, such as “The Dybbuk.”

More and more frequently, Jewish classics are performed in Polish on account of the audience, to avoid the use of earphones, and also due to the shortage of actors capable of performing well in Yiddish, which, in most cases, was only an acquired language. The Jewish Theater, therefore, can only expect larger audiences on its foreign tours.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a growing differentiation of the Jewish milieu set in. The Beit Warszawa Association started functioning actively as an alternative to Orthodox Judaism, which was officially adopted by the Jewish community of Warsaw. Affiliated with Reform Judaism, the association practices so-called cultural Judaism, which is open to wide circles. There has been an ever-increasing interest in the Yiddish language. Due to the development of older academic centers in Kraków and Warsaw, and the creation of new ones in Lublin, Wrocław, and Łódź, it has become much easier to study Jewish culture and history, which has become accessible to a wide audience. Furthermore, a number of websites focusing on Jewish topics have emerged and numerous projects have been initiated by non-Jews, both individuals and institutions.

29 For example, its tour in Argentina in 2006 was a great success. See “Warszawa. Miasteczko Belz w Buenos Aires.” The article contains a quote by Szymon Szurmiej, Director of the Jewish theater in Warsaw: “When Alina Świdowska, an actress at our theater, started singing the famous song ‘The Town of Belz’ on the stage in Buenos Aires, over 1,500 people, who filled the 1,000-seat concert hall, joined in with her...” www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuły/27257.html (accessed, May 12, 2013). The Jewish Theater went there in the framework of the Polish Culture Week.

30 See, for example, websites of educational institutions such as the Shalom Foundation: www.shalom.org.pl, Judaica Foundation Center for Jewish Culture: www.judaica.pl, Center for Yiddish Culture: www.jidyszland.pl, Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków: www.galiciajewishmuseum.org, Czulent Jewish Association: www.czulent.pl, Jewish Community Center in Kraków: www.jcckrakow.org, and some educational Internet portals like the Yiddish Lebt Project: www.jidysz.net, Virtual Shtetl: www.szetl.org.pl,
In recent years, the number of professional initiatives aimed at promoting Yiddish culture and literature has grown considerably. This may be exemplified by the series of lectures and presentations by members of the Forum of Young Yiddish Scholars, representing the achievements of young scholars from Jewish and non-Jewish milieus from all over Poland. Recent projects include: the establishment of educational websites; the continuously updated Yiddish-Polish mini-dictionary; and the compilation of the scholarly papers on literature and literary translations; the publication of the first Yiddish-Polish/Polish-Yiddish dictionary since the war.

In 2010, the Polish Association for Yiddish Studies was established by scholars and enthusiasts of Yiddish language and culture. Simultaneously, the Center of Yiddish Culture, under the auspices of the Shalom Foundation, launched its activities in Warsaw, offering a rich education program and the publishing of Cwiszn periodical devoted to Yiddish literature and culture.

For several decades, the original Yiddish-language cultural circuit has no longer been in existence, and most representatives of this culture are no longer alive. The Słowo Żydowskie/Dos Yidishe Vort is used to exemplify the changes during this period: the Yiddish-language part has contracted to a few pages, and its contents consist of reprints from foreign publications, or educational materials for teaching Yiddish, another sign of the times.

The Situation in Poland Compared with Similar Developments in Other Countries

As noted by Ruth Ellen Gruber, since the 1990s the phenomenon of “virtual Jewishness” has emerged in several European countries. Jewish culture has not only acquired an ever-increasing circle of followers, but its representative works are increasingly being created by non-Jewish artists, sometimes in places where Jews are completely absent. There are various interpretations of this phenomenon: Some view it as an attempt to exploit the social
interest in discussions and polemics concerning the Holocaust (see “the Shoah business”); others see it as the popularity of a distorted folklore; while yet others look for the source of its popularity in fashion, commercial considerations, and, finally, in the executioner’s peculiar attraction to the victim (which particularly applies to Germany). Undoubtedly, to no small extent, this phenomenon originates in the ever-intensifying process of historical reassessment, attempts at determining the identity of a local or national community, as well as a sincere effort to compensate for the wrongs of the past, for example, by memorializing the Holocaust. Commemoration becomes a tool for gaining knowledge about one’s own identity in the process of filling in blanks. Last but not least, intellectual or emotional fascination with the Jewish world plays a part as well.

According to Gruber:

“Universalization” of the Jewish phenomenon and its integration into mainstream European consciousness, this emergence of a “Judaizing terrain” and “Judaizing milieux” [can be perceived as] “filling”...the Jewish space. This is a process that, in turn, encompasses the creation of a “virtual Jewishness,” a “virtual Jewish world,” peopled by “virtual Jews” who perform...Jewish culture from an outsider perspective, alongside or often in the absence of local Jewish populations.

This phenomenon has several dimensions: political, personal, material (for example, reconstruction of synagogues and refurbishing property in former Jewish neighborhoods), and entertainment-related (theater, movies, music, and museums).

According to the 2002 Jewish Policy Report, despite the relatively


37 Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 11. See also the Polish translation, Agnieszka Nowakowska, trans., *Odrodzenie kultury żydowskiej w Europie* (Sejny: Fundacja Pogranicze, 2004). It is noteworthy that the Polish title, literally translated as, “The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Europe,” differs substantially from the English one, since it is devoid of skeptical distance and a certain measure of irony present in the original title.

38 Ibid., p. 27.

small number of Jews in Poland, the coefficient of Jewish cultural events was the highest among the countries studied: In Poland, there were 38 events for every 1,000 Jews, whereas in Italy, Belgium, and Sweden, there were two to three events for every 1,000 Jews. Consequently, the coefficient in the other countries was less than ten percent of Poland’s. Is this a paradox or an expression of a natural course of events, taking into account Poland’s historical and political conditioning?

Reasons for the Shift in the Non-Jews’ Approach to Jewish Culture after the 1970s

1) The shift in the attitude of the Church toward Jews and Judaism has certainly given impetus to these changes. Among its manifestations is the publication of the *Nostra Aetate* in 1965 and the Second Vatican Council’s repudiation of the argument about the collective responsibility of the Jews for the death of Christ. Pope John Paul II played a significant role in the ensuing Christian-Jewish dialog by visiting Auschwitz in 1979 and the Great Synagogue in Rome in 1986; contributing to the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Israel in 1993; signing a document expressing contrition for the attitude of the Christians during the Holocaust in 1998; and, finally, undertaking a pilgrimage to the State of Israel in 2000. Among the results of the above-mentioned changes was the institution of the Day of Judaism, which is marked annually in Poland on January 17, and often becomes an opportunity to present Jewish culture to a wider audience. Every year, the main events of this day are held in a different city.40

There have also been initiatives at a local level as, for example, by the late Archbishop Józef Życiński, who took steps to organize symbolical events to “mourn for the Jews” in various localities in the Lublin province, where they constituted the majority of the residents before the Second World War. In 2001 and 2002, such prayer meetings took place in the small towns of Piaski, Trawniki, Izbica, Łęczna, and Kazimierz Dolny.

The Christian-Jewish dialog has also led to a number of seminars for the exchange of views and ideas of clergymen and students from various

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40 For more on initiatives of the Catholic Church for Christian-Jewish Dialog, see the website of Polska Rada Chrześcijan i Żydów (Polish Council of Christians and Jews): www.prchiz.pl.
countries. Such initiatives include the Polish-German-American seminars initiated by late Rabbi Michael Singer, who was among the authors and signatories of the *Dabru Emet* (Tell the Truth) document. They took place in Kraków at the Papal Theological Academy in 2002 and at the Catholic University of Lublin in 2007.

2) **The fall of Communism** was an important turning point. The scope of research conducted on Jewish history and culture in Poland in the Communist era was very limited, which was mainly carried out in circles affiliated with the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, while contributions from other academic centers were usually regional in character, dealing in a fragmentary fashion with the history of Jews in specific localities. Moreover, there was no room for a moral reckoning related to the Holocaust. A slow process of breaking the silence began in the 1970s thanks to a significant involvement of certain Catholic circles. The Kraków-based weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*, which allocated editorial space to a discussion triggered by Jan Błoński’s significant article “Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto” (The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto), among others, played a particularly important role in this regard. Knowledge of Jewish culture and Polish-Jewish relations was propagated at meetings of local chapters of the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej) or at the Lublin Catholic University (e.g., The Week of Jewish Culture in 1986). Interest in the history of the Jews was an indirect form of opposition to the Communist regime.

The non-Jews’ fascination with Judaism and Jewish culture intensified in the period of solidarity and its aftermath. At that time, an intellectual shift occurred toward some issues forbidden to discuss until then, including Jewish topics. This is the period when large-scale Judaic studies were initiated; the above-mentioned Research Center on Jewish History and Culture in Poland at the Jagiellonian University opened in 1986; and the first cultural events, such as the Kraków Festival of Polish Movies dealing with Jewish topics took place in 1986, and the Festival of Jewish Culture in

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41 See a bibliographical series of *Judaika wydawane w Polsce. Druki zwarte i niesamost- ne: materiały do bibliografii*, issued in the late 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s by Międzywydziałowy Zakład Historii i Kultury Żydów w Polsce at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

Kraków was established in 1988. The latter festival, in particular, inspired other cities to organize similar events. In addition, staging such a major event as the festival speeded up revitalization of the former Jewish quarter of Kazimierz, and was conducive to the growth of the tourist and restaurant business there (the opening of Jewish-style hotels, restaurants, and pubs, such as the Klezmer Hojz, Ariel, Dawno temu na Kazimierz (A Long Time Ago at Kazimierz) and, last but not least, the entertainment business (several bands performing Jewish music were formed at that time). Since the end of the 1990s, the Center of Jewish Culture in Kraków has been hosting a competitive Bajit Chadasz festival.43

3) **Spiritual and ethical sources of interest in Jewish culture**, such as the search for the roots of the faith and attempts at explaining certain issues connected with responsibility for the Holocaust, also played a far from insignificant role in the transformation process. In this context, Claude Lanzmann’s movie *Shoah* and Jan Błoński’s article of 1987, and the ensuing polemic, had a highly stimulating effect. This was the first time such difficult issues became the subject of a public debate.

An important stage of the growing interest in Jewish culture and history was also represented by several exhibitions. Marek Rostworowski’s *Polish Jews* was held at the National Museum in Kraków in 1989. The exhibition *I Still See Their Faces* was organized following a call by the Shalom Foundation to send in photographs in 1994, to which there was a wide-scale response, with the submission of 8,000 images of pre-war Polish Jews.

4) **The gradual revival of the Jewish community after 1989**, following the activities of the Flying Jewish University in Warsaw in the late 1970s, is also significant.

**The Complex Character of These Changes**

1) **The Creation of High Culture**
Between 1945 and 1968, Jews were mainly involved in popularizing Jewish

43 For more information on the revitalization of the former Jewish quarter of Kazimierz in Kraków, see Monika Murzyn, *Kazimierz: Środkowoeuropejskie doświadczenie rewitalizacji* (Krakow: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2006).
culture in Yiddish and Polish. By contrast, after 1968, and especially after 1989, non-Jews often initiated literary translations and scholarly and educational activities.

Since the late 1980s, until today:

a) Several Polish academic centers have been established, offering a wide range of Judaic studies, including the organization of numerous conferences, sessions, and seminars, often in small centers.

b) Specialized Judaica museums were created, regional museums were enriched by permanent Judaica exhibitions, and relevant educational activities developed. New projects constantly emerge, such as expanding an exhibition dedicated to Kraków during the Nazi occupation, focusing on the history of the local Jewish community in the new section of the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków, which is located in the building of the former Schindler factory. Gołda Tenczer and the Shalom Foundation proposed an initiative to establish a center for Yiddish culture in Warsaw. The Museum of the History of Polish Jews, constructed in Warsaw, opened in April 2013, on the seventieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, is an initiative with tremendous international scope.

c) Numerous monographs and recollections about Jews from specific localities and regions have been published as a result of individual and collective projects.

d) Foundations and private institutions have been initiated, originally to disseminate mass culture products as *sui generis* folklore and exotica. Over time, however, the quality of the cultural products offered has increased considerably. Until today, the Kraków

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44 Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich: www.jewishmuseum.org.pl. At the time of going to print the main exhibition had not yet opened.

Jewish Culture Festival constitutes a borderline case between high and commercial cultures since, in recent years, popular music performances have been accompanied by a series of interesting lectures, some of which were later published. The Isaac Bashevis Singer Festival in Warsaw has a similar character. Every year, it offers a scholarly session dedicated to selected aspects of Yiddish culture, but, unfortunately, to date, the papers presented have not appeared in post-conference publications.

In addition to those in Kraków and Warsaw, periodical festivals also take place elsewhere: the Four Cultures Festival in Łódź, the Jewish Culture Festival Simcha in Wrocław, the Three Cultures Festival in Włodawa, and the Klezmer Music Festival in Kazimierz Dolny. In addition, countless Jewish Culture Days and Weeks are celebrated all over Poland, as well as the so-called Israel Days, which often include many events dealing with Ashkenazi culture and not just contemporary Israeli culture.46

e) Professional music bands, such as Kroke and the Krakau Klezmer Band, have been formed.

f) Publishing activities include: the Austeria publishing house in Kraków, the Cyklady publishing house in Warsaw, the Pogranicze in Sejny, and the scholarly series on Jewish topics launched by university presses. Many bookstores specialize in Judaica, for example, at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, Jarden, Klezmer Hojz, and Muzeum Galicja in Kraków; and Judaica sections are becoming increasingly popular in major bookstores all over the country.

2) Commercial Activities
These include:

a) Numerous bands, which have started to play “Jewish” music, in most cases, in “Jewish” food establishments.

b) The commercialization of space — Jewish-style cafés and restaurants, with wooden figurines of Jews, which have “replaced” the absent Jewish communities.

46 There are more than 90,000 search results in Google for the Polish words “dni kultury żydowskiej” (days of Jewish culture), and among them is information on Jewish festivals organized in Kraków, Warsaw, Wrocław, Olsztyn, Cieszyn, Łódź, Szczecin, Jelenia Góra, Białystok, Dukla, Tarnów, Kalisz, Poznań, and more.
3) Borderline Professional and Educational Activities
Local institutions are involved in commemoration activities. These include: educational programs for schools, for example, the annual literary competition organized by the Staromiejskie Culture Center in Kazimierz in Kraków; numerous initiatives of the Brama Grodzka — NN Theater in Lublin; school contests on the culture and history of Polish Jews organized by the Shalom Foundation in Warsaw; and the activities of schools and other non-governmental organizations aimed at mass audiences.

Searches carried out for Jewish spatial traces (synagogues, cemeteries, and neighborhoods) have become popular all over the country. This is a meeting-point for educational and commercial activities, conducted by amateurs, aficionados, and specialists. This is particularly so regarding the recent so-called Jewish tourism (for example, “In the Wake of Schindler’s List” in Kraków and “In the Wake of I.B. Singer” in the Lublin region).

However, the quantity and variety of the activities do not mean that all of them meet with the approval of the circles in which they were conceived or at which they are targeted. Now and then, certain groups express reluctance at commemorating Jews from a specific region. This was the case with regard to the idea of commemorating Isaac Bashevis Singer in his birthplace of Leoncin, on the centennial of his birth in 2004. In Bilgoraj, the town where he spent some of his youth and where his maternal grandfather was the rabbi, the town councilors opposed the idea of naming one of the streets after the writer. It would nevertheless be unfair not to mention the successful initiatives commemorating the Singer family, which, together with the previously described activities, constitute a telling example of dramatically different approaches by various groups of Bilgoraj residents to the history of the Jewish presence there. Yet another positive example is Sanok, where a conference was hosted in memory of the writer Kalman Segal in September 2007. During the conference organized by the city council and the municipal public library, the mayor publicly declared that steps would be taken to commemorate local Jews.

Acceptance of “Virtual Jewishness”
As a rule, the reactions to the above phenomena are mostly positive in

47 However, one of the first attempts made to commemorate the presence of the writer in the late 1980s was in Radzymin, where he lived for a couple of years as a child.
Poland, at times slightly uncritical, while the antisemitic press terms them as “doting on Jews.” In answer to the question as to whether Jewish life exists in Poland, Agnieszka Sabor, a journalist with the *Tygodnik Powszechny* weekly, which, for many years, allocated a great deal of editorial space to Jewish issues, made mention of various events, in recent years, initiated by various Jewish and non-Jewish circles. She optimistically concluded that “Polish Jews, due to their determination rather than their numbers, would yet make a positive contribution to our reality.”

However, the multiplication of similar initiatives arouses ambivalent feelings among Polish Jews. As Konstanty Gebert aptly put it in his foreword to the Polish edition of Ruth Ellen Gruber’s book:

> There is absolutely no doubt that this virtual, as opposed to authentic Jewishness, fashions the Europeans’ ideas about what Jews were like. This is why enthusiastic support for virtual Jewishness is simply not possible even if its proponents cannot be accused of ill will or artistic mediocrity. However, rejecting it would be tantamount to abandoning the only possible presence of Jews in the mass imagination. If it were not used as a concert hall, the old synagogue in Sejny would be turned into a warehouse or become a ruin.

Bella Szwarcman-Czarnota, an editor of the *Midrasz* monthly, concludes in her comments on the lively “Jewish” cultural activity:

> In fact, we are currently dealing with a blatant simplification of a culture, which, after all, was not all folklore. Among its achievements feature highly sophisticated poetry, interesting music, and literature. Here we are forced to deal with its folkloristic aspect. It is this simplification that hurts me most. Those singing in Yiddish mutilate the language more often than not; everybody around is a Jewish cultural expert, so that Jews are actually redundant...[since] just about anybody can create Jewish culture.

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50 “Koza ze styropianu, pejsy z pakuł. O współczesnej sztuce żydowskiej i pseudożydowskiej...”
At the same time, who should create Jewish culture — and how — is also a question. There is no easy answer. As Piotr Paziński, the Editor-in-Chief of the *Midrasz* monthly admits, an audience, and especially one with Jewish roots, often reacts with mixed feelings:

Is it not a fact that, somehow, it annoys us when someone starts taking an interest in Jewish culture? It irks us when a few guys get together to play klezmer music and they are no good at it, they make a mess of it, and are not authentic.... Is it a good thing that they play? Or perhaps, would it be better if they gave it up? I have the impression that sometimes we are divided by opposing wishes: We are upset when no one commemorates Jews and their culture — that is, when it is defunct. Yet again, when someone does something about it, we do not approve: We say that he plays badly, mutilates Yiddish, does not have a clue, and has no feel for it...

From the very beginning of the revived interest in things Jewish in the ‘80s, Jews abroad perceived these phenomena in an ambivalent fashion. They actually appreciated some of the initiatives, but not without reflecting bitterly that it was much easier and nicer to take an interest in Jewish culture when there were almost no Jews left. For example, in his account from the late 1980s, on the one hand, Zachary Baker affirms:

It seems as if it took the extermination by the Germans of 95 percent of Poland’s pre-war Jewish community and the subsequent, post-war emigration of most of that community’s remaining Jews (who were often coerced into emigrating, by means of crude antisemitic provocations), in order for Poles to come to grips with the cultural dimensions of their country’s irretrievable loss.

On the other hand, in her trail-blazing work on remembrance of the Jews in Poland after the Second World War until the late 1980s, Iwona Irwin-Zarecka claims that sentimental and nostalgic as the interest in Jewish things might be, it nonetheless may play a positive role. Although attending a
“Fiddler on the Roof” production cannot replace a thorough knowledge of Yiddish literature, it still may enable spectators to view the world through the eyes of the show’s protagonists, and eventually lead them to develop empathy and a desire to broaden their knowledge of this subject.53

More than a decade later, Ruth Ellen Gruber wrote:

I have tracked aspects of the phenomenon [the virtual Jewish world in Europe — M.A.-G., M.R.] since the 1980s, both as an outside observer — a journalist — and as something of a protagonist, and it is from these two sometimes contradictory vantage points that I approach the subject. A Jew myself, I became associated in 1980 with the so-called Flying Jewish University in Warsaw, a semi-clandestine group of young Polish Jews and non-Jews who were trying to teach themselves about Judaism and Jewish history, culture, and traditions. At the end of the 1980s, I began documenting Jewish heritage sites in east central Europe and in 1992 published a Jewish heritage travel guide to the region aimed not just at encouraging Jewish-themed tourism but also, literally, at putting synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, old ghettos, and former Jewish quarters, long ignored or forgotten under Communism, back on the map — at “filling in the blanks” and thus reintegrating Jewish history and memory into contemporary mindsets. In this dual role, I, too, have frequently shared the ambivalence and discomfort expressed by many Jews about the “virtual Jewish” phenomenon. Yet, I also support many of its manifestations and sympathize with the activities, emotions, and the ideals of many people who are involved.54

Nowadays, various types of reactions and audiences quite often coexist, and, in a certain sense, the examples cited at the beginning of this article drew attention to such coexistence. This state of affairs may be further substantiated by the conference on the place of women in Yiddish culture, organized by the Department of Jewish Studies at Wrocław University in 2007. The accompanying program included a concert in the restored White Stork Synagogue that inaugurated the conference. The concert for a broader audience was performed by the band Irena and the Klezmers, and their repertoire consisted of popular Yiddish songs and szmonces-like jokes (based

54 Gruber, Virtually Jewish, pp. 20–21.
on Jewish humor often referring to some stereotypical elements attributed to Jews before the war, often written by Jewish authors and performed in cabarets). The other, distinctly different item on the program was a literary evening of Yiddish poetry in the original, and in translations prepared by a group of younger-generation scholars who had mastered Yiddish.

Numerous conferences on Jewish issues are evidence of duality also in professional activities. On the one hand, they demonstrate tremendous progress, but, on the other hand, they reflect an outdated approach to research (ignorance of Yiddish and Hebrew and “second-hand” research). The varying quality of research was evident at the largest and best-attended conference on Jewish issues — to date — the First Warsaw Congress of Jewish Studies, held in June 2008, at the University of Warsaw. Nevertheless, the great progress made in research in this field was substantiated by the conference dedicated to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the revival of Polish-Jewish studies, hosted by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in March 2009, in the framework of the Polish Year in Israel.

At almost every level of “virtual Jewishness” or “rebirth of Jewish culture” in Poland, there are examples of original and authentic activities, as well as imitation and kitsch. The spate of “Yid” figurines and stereotypical portraits of Orthodox Jews, which supposedly bring good fortune in financial matters, are examples of kitsch. By contrast, the work of three folk artists from the village of Muszyna-Zlockie, who recreated in clay the 748 Jews who lived in that region before the Second World War and perished in the Holocaust, is an example of authentic folk art and a genuine commemorative act.

The nature of the audience is extremely important in this context. Writing about the Holocaust, Dominick LaCapra noted:

Whether the historian or analyst is a survivor, a relative of survivors of the Holocaust, a former Nazi, a former collaborator, a relative of former Nazis or collaborators, a younger Jew or German distanced from more
immediate contact with survival, participation, or collaboration, or a relative “outsider” to these problems will make a difference even in the meaning of statements that may be formally identical.59

This rule may also apply to the so-called Jewish art sold or performed nowadays in Poland. While figurines similar to those sold in Poland may not be appealing in Israel, they do not necessarily offend. The same goes for Jewish jokes. For example, in a discussion about contemporary Jewish and pseudo-Jewish art, Bella Szwarzman-Czarnota describes how satirical cabaret songs on Jewish topics, which were once written by Jews, and are presently performed in very different environments, sound “ghastly” to her:

And this is probably the core of the problem. Once, before the Holocaust, there was a social reality in which jokes about Jews, awful as they might have been, could be justified. Nowadays, Jews are almost gone, and certainly those traditional Jews in the pre-war sense who distorted the Polish language with their Jewish accent and expressions. Yet, the jokes and the szmonces-like barbs persist. So does antisemitism without Jews. Therefore, even these harmless pre-war jokes offend me nowadays.60

Consequently, the issue of the Holocaust still plays a key role, as does the greatly diminished size of the Jewish community in Poland. Due to these two factors, the impact of various types of reception and audience is greater than in other countries, making it more difficult to assess various cultural phenomena objectively.

It is hard to predict in which direction the processes described in this article will evolve. It may be assumed that scholarly research on Jewish culture will develop and reach a high qualitative level; and that pseudo-Jewish kitsch will take a long time to disappear from popular culture. However, the development of an authentic contemporary Jewish culture will depend on the situation of the Jewish community in Poland, which, in turn, is a function of economic, political, and other conditions in the country as a whole.

60 “Koza ze styropianu, pejsy z pakul,” p. 9.
The Debate around the Jedwabne Massacre

DARIUSZ LIBIONKA

Precedents

The national debate, mainly in 2001 and 2002, around the massacre of the Jewish residents of the town of Jedwabne on July 10, 1941, was a continuation and, in a sense, conclusion of the discussion on Polish-Jewish relations initiated by Jan Błoński’s memorable essay “Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto” (The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto), published in the Kraków weekly Tygodnik Pow.-szechny in January 1987. Błoński, Professor of Literature at Jagiellonian University, used the analysis of two poems by Czesław Miłosz, “ Campo di Fiori” and “A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto,” among the Nobel Prize laureate’s best-known wartime poems, as a starting point for a new type of reflection on the attitudes and behavior of Poles during the Holocaust. In Polish memory, the fate of Jews during the German occupation was a marginal question, treated in a highly ritualized manner. Assistance by ethnic Poles to Jews during the Holocaust, usually presented without the broader context, was the main subject of Polish historical literature, especially after the outburst of state antisemitism in 1967–1968. Jews, if they featured at all in these narratives, were portrayed as witnesses to the

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2 Błoński’s articles were subsequently reprinted on several occasions. For the latest edition, see Jan Błoński, Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2008).
heroism and martyrdom of Poles, who had selflessly risked their lives for them. Facts and testimonies that did not fit this interpretation, according to which the Polish attitude to the Holocaust had been dominated by empathy and assistance, were ignored or at best marginalized. This situation resulted partly from the unfavorable political climate and censorship, but also from the unavailability of many basic sources of information. There was only one possible way to present the recent history of Poland in the official discourse. Instrumentalization of Jewish subjects, involving concealment and distortion of truth, not only occurred in People’s Poland. The Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations were among the few subjects on which the views of Polish historians at home and abroad, even though not unanimous, were more similar than different. By contrast, Błoński not only placed the Holocaust at the center of the Polish wartime experience, but by writing about Polish inaction and general indifference to the fate of the Jews, he also demolished the well-established myth in the national memory of solidarity among the victims of German persecution. The response to “The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto” included several polemical articles and about 180 letters to the editors of Tygodnik Powszechny. They expressed more or less vehement disagreement with Błoński’s position, accusing him of making unfounded generalizations, basing his claims on inadequate sources, ignoring the conditions under the Nazi occupation, and, finally, acting against Polish raison d’état. The vehemence and content of the response revealed significant social facts: the painful relevance of the “Jewish subject” 40 years after the war, as well as the historians’ inability to face this challenge. The views based on the poetic text by Błoński, who was not a historian and had hardly dealt with Polish-Jewish relations before, did not quite fit in with Polish narratives on the Holocaust. No less important than the essay published in Tygodnik Powszechny was the paper “Polak-

3 Błoński’s article has been translated into a number of languages. It was first published in English in the yearbook Polin, vol. 2 (1987), pp. 321–336. Błoński’s main adversary was Władysław Siła-Nowicki, a lawyer associated with the Democratic opposition. Teresa Prekerowa, the author of the monograph on “Zegota,” was the only historian involved in the debate. A full record of the press debate is only available in English (Antony Polonsky, ed., My Brother’s Keeper?: Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust (London-New York: Routledge, 1990).

katolik i katolik-Polak” (A Polish Catholic and a Catholic Pole), presented by Błoński in Vienna in November 1988, in which he analyzed the leaflet “Protest,” authored by Catholic writer Zofia Kossak-Szczucka. Apart from an appeal to break the indifference to the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto, the leaflet also included some extremely antisemitic elements, which had long been ignored or concealed in historical studies. Błoński’s article, pointing to the deep-rooted and enduring anti-Jewish sentiments, though published in Poland after the fall of Communism, played an inestimable role in shaping the understanding of Polish intellectual elites.

As early as 1981, in the essay “Dwie Ojczyzny — dwa patriotyzmy” (Two Homelands — Two Patriotisms), Jan Józef Lipski called for a more distant and critical reflection on the national past. Shortly afterward, Tygodnik Solidarność published Krystyna Kersten’s article on the Kielce Pogrom, which had been completely forgotten in popular historical discourse in People’s Poland. However, the imposition of martial law froze these budding discussions for several years.

The premiere of Claude Lanzmann’s documentary Shoah served as a direct stimulus for reopening the discussion. In 1985–1986, this documentary triggered a series of indignant reactions both in Poland and abroad in the Polish Diaspora. From the very beginning, the debate on the film in People’s Poland was controlled by the authorities to a considerable extent. Journalists who actively supported the anti-Zionist campaign of 1968 claimed that the film was “anti-Polish.” The daily Rzeczpospolita summed up the film as “disgusting, belated support for fascism.” The Polish ministry of foreign affairs issued a formal protest against the film. After a great deal of hesitation, Polish television eventually ran an abridged 90-minute version of the film (the full version is 9 hours, 30 minutes), but even this required a direct

7 Jan J. Lipski, Dwie Ojczyzny — dwa patriotyzmy. Uwagi o megalomanii narodowej i ksenofobii Polaków (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1981). This was published underground and was later reprinted on numerous occasions.
order from General Wojciech Jaruzelski. The whole film was only screened in a few cinemas, but negative reactions were far more widespread. Representatives of various independent circles expressed highly critical opinions of the film. Jerzy Turowicz, Editor-in-Chief of Tygodnik Powszechny, during a debate accompanying a special screening of Shoah organized by the Institute of Polish-Jewish Studies at Oxford, stated that, “as far as the Polish aspect is concerned, the film is definitely not objective, [it’s] biased, and...its ultimate significance...[is] anti-Polish.” Various parties charged the director with the failure to maintain the right proportions, ignoring the context of the German occupation of Poland, creating a biased picture of Polish society based on anti-Polish stereotypes, and, finally, minimizing the scale of Polish assistance to Jews.

In this situation, Błoński’s demand to reject traditional defense strategies in the name of moral considerations was an entirely new phenomenon in Polish public discourse. His statement was a breakthrough, not only because of its radicalism (given the collective memory at the time), but also because it led to such a sharp and public polarization of opinions among Polish authors for the first time. Until then, there had been a division between the “Polish truth” and the “Jewish truth.” Expressing criticism of both “truths” initially remained a minority position. The few Polish voices that went against the tide of public opinion — for instance, Maria Czapska and Konstanty Jeleński — went practically unnoticed.

However, Błoński was not alone. Several months earlier, important articles by Jakub Karpiński, Jacek Kuroń, British historian Timothy Garton Ash, Aleksander Smolar, and Jan Tomasz Gross were published by Aneks, the political quarterly established by March 1968 émigrés in London, in the special issue, Żydzi jako problem polski (Jews As a Polish Problem), dealing

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10 The original film premiered on TV only in February 2003. It was aired in four episodes at 11 p.m. After 1989, in East Central Europe the film in its full form was shown only in the Czech Republic.

11 The Polish American Congress also expressed strong protest. Jan Karski, one of the film’s protagonists, spoke about it with restrained criticism.


THE DEBATE AROUND THE JEDWABNE MASSACRE

with Polish-Jewish relations. The essays dealing with historical issues by the last two authors listed above were particularly important.14 Smolar analyzed both the relations of Jews with Communism and the vitality of antisemitism in post-war Poland. Gross recommended a radical change of approach in dealing with Polish attitudes toward Jews during the German occupation. According to him, “Poles [were] unable and unwilling to talk of what had happened between them and [the] Jews,”15 and the stereotypical picture of life under the occupation was muddled and distorted at both the general and detailed levels. Although he had been dealing with both the German and Soviet occupation for several years, Gross only touched on the subject of the Holocaust under the influence of Lanzmann’s film. Nevertheless, Gross’s text already included some elements typical of his later approach. Owing to the periodical’s small circulation, there was a very limited access to the content of the article, which was quite shocking at that time. Gross’s opinions only became the subject of a wider debate a few years later, after the publication of his essays in Poland.16

Polish critical comments on Lanzmann’s film make the recurrent charge that presenting poorly educated people from the Polish provincial towns and villages near Chełmno nad Nerem to the viewers had the objective effect of reinforcing the antisemitic Polish stereotype, whether intended or not. Thus, Polish attitudes toward the Holocaust and the reliability of the related testimonies again became central to the Polish-Jewish debate. On the one hand, Błoński intuitively referred to the images created by Miłosz, one of the greatest Polish poets and an eyewitness of the events in April 1943. On the other hand, Gross mentioned documents revealing antisemitism and ambivalence toward Jews put out by the resistance movement and the underground press. He also drew attention to the Polish government-in-Exile’s consternation in the face of reports on the antisemitic attitudes among a considerable portion of Polish society. As evidence for this, he cited, among other things, “amending” the foreign version of the report by the government’s emissary Jan Karski, written on his return from occupied Poland in spring 1940. Karski warned that the “Jewish problem” was the

only common ground between German society and part of Polish society. An important element of Gross’s discourse, included in the above-mentioned, expanded version of his essay, was reference to the unique diary by Zygmunt Klukowski from Szczebrzeszyn, who presented a picture of Polish society’s indifference toward the Holocaust, as well as collaboration in the persecution of Jews, in the wake of wartime demoralization and various other motives. The fact that Klukowski’s shocking testimony, published as early as 1958, was sentenced to oblivion for a long time, assumes telling and symbolic proportions in discussions of the Polish-Jewish question.

Lanzmann’s film also exerted a certain influence on opposition circles in Poland. However, although source materials of inestimable value, such as Emanuel Ringelblum’s classical essay about Polish-Jewish relations, began to appear in the second half of the 1980s, there was still no breakthrough in Polish studies on the Holocaust at the time. Until the late 1980s, scholarly debates were overshadowed by the parallel conflict over the Carmelite nunnery on the grounds of the former concentration camp at Auschwitz.

The fall of Communism brought about a radical change with respect to exploring and discussing the past. After 1989, there were important contributions to the debate on the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations every year. A growing number of Polish historians, led by Kersten, carried out an ever-increasing number of studies on the immediate post-war period.


21 For more on the Carmelite convent controversy, see Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, pp. 117–119.
The direct and long-term reasons for hatred toward Jews and the nature of the pogroms were among the controversial issues at the time. One of the issues debated was whether and to what extent the outbreak of anti-Jewish violence was spontaneous or provoked. Nevertheless, popular press articles, rather than scholarly publications, determined the heat and intensity of the Polish debate on Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War. The best example is the violent controversy that broke out in early 1994, over Michał Cichy’s article, “Polacy-Żydzi. Czarne karty powstania” (Poles and Jews: Dark Episodes during the Uprising), about the murder of Jews during the Warsaw uprising in August 1944. The fact that the debate erupted on the uprising’s fiftieth anniversary had a negative effect on the discussion. The author and Gazeta Wyborcza were accused of desecrating what was held sacred, unfounded generalizations, and using questionable source material, with some justification. Several recognized historians supported the author; and his opponents included war veterans’ organizations, such as the World Union of the Home Army Veterans, and the extreme right-wing press. However, the historian Tomasz Strzembosz, who accused Gazeta Wyborcza of manipulation and spreading anti-Polonism, was the main adversary.

Several public debates were held at the Polish Journalists’ Association, the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the Polish Historical Society, but within a few months the strong feelings subsided. Commenting on those debates, Jerzy Jedlicki observed:

There is probably no other historical subject in Poland that would act so strongly on some hidden moral sensibility or perhaps resentment, despite the passage of time.... There is a veritable wall between the body of verified historical knowledge, and popular knowledge, which filters available information through a thick mesh of deeply rooted opinions,
prejudices, and personal memories. Some information either does not get across, or, having penetrated..., is rejected as incompatible with the adopted belief system.25

Neighbors

The subject of Polish attitudes toward the Holocaust came up again in May 200026 after Pogranicze, a small publishing house in Sejny, published the book *Sąsiedzi. Historia Zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Neighbors: The History of the Destruction of a Jewish Town), by a New York University professor, Jan Tomasz Gross. The book deals with the massacre of the Jewish residents of a small town of Jedwabne in the Białystok voivodeship on July 10, 1941. The author demonstrated that, contrary to the inscription on the monument unveiled in Jedwabne in 1961, claiming that 1,600 Jews had been murdered by “the Gestapo and Nazi gendarmerie,” the perpetrators of the massacre were in fact the victims’ Polish neighbors, who were unaided, but acted with German permission. The Jews, who had been harassed all day, were finally driven into a barn and burned alive. Moreover, the massacre was reportedly perpetrated not by the dregs of society but by “ordinary” people in the local community. Analyzing the direct and long-term causes of the eruption of violence in the summer of 1941, Gross rejected the claim of widespread collaboration of the Jews with the Soviet invaders after September 17, 1939.

Gross not only conclusively deconstructed the picture of past mutual Polish-Jewish martyrdom, but also formulated a demand for “a new historiography” and “a new approach to sources of information,” according to which, “the initial attitude toward each testimony by a Holocaust survivor should change from questioning to accepting.”27 Reconstruction of the gruesome events in Jedwabne, and several nearby localities, was based on immediate post-war testimonies in the Jewish Historical Institute’s (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny — ŻIH) archives in Warsaw. Szmul Wasersztejn’s testimony, to whose memory the book is dedicated, was the starting point, and other sources included the Jedwabne Memorial Book, published in the USA.

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26 Slightly earlier, on April 3, during a conference at Yeshiva University in New York, Gross presented a paper on the case of Jedwabne in the presence of Polish and Israeli historians.
27 Gross, *Sąsiedzi*, p. 94.
in 1980, and above all, the post-war files of the case. It turned out that, in 1949 and 1953, 23 Poles who had taken part in the crime, ten of whom were sentenced to imprisonment, were tried on the basis of the so-called Polish Committee of National Liberation’s August Decree (1944). The court records, including testimonies of witnesses and defendants, as well as the sentences, had not been previously used for research purposes. They were kept partly in the archive of the Central Commission for Investigating Nazi Crimes in Poland, which at that time was being reorganized as the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej — IPN), and, as it later turned out, partly in the archives of the regional courts. There was no awareness of settling accounts with collaborators after the war, since these trials were almost completely ignored by the press, unlike the show trials of members of the Polish underground (anti-communist — translator’s note), who were sentenced under the same decree.

Main Features of the Debate

The 120-page book Sąsiedzi radically changed the perception of Polish-Jewish relations during the 1939–1945 period. All foreign authors, even those most critical in their analyses of Polish attitudes toward the Holocaust, were horrified by the scale of the crime and astounded by the extent of their own ignorance. Referring to the prevalence of pre-war antisemitism, Błoński, in the conclusion of his essay, “Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto,” wrote:

When one discovers the amount of hatred in Polish society, one may sometimes wonder how acts did not follow the words. But they did not (or only seldom did). God stayed that hand. Yes, God, for if we did not take part in the crime, it was because we were still a little Christian.

29 Isolated cases were tried under the decree of August 31, 1944, and accounts of sentencing the fascist-Nazi criminals as guilty of murdering and abusing civilians and POWs, and as traitors of the Polish nation, are among the Jewish Historical Institute’s publications from the 1950s and 1960s.
30 The book has 157 pages, 37 of which consist of photographs.
The discovery of the massacre in Jedwabne and neighboring towns called the above statement into question.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the events that took place in Jedwabne and the vicinity in the summer of 1941 became the subject of a discussion over several months, which justifiably acquired the status of a “national debate,” with the participation of politicians, clergy, journalists, historians, intellectuals, as well as many ordinary people.32

The film director Agnieszka Arnold, who was the first to take an interest in the subject and record interviews with town residents, played a very important role in revealing the Jedwabne massacre. The title of Gross’s book, Sąsiedzi (Neighbors), is actually borrowed from his documentary.33 Even before the publication of Gross’s book, the murder of Jews committed in the Łomża voivodeship in the summer of 1941 was mentioned in the daily Rzeczpospolita, which published a series of articles on the subject, starting with one by Andrzej Kaczyński.34

The case of Jedwabne reached much wider circles than earlier and even led to historical debates on Polish-Jewish relations. Owing to media interest for several months, information about the Jedwabne massacre reached almost every Pole,35 and attracted considerable interest abroad.36 In the view of Adam Michnik, Editor-in-Chief of Gazeta Wyborcza:

32 Tomasz Szarota was among the first to use the term “national debate” (“Debata narodowa o Jedwabnem” — National Debate over Jedwabne), Więź, no. 4 (2001), p. 38.
33 Arnold’s first film on Polish-Jewish relations, ...gdzie jest mój starszy syn Kain?, which includes a fragment of ten minutes or so dealing with the crime in Jedwabne, was broadcast long after it was made by Polish Television on April 19, 2000. The film went almost unnoticed.
34 From May 5, 2000 (the first article by Kaczyński, “Całopalenie”) until December 2002 (publication of the IPN’s findings), Rzeczpospolita published 116 articles (not counting letters to the editors).
35 Special websites were created, offering immediate access to all new voices in the discussion. According to the survey, “The Attitude of Poles toward the Crime in Jedwabne — Transformation of Social Consciousness,” carried out by the CBOS [a public opinion research center — translator’s note] in August 2001, information on the Jedwabne massacre reached 90 percent of Poles (Warsaw: Komunikat z badań, 2001), quoted in: www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2001/K_120_01.PDF (accessed, October 20, 2009).
36 In 2001, Sąsiedzi was published in the USA, Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001); and in Germany, Adam Michnik, Preface, Nachbarn. Der Mord an den Juden von Jedwabne (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2001). A collection of 53 of the most important articles was published in German, in Ruth Henning, ed., Die “Jedwabne-Debatte” in polnischen Zeitungen und Zeitschriften (Potsdam: Transodra, 2001); and 37 in English
This debate has been as violent as the Dreyfus affair in France. It has deeply divided families and the country.... The fault line does not run along the old rift between the left and the right, but between advocates of an open and closed Poland.37

Elsewhere, he wrote that Gross’s book had provoked reactions as heated as those among the Jews after the publication of Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.38

It was clear from the very beginning that Gross’s book would have consequences of great social significance. As soon as May 19, 2000, a meeting was held at the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, with the participation of a group of historians, employees of the Central Commission for Investigating Crimes against the Polish Nation, and representatives of the chancellery of the prime minister and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to discuss the situation created by the publications about the Jedwabne massacre. They concluded that a thorough investigation and clarification of the case would be beneficial to Polish interests and would contribute to deepening the historical consciousness of Polish society.39 The sociologist Antoni Sulek, in one of the most insightful articles published at the time, underscored another aspect of this affair:

The news of the crime must have been a blow to all those who cherish... the image of the Polish...as a nation of heroes and victims. It was a surprise to everyone, even to those approaching the history of Poles in a more empirical manner, since the crime was more severe than anything they knew about.40


The case was taken up by the newly formed Institute of National Remembrance. As Chairman Leon Kieres put it:

Everyone, including the initiators of the act whereby the institute was established, expected it to be...for the remembrance of heroic, admirable deeds and martyrdom. We were expected to deal with the crimes of Communism, martial law; [using] the files [of the Communist Security Service — translator’s note]...41

This forced redirection of the institute’s immediate activities was unavoidable, because the archives it took over contained some crucial material on the Jedwabne massacre.

The first responses to articles in Rzeczpospolita and Sąsiedzi, which appeared in the radical right newspapers Nasza Polska and Nasz Dziennik, totally contradicted Gross’s findings about the course of the massacre and its perpetrators. In the following months, the comprehensive debate over Sąsiedzi and the methods of commemorating the Jedwabne massacre, which took place in the major Polish media and among professional historians, was accompanied by a deluge of scathing publications and commentaries in the right-wing press,42 on Radio Maryja (a radio station based in Toruń with millions of listeners), and on the Internet.43 Protests were voiced against the “lies” and the “ghastly publications by Gross,” “the groundless anti-Polish campaign,” “anti-Polonism,” and “slandering the Polish Nation,” among other charges. Unlike “normal” criticism, these arguments were distinguished not only by verbal aggression and attempts to totally discredit and morally condemn the author of the book and anyone even partially

42 Nasz Dziennik, Nasza Polska, Głos, Najwyższy Czas, and Myśl Polska (in the latter, the film director Bogdan Poręba, who was cofounder of the antisemitic Grunwald Association, established in the mid-1980s by the antisemitic wing of the Communist party, was one of Gross’s leading critics); Tylko Polska (a periodical published by Leszek Bubel, a tried-and-true antisemite). The articles of Jerzy Robert Nowak, the most active and extreme polemicist, appeared in the Nasz Dziennik daily, and the Niedziela Catholic weekly, published in Częstochowa. He collected these articles in a volume entitled 100 kłamstw Jana Tomasza Grossa o żydowskich sąsiadach i Jedwabnem (Jan Tomasz Gross’s 100 Lies about Jewish Neighbors and Jedwabne) (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo von Borowiecky, 2001).
43 Special websites were created to publish the “correct” facts about the Jedwabne debate.
inclined to accept his arguments, but also by references to a conspiracy theory. The publication of Sąsiedzi fueled circles in Poland and the Polish community abroad using more or less veiled antisemitic rhetoric and raised the frightening specter of “anti-Polonism.”

They devoted a great deal of energy to delivering their message to a wide audience. Apart from innumerable press articles, books about Gross’s work also appeared.

It turned out that Gross was not the first to write about the massacre at Jedwabne. Jewish testimonies referring to these events were published in the Grajewo Memorial Book in 1950, and others were included in the aforementioned Jedwabne Memorial Book of 1980. However, these publications went unnoticed even by Israeli historians studying the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations. In People’s Poland, Szymon Datner mentioned Polish participation in crimes committed against Jews in the summer of 1941 in the book Walka i zagłada białostockiego getta (Lodz: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna, 1946), and particularly, in Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (BŻIH — Jewish Historical Institute Bulletin), published 20 years later. Datner, who spent the period of the German occupation in Białystok and worked in the Jewish Historical Commission there directly afterward, knew a great deal more about those matters, but the climate was not appropriate for raising the subject in the imme-

44 This was headed by the notorious Edward Moskal, President of the Polish American Congress. He concluded his statement after Leon Kieres’s visit to the USA, with the following observation: “Considering all Jewish demands on Poland over the last ten years, the sad conclusion is that they have decided that Poland should no longer be Poland but rather should be like a suburb of Israel,” Dziennik Związkowy, Chicago, March 2–4, 2001 (statement made on February 28, 2001).

45 This is strange considering that they drew on memorial books during their studies; see Yisrael Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski, Unequal Victims. Poles and Jews during World War II (New York: Holocaust Library, 1986). The relevant material from the Yad Vashem Archive, which was found by Gazeta Wyborcza journalist, Anna Bikont, was not used either. In a conversation with Barbara Engelking and Anna Bikont, Gutman admitted that he had known absolutely nothing about the pogrom at Jedwabne. Martin Gilbert, relying on Polish studies, wrote that the Jews of Jedwabne were murdered by Germans. Martin Gilbert, The Holocaust. A History of the Jews of Europe during the Second World War (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1985), p. 170, 846.

46 Szymon Datner, “Eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej w Okręgu Białostockim,” Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (BŻIH), no. 60 (1966). This article was a source of information even for Yad Vashem historians and, as Gutman admitted, “The truth could easily have been read between the lines.” Quoted in Anna Bikont, Jacek Kuroń, Introduction, My z Jedwabnego (Warsaw: Prószyński i S-ka, 2004), p. 163.
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diate post-war period and later. At the time, censors would have rejected such material anyway. The employees of the Jewish Historical Institute did not speak about sensitive topics, remembering the repression and the threat of liquidating the institute during the anti-Zionist campaign of 1967–1968. It is hardly a coincidence that the publications of the institute made no reference to Błoński’s article published in Tygodnik Powszechny.

The first article devoted entirely to the Jedwabne massacre, which cast a new light on the subject, appeared in 1988 in a regional Łomża periodical. It quoted fragments of Wasersztejn’s testimony, preserved in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, which was also to become central to Gross’s narrative. The authors Danuta and Aleksander Wroniszewski also carried out interviews with several of the town’s residents. Their article, written in 1986, but not approved for publication then, did not attract attention, even though it later won a prize in the Melchior Wańkowicz Reporters’ Contest.

Andrzej Żbikowski did not refer to it in his pioneering article in 1992, on incidents and pogroms in that area after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war. Although he mentioned pogroms in Radziłów, Wąsosz, and Jedwabne, he treated the source that reported them with a great deal of caution. Given the state of knowledge at the time, his caution seems understandable. Only later did it become known that there were not only many informative Jewish testimonies at hand (in the Jewish Historical Institute’s archives), but also other references to the subject (e.g., in Polish underground state material, and the above-mentioned post-war trial records). More importantly, it proved very difficult to overcome the cognitive block. It even took Gross several years until he was able to believe Wasersztejn’s testimony, written down immediately after the war. In the 1990s, the knowledge of Polish

47 During the “anti-Zionist” campaign of 1967–1968, Datner published many articles on mass assistance provided by Poles to Jews, without mentioning the tragic position of Poles who helped Jews in the Białystok voivodeship, which he wrote about as early as 1946.

48 As of 1982, Prosecutor Waldemar Monkiewicz wrote articles, including statements about the murder of the Jews of Jedwabne and Radziłów by the Germans, which appeared in publications of the Białystok Regional Commission for Investigating Nazi Crimes in Poland.


51 Sulek points out this fact in “Sąsiedzi — zwykła recenzja.”

52 See Gross’s article, “Lato 1941 w Jedwabnem. Przyczynki do badań nad udziałem
historians about the Soviet Occupation in the Eastern Borderlands, especially during the first weeks of the German-Soviet war, was still very limited. In 1996, *The New York Times* published a letter to the editors, according to which a gruesome massacre of Jews had been committed by Polish hands in Jedwabne. The author of the letter had even visited the place and described “the obelisk raised by the Communist government.”

The post-Communist and right-wing press, *Trybuna* and *Słowo-Dziennik Katolicki*, protested in unison against the “anti-Polish” campaign, but the case had no wider repercussions. Only *Sąsiedzi* changed the situation.

The debate over the Jedwabne massacre was, to some extent, a continuation of earlier discussions. As with Błoński’s and then Cichy’s articles, it was, above all, an internal Polish debate. The voices of foreign writers were relatively few and certainly less significant than those in Poland. Some new trends also emerged. Before the publication of *Sąsiedzi*, major disputes centered on the situation in Warsaw (Polish reactions to the ghetto uprising, questions relating to hiding Jews on the Aryan side, etc.), whereas the center of gravity later shifted to the hitherto marginalized provinces. Gross’s article in *Aneks*, in which he emphasized the importance of the provinces for the realization that the Holocaust “had taken place among Polish society,” was a departure, but did not change the direction of historical reflection on the Polish and Jewish fates during the German occupation. It was only the Jedwabne affair that brought about a genuine shift of emphasis. The context

54 Thomas Urban, a correspondent for *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, played a certain role in the Polish debate; see also polemics with Gross by the American author Aleksander B. Rossino, “Polish ‘Neighbors’ and German Invaders: Anti-Jewish Violence in the Białystok District during the Opening Weeks of Operation Barbarossa,” *Polin*, vol. 16 (2003). He claimed that “the events in Jedwabne cannot be described as a pogrom since circumstantial evidence suggests that the massacre was a part of the SS extermination assignment in which a few dozen local Poles took part” (see also *Rzeczpospolita*, September 26, 2001). The subject was also discussed by a controversial author, Norman Finkelstein, who treated Gross’s book as a product of the “Holocaust Industry,” working for the recovery of Jewish property (“Goldhagen dla początkujących,” *Rzeczpospolita*, vol. 142 [2001]).
of the 1939–1941 Soviet occupation was an immensely important element in the debate.

Unlike cases of earlier controversies concerning Polish-Jewish relations, public opinion had access to the disputed material: Not only was Gross's book constantly on sale, but it was also made available free of charge on the publisher's website. Another novelty was an extremely animated debate in academic circles, since, unlike Błoński's essay, Gross's work, despite claims to the contrary, was a scholarly text, even if opinions on its scholarly merit varied considerably and, as such, it required the appropriate style of debate. Gross's main defenders and antagonists were no longer journalists and war veterans, but rather historians and sociologists. Besides, it was evident from the very beginning that further, more detailed research would be necessary to verify the facts described by Gross — from the number of victims to the wider context of the events. His hypotheses concerning the characteristics of the perpetrators, their motives, and the role of the Germans, among others, also required verification. It was also necessary to investigate the general background of pre-war antisemitism in Poland, and in the Łomża region in particular, as well as to analyze extensively the context of the Soviet occupation. Finally, the “new methodology” and “new approach to sources of information” that Gross demanded had to be more precisely defined and discussed. Historians, mainly the middle and younger generations who had already been working on Jewish subjects, as well as historians of the Eastern Borderlands and the Polish underground movement, studied the polemics, filled in missing information, and carried out archival research. Such studies became possible thanks to the ever-widening access to archival material. The opinions expressed by Polish scholars in other branches of the humanities were just as important as historical investigations.

The Scholarly Debate

In the first months following the publications in Rzeczpospolita and the appearance of Sąsiedzi, polarization of positions was not evident, except for the extreme right-wing press, and the central themes of the discussion had not

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55 Two thousand copies of the original edition were printed.
56 To some participants in the debate, it was a “model” study (Andrzej Żbikowski, “Nie było rozkazu,” Rzeczpospolita, January 4, 2001); to others, it was on the level of a mediocre master’s thesis.
yet emerged. During this period, the local press published further reports from Jedwabne,\(^57\) as well as articles on the subject. A discussion organized by Jerzy Jedlicki at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, in mid-November 2000, brought together most of Warsaw’s leading historians and the general public, and turned out to be a catalyst for a debate among professionals. It was partly oriented by the first publications on the massacre in Jedwabne published before in \textit{Gazeta Wyborcza}.\(^58\) Jacek Żakowski’s remarks, calling Gross’s book “an atomic time bomb,” “too gruesome and too emotional,” and “uncritical and generally dangerous,” led to a sudden increase in tension and heated up the debate. Tomasz Szarota, the author of a comparative analysis of anti-Jewish incidents and pogroms in capitals of occupied Europe in 1940–1941, published shortly before, shared Żakowski’s opinion, to some extent.\(^59\) While he did not question the significance of \textit{Sąsiedzi}, comparing it to Błoński’s writings, or the truth of the facts described in the book, since Poles clearly did participate in the Holocaust, he pointed out that Gross had ignored some important source material. These included not only German records, but also, above all, files from the investigation carried out by Waldemar Monkiewicz, prosecutor of the Białystok branch of the Commission for Investigating Nazi Crimes in Poland, according to which, the Germans or, more accurately, a unit of 232 men under the command of Wolfgang Birkner of the Warsaw Gestapo, were responsible for killing the Jews in Jedwabne. Szarota partly questioned Gross’s qualifications, as “a sociologist and journalist,” claiming that he had not thoroughly analyzed the case. He also emphasized the role of details in the historical investigation process.\(^60\) He raised these points in all subsequent and increasingly critical statements, claiming that the events in Jedwabne were part of orchestrated “cleansing actions,” with the local population’s involvement, directed by Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of the Reich Security main office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt — RSHA). However, in the case of the murder of Jews in the

\begin{flushleft}
\(^{57}\) See, for example, Gabriela Szczęsna, “Krew w Jedwabnem,” \textit{Kontakty}, May 7, 2000.

\(^{58}\) Michnik, who for the first time spoke on Jedwabne in mid-March 2001, shortly before the American publication of \textit{Sąsiedzi}, admitted that, for a long time, he had serious doubts about the information in Gross’s book.


\end{flushleft}
Łomża region, it proved impossible to confirm the involvement of Birkner, who was sent with a “special police unit” from Warsaw to Białystok on July 3, 1943, as the Institute of National Remembrance later established. Moreover, Prosecutor Monkiewicz’s claims remain unsubstantiated.

Tomasz Strzembosz, a Warsaw historian of the Polish underground movement, who had been carrying out pioneering studies on anti-Soviet partisan units operating near Jedwabne from 1939 to 1941, put forward another line of argument. He managed to collect numerous testimonies on the subject. It is not known whether the people he interviewed mentioned murders of Jews. Strzembosz does not refer to this issue. His first article in the Jedwabne debate, published in January 2001 under the significant title *Przemilczana kolaboracja* (Concealed Collaboration), presented a different approach to the events. In his opinion, the key to understanding the situation was the context of the Soviet occupation. His argument is preceded by the following declaration:

“Nothing can justify the killing of men, women, and children only because they are members of a specific social class, people or religion since justice should always be meted out on an individual basis.”

61 On the other hand, as Urban established, based on records stored at the Central Office for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Ludwigsburg, another commando under German officer Herman Schaper operated in the Łomża voivodeship. Thomas Urban, “Poszukiwany Hermann Schaper,” *Rzeczpospolita*, September 1–2, 2001. This information was confirmed by a representative of the Institute of National Remembrance.


64 His studies concentrated on the Soviet period and not on the situation after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war. Except for Polish assistance in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, he did not deal with the subject of the Holocaust at all.

Strzembosz also refers to Jewish participation in various actions against Polish soldiers after the Soviet invasion in September 1939, revealing his morally questionable attempt to apply the same yardstick to the Jews involved in those activities and the Poles who murdered Jews in 1941:

I am fundamentally opposed to the murder of soldiers in army or police units just because they serve in them, especially when they...are unarmed or give themselves up as prisoners. Those committing such murders, then, irrespective of whom they represent, are mere murderers to me.66

Leaving aside what had happened at Jedwabne, he presented a picture of widespread, largely ideologically motivated Jewish collaboration with Soviets, based on Polish testimonies. Jews allegedly “turned out in their masses to welcome the Soviet Army, [and went] hand in hand [with them].”67 Referring to the investigation files, on which the book Sąsiedzi was based, he pointed out that the defendants’ testimonies had been elicited “in the process of undoubtedly ruthless interrogations in 1949 and 1953, at a time when Polish bishops were being sentenced for betraying the Polish nation and espionage for the ‘imperialists.’”68 The claim of mass Jewish collaboration with the Soviets appeared in the extreme right-wing press long before the Jedwabne debate, but Strzembosz was the first well-known historian to support it.69 As a matter of fact, a few years earlier, in his polemics with Cichy and Gazeta Wyborcza, Strzembosz redirected the readers’ attention from the deeds perpetrated by Poles to more serious crimes committed by Jewish Security Office functionaries, who “co-decided about tortures and death of hundreds of their fellow citizens.” This position was evidently a step backward, compared, for instance, to Jakub Karpiński’s views, as expressed in 1986:

However, on the Polish side there was something more than just intellectual constructs: There were crimes. Contrary to commonly expressed

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
69 Strzembosz wrote about it in a more nuanced way in his book on the Polish underground state, Rzeczpospolita podziemna (Warsaw: Krupski i S-ka, 2000), pp. 93–98. He also wrote about the “anti-state revolt, in which the Jewish community got involved alongside the Byelorussian peasants.” In this book, he still made no references to the situation in Jedwabne and the vicinity.
In his subsequent articles, Strzembosz had a tendency to minimize the role played by Poles in the Jedwabne massacre. He quoted Polish testimonies he collected, comparing them to the Jewish sources, which he considered highly unreliable.\textsuperscript{71} Strzembosz also attempted to offer a kind of patriotic justification for the events at Jedwabne by calling those involved in anti-Jewish acts “volunteer avengers.”\textsuperscript{72} Another argument was the alleged collaboration of Jews, and the Jewish police, in particular, under the German occupation.\textsuperscript{73} Strzembosz returned to this point on several later occasions. The behavior of Jews under the Soviet occupation, during the months preceding the German attack on the USSR, became one of the most frequently recurring subjects in the academic and media debate. A more complete and balanced picture of Jewish attitudes is given by Marek Wierzbicki, Strzembosz’s pupil.\textsuperscript{74} Krzysztof Jasiewicz, another long-standing collaborator with Strzembosz, deconstructed the “Jewish treason” stereotype in the northeastern Borderlands of pre-war Poland, based on extensive archival research. His analysis of the Soviet apparatus in 1939–1941 showed that the picture of mass Jewish collaboration, which emerges from Polish testimonies, bears little relation to the facts.\textsuperscript{75}

It is worth noting the two most important reviews of *Sąsiedzi*. The sociologist Antoni Sułek, referred to above, pointed to the lack of a critical


\textsuperscript{71} As well as factual criticism of Wasersztejn’s testimony, there are also innuendos about his service as a lieutenant in the Security Office, in an interview with Strzembosz for *Głos*, March 3, 2001.


\textsuperscript{73} “After all, in the Warsaw Ghetto 2,000 Jewish policemen, the same as the number of residents in Jedwabne, brought 300,000 of their own people to the Umschlagplatz, beating them and treating them cruelly, about which all Jewish witnesses write. Here, in the same way as in Jedwabne, Germans were only present in the background, at various stages.” Strzembosz, “Pytanie o przemilczanie,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 4, 2001.

\textsuperscript{74} Marek Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Żydzi w zaborze sowieckim* (Warsaw: Fronda, 2001).

\textsuperscript{75} Krzysztof Jasiewicz, *Pierwsi po diable. Elity sowieckie w okupowanej Polsce 1939–1941* (Warsaw: Rytm, 2001). See also the first article by this author on this subject: “Sąsiedzi niezbadani,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, December 9–10, 2000. Without going into it more deeply, it should be mentioned that Jasiewicz presented a radically different view on the issue of “Jewish collaboration” in the Eastern Borderlands during a discussion about Edward Zwick’s film *Defiance*, devoted to the Bielski brothers, who were partisans. See Krzysztof Jasiewicz, “Opór przed rzeczywistością,” *Rzeczpospolita*, January 24, 2009.
approach to the sources as a “deficiency of sociological information” and “hasty and mistaken generalizations.” For example, in his view, the Jedwabne murderers were “people from the margin” and “idle youths” rather than “ordinary people”; he points out an omission of details important for reconstructing events, as well as the emotional and accusatory language of the book. Despite these deficiencies, Sulek concludes that all this “is of no import to the author’s main finding: revelation to the Polish public of...the murder of the Jedwabne Jewish community by the hands of the local Poles.” However, after Gross’s response, the author concurred with his opinion that the main culprits had been ordinary people.76 Bogdan Musiał, a German historian of Polish origin and author of an important study on the role of German civilian administration in the process of the annihilation of Jews in the General Government, reached radically different conclusions. His review enumerates his opinion of the “contradictions, misinterpretations, ahistorical speculations, and false claims” by the author of Sąsiedzi. Musiał compared the book to the error-ridden German exhibition, “Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941–1944,” prepared by the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, and to Daniel Goldhagen’s controversial book Hitler’s Willing Executioners. He completely discredited Sąsiedzi’s informative value, denied it the status of a scholarly work, and earlier described it as “emotional journalism.” Although his criticism was partly legitimate, especially on the factual level, many shortcomings had already been pointed out. Musiał’s polemic temperament and the wish to substantiate his hypothesis of the “anti-Soviet context” of the pogrom in the Łomża region made him lose sight of the fundamental issue of the Jedwabne massacre’s nature and Jewish victims, above all. However, the author’s view, “that the action [the massacre at Jedwabne — D.L.] was organized, controlled, and carried out by Germans with the participation of Poles,” has not been convincingly proven.77

The Polish historian Piotr Gontarczyk and the American historian of Polish descent Marek J. Chodakiewicz held similar views. Like Musiał, they claimed that the Jedwabne massacre had been planned, organized,

and carried out by Germans, while the few Poles involved were passive and coerced by the Germans against their will. They accused Gross of manipulating the source material, ill will, and extreme incompetence. They questioned the value of the case files, pointed to the use of physical force against the defendants and, legitimately, in several cases, to the limited informative value of post-war Jewish testimonies. Several other historians also pointed out factual errors and inaccuracies. On the one hand, it should be stressed that their initial arguments, formulated after a very cursory study of the archival material, have remained practically unchanged throughout the debate. On the other hand, the rhetoric directed at Sąsiedzi’s author and the fervent criticism became increasingly radical. Gross’s “journalism” was compared with Communist propaganda. In these articles, there is a noticeable empathy for the Polish perpetrators of the crime and lack of it for the victims.78

The Investigation by the Institute of National Remembrance

The IPN’s work to clarify the circumstances of the massacre at Jedwabne proceeded along two different lines. The investigation was launched on September 5, 2000, as the first by the Białystok branch of the Commission for Prosecuting Crimes against the Polish Nation. It was conducted by the local prosecutor Radosław Ignatiew. As the point of departure, three hypotheses were formulated: The massacre had been committed by Germans alone, by Poles alone, or by a group of Poles at German instigation. Leon Kieres, Head of the IPN, played an incontestable role in these proceedings from the very beginning. He adopted a responsible and uncompromising stance on the matter, pointing out the state’s role in the full elucidation of the case:

The point is to achieve a situation whereby a Polish prosecutor, with the Polish state’s authority behind him, presents the course of events in light of the evidence collected.79

He emphasized that the number of victims, which could not be questioned \textit{a priori}, was irrelevant with respect to how the crime should be treated. For this reason, in the same way as “Holocaust denial,” the case was protected by penal law. He also pointed out that the victims should be recognized as Polish citizens. In March 2001, the IPN’s investigative section in Białystok launched a separate inquest into the massacre of 800 residents of Radziłów on July 7, 1941.

At the same time, the IPN’s Public Education Bureau initiated inquiries and wide-ranging archival research on all aspects of massacres of Jews in the Łomża region in the summer of 1941. These activities were conducted by IPN staff, together with invited experts from other research institutes.

**The International and Local Contexts**

The political “cleansing the memory” aspect was a major element of the national debate. President Aleksander Kwaśniewski’s unexpected announcement of his intention to apologize for the Jedwabne massacre, in an interview with the Israeli newspaper \textit{Yediot Aharonot}, on March 2, 2001, was a breakthrough. This started a chain reaction over the following months. In Jedwabne, defensive activities were consolidated. From the very beginning, the state authorities tried to develop a strategy whereby involvement of the local community in clarifying the case and due commemoration of the victims would be made possible. For this purpose, a meeting was held between representatives of the local government of Jedwabne, the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland, and the chancellery of the prime minister and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on May 8, 2000. The question of “positive involvement” of the local community was also discussed. However, despite the commitment of the Jedwabne Mayor, Krzysztof Godlewski, these efforts proved fruitless. Agnieszka Arnold, who was the first to talk to the Jedwabne residents about the massacre, recognized their tragedy:

\begin{quote}
I considered it as obvious that people from Jedwabne would participate in it [memorial events and restoring memory of the massacre — D.L.] on equal terms. Unfortunately, it was impossible because they had been instantly stigmatized as criminals. They were punished for their
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{81} Szarota, “Mord w Jedwabnem,” p. 486.
Some researchers also perceive a connection between the radicalization of attitudes among the Jedwabne residents and outside pressure, exploitative treatment by the media (hundreds of journalists came to the town), incomplete information about the course of the debate, and growing anxiety about applying the principle of collective responsibility. According to some observers, all these factors undermined readiness for authentic, grassroots commemoration of the victims, ultimately leading the Jedwabne residents to oppose the solutions suggested by state institutions. Others emphasized the opposition of most residents to activities and initiatives aimed at bringing back from oblivion and rethinking the events of July 1941, which had been driven out of the local collective memory, or at best turned into a myth. Their desire to distance themselves from the past was evidenced by foiling the initiative to name the local school after Antonina Wyżykowska, who is among the Righteous Among the Nations, as well as by intimidating those who shared their knowledge of the massacre with journalists. The feelings of uncertainty were fueled by various “experts” and supporters of the local population. According to Anna Bikont, who returned to Jedwabne several times, the town was living a “reflected life.” Journalists and politicians “fed on the residents’ voices,” but the reciprocal process was more important, i.e., the influence of politicians and the media on the residents’ discourse: “The residents speak about what happened in their town in the journalists’, historians’, and politicians’ language.”

In this atmosphere, the founding of the Committee for the Defense of the Good Name of Jedwabne was among the first reactions to President Kwaśniewski’s announcement. Michał Kamiński, a Łomża MP and

84 Bikont, My z Jedwabnego, p. 113.
member of the disintegrating political party Zjednoczenie Chrześcijańsko-Narodowe (Christian-National Union) and Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność (Solidarity Electoral Action — a coalition of conservative, Christian-democratic, and liberal parties — translator’s note), was the *spírítus movens* behind this enterprise.85 He claimed to be motivated by the wish to defend the local community in the face of the “affair” provoked by Gross to “reverse” history and accuse the Poles of participating in the Holocaust. Quoting the extreme right-wing polemicists, he demanded a Jewish apology for the persecution of Poles, claiming that the “attack” on Jedwabne resulted from “the aversion of some Jewish circles toward Poland.”86 He was behind the initiative to write an open letter to the state authorities, protesting against treating all Jedwabne residents as guilty, and especially against President Kwaśniewski’s intended apology “in the name of the whole nation.”

From the very beginning, Rev. Edward Orłowski (1931–2003), parish priest in Jedwabne since 1988, played an important role in the committee. He had worked previously in the nearby Drozdowo parish. After the Jedwabne case came to public attention, he became the local community’s unquestioned authority.87 On the one hand, Godlewski, Mayor of Jedwabne, skeptical about the intentions of the committee’s initiator, ultimately withdrew from it. On the other hand, two Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność senators expressed support for the initiative, but without the party authorities’ official recommendation. Generally, Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność remained distant from the whole issue.88 Various nationalistic groups and circles associated with Radio Maryja in Toruń, whose representatives became

85 Kamiński was known as an apologist for General Augusto Pinochet, whom he visited with a delegation of “the Polish right,” in January 1999, and presented with an ornamental pectoral bearing the Mother of God’s image, as a gift. Michał Kamiński, former minister in the president of Poland’s chancellery, is currently deputy to the European Parliament. Kamiński’s election to the chair of the European conservatives and reformists group at the European Parliament, in July 2009, triggered extremely critical reactions in the British press (*The Observer* and *The Independent*, among others), recalling his negative role in the debate on memorializing the Jedwabne Pogrom, quoting his statements from that period. Kamiński’s disclaimer sounded highly unconvincing.


87 Even in his sermons, he glorified the Laudański family, although two of their members had taken an active part in murdering the Jews (quoted in: Anna Bikont, “Proszę tu więcej nie przychodzić,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 31, 2001).

88 The author is not aware of any statement made by the party on this matter.
frequent guests in Jedwabne, supported the committee, as well as the Łomża bishop Stanisław Stefanek, who also visited the town (see below).

The government’s position on the President’s announced intention of apologizing was very balanced. As Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek stated, Poland had a duty to establish the truth. He considered the participation of Poles in the pogrom against Polish Jews, “our fellow citizens,” as indisputable, and although the crime was not committed either “in the name of the nation or in the name of the Polish state,” the perpetrators’ guilt should be acknowledged. While speaking of readiness to face the dark episodes from the past in the spirit of truth without justification, he stressed, “We shall not consent to use of the Jedwabne case to spread false claims about Polish co-responsibility for the Holocaust or innate Polish antisemitism.” The Jedwabne case was also raised during the electoral campaign of the newly formed Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) political party, led by Jarosław Kaczyński, who claimed that enemies of Poland were attempting to “defame us and make Hitler’s accomplices out of us.” On the one hand, former president Lech Wałęsa was more than skeptical about Kwaśniewski’s declared apology. On the other hand, the national executive committee of Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance) supported President Kwaśniewski and issued a letter to convince its members about the seriousness of the situation:

The massacre in Jedwabne is a source of pain and shame to us. There is and there can be no justification or explanation for crime and villainy. We are in favor of revealing and clarifying all such events in the recent history of Poland, irrespective of their scale and nature.... National

89 Antoni Maciarewicz, who was among the leaders of the minor Ruch Katolicko-Narodowy (Catholic-National Movement) Party, was particularly vocal. Leszek Bubel, a pathological antisemite, also visited Jedwabne, where he attempted to buy a plot of land adjacent to the mass grave of the Jews from the municipality in order to prevent events marking the massacre’s sixtieth anniversary.


91 Quoted in Bikont, My z Jedwabnego, p. 181. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość was formally established on June 13, 2001.

92 He apologized to the Jewish people during his visit to Israel in 1991, and expected an apology from the other side (quoted by Polish Press Agency, March 10, 2001).
memory cannot be selective, regardless of how painful it might be for the contemporary generations of Poles.93

This initiative may have been motivated by the fear of reactions from the rank-and-file party members. Politicians from Unia Wolności (Freedom Union) Party, such as Jacek Kuroń, Henryk Wujec, and Bronisław Geremek, spoke the most about the need for reflection on the Jedwabne case, while those who switched from Unia Wolności to the newly formed Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform) Party did not demonstrate any particular interest in the matter.94 The voice of Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, an officer of the Home Army, the legendary “courier from Warsaw,” and a long-standing head of the Polish section of Radio Free Europe, was extremely important. He stated:

If we share the national pride in our victories, glorious deeds, and the enormous contribution made by the Polish culture to the body of universal values, we should also feel national shame for ignominious acts. As an almost uniformly Christian nation, we must beat our breasts, admit our sins, and violation of the commandment “Thou shalt not kill!” by Polish Cains. If we expect others to redress the crimes committed against Poland and the Poles, we must demonstrate willingness to redress the evil we have done to our neighbors.

According to Nowak-Jeziorański, such an approach was morally and historically justified:

For many years, Poles protested against the false inscription placed by Russians in the Katyn forest...claiming that Polish POWs had been murdered there by German fascists. Similar lies were inscribed on two monuments in Jedwabne.95

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93 Gazeta Wyborcza, March 6, 2001.
94 Donald Tusk, among the leaders of Platforma Obywatelska and vice-speaker of the Senate at the time, spoke on the subject only once, stressing the need to explain the circumstances and methods of the investigation in 1949, and calling on historians to examine thoroughly the facts Gross described. This fact may explain this party’s subsequent limited or opportunistic interest in historical questions.
The New Commemoration and Events Marking the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Jedwabne Massacre

The process of commemorating the Jews murdered in Jedwabne did not proceed without friction. The obelisk put up in 1961 was dismantled on March 15, 2001. It bore the inscription: “The site of the death of the Jewish population. On July 10, 1941, the Gestapo Nazi gendarmerie burnt 1,600 people alive.” The local community was not informed of the obelisk’s removal. The decision was taken by Andrzej Przewoźnik, Head of the Council for Remembrance of Struggle and Martyrdom. A new monument was unveiled on July 7, 2001, bearing the inscription: “To the memory of Jews from Jedwabne and the vicinity, men, women and children, co-hosts of this land, murdered, burnt alive at this site on July 10, 1941.” This “compromise” formula was adopted for fear of protests from the local population and their supporters, including war veterans’ organizations. An argument in favor of this solution was the unfinished IPN investigation, making it impossible to pronounce the final verdict in the case.96 This argument was not entirely justified, since, regardless of the need to resolve various details, there was at the time, no doubt about the participation of Poles in the massacre.97

The exhumation at the site where the barn had been, started by the IPN at the request of Minister of Justice Lech Kaczyński, on May 30, 2001, did not resolve doubts about the case. It was stopped after five days because of protests from Jewish religious institutions. According to statements of the IPN chairman and prosecutors, the remains of 150–250 people were found, and an estimated 300–400 bodies were discovered in the two mass graves. Witold Kulesza, Head of the Central Commission for Prosecuting Crimes against the Polish Nation, emphasized that the figures referred to the remains discovered in the two graves, and not to all the Jews murdered at Jedwabne. The investigators also found 89 cartridge cases, one complete cartridge, two bullets, an ammunition container, and several other military objects from various periods. These reports stirred up public opinion. Both Gross’s followers and opponents protested against the discontinued

96 The Union of Veterans’ and Independence Organizations (based in Kraków), uniting 20 different associations, submitted an appeal to the president, claiming that “it was an act of extreme irresponsibility to specify the perpetrators of this savage crime” before the investigation was concluded. They also called on the president not to apologize.
97 At present, it is quite unlikely that the inscription will be changed. In Radziłów, there is still a plaque with the inscription: “In August 1941, fascists murdered 800 people of Jewish origin, 500 of whom they burnt alive in a barn.”
exhumation. Gross called for resumption of the work, quoting William Haglund, an expert at the International Tribunal in The Hague, who questioned the validity of drawing final conclusions on the basis of incomplete data.98

The events marking the sixtieth anniversary of the Jedwabne massacre took place on July 10, 2001, with Minister of Foreign Affairs Władysław Bartoszewski representing the government.99 Other participants included: representatives of Unia Wolności and Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, the IPN chairman, a group of democratic opposition members from before 1989, and a delegation from the Warsaw Club of Catholic Intelligentsia. There were no representatives of Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność, the new parties Platforma Obywatelska100 and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, or the Polish episcopate. Among the few Polish Catholic clergymen attending the events was Rev. Adam Boniecki, Editor-in-Chief of Tygodnik Powszechny,101 along with representatives of the Reformed Calvinist Church, the Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession, the Methodist Church, and the German episcopate. Israeli Ambassador Szewach Weiss and the Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich were present, but the Yad Vashem Institute boycotted the events because they did not approve of the text of the inscription on the memorial tablet. In another dissonant note, the victims’ families, who were invited by the government, were not allowed to speak, although the president later received them. Rabbi Jacob Baker, who left Poland before the war, was the only speaker. Antonina Wyrzykowska, who saved seven

98 Gazeta Wyborcza, no. 6 (2001).
99 On the evening of July 10, Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek attended a concert in memory of the victims of the Jedwabne tragedy at the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Warsaw. His speech on this occasion was couched in very cautious terms. Protestant clergymen, including Bishop Janusz Jagucki, and relatives of the victims, were among the audience.
100 This was a conscious decision. As Donald Tusk, the party leader, stated: “Whenever someone is harmed, I am with all my heart on their side..., and not [on the side of] the one who harms. So I obviously identify with the murdered Jews. However, during the debate over Jedwabne, a claim about the Polish nation’s co-responsibility for the Holocaust has repeatedly been made. Platforma does not agree with this position, and that is why we did not participate in these events.” Quoted in Witold Gadomski, “Platforma do zwycięstwa,” Gazeta Wyborcza, no. 202 (2004), p. 15.
101 He was reportedly asked to participate by Bishop Gądecki. Apart from him, Reverend Wojciech Lemański and Reverend Edward Nowak were also present. See Adam Boniecki, “Łzy Żydów,” Tygodnik Powszechny, no. 29 (2001).
Jews, was too afraid to come. President Kwaśniewski’s address included some important statements:

We can have no doubts: Here in Jedwabne, citizens of Poland died at the hands of other Polish citizens. Human beings did this to other human beings, neighbors to neighbors. Today, I apologize as a human being, a citizen, and the president of the Republic of Poland. I apologize in my own name and in the name of those Poles whose conscience is disturbed by that crime, in the name of those who believe that one cannot be proud of the greatness of Polish history without feeling pain and shame because of the evil done by Poles to others.

The president made this act of expiation, although 48 percent of those polled by the CBOS (a public opinion research center) believed that Poland should not apologize for the Jedwabne massacre, while 53 percent claimed they would not sign such a letter. He considered this act as one of the greatest challenges of his presidency.

Views on the commemorative events at Jedwabne were divided. To some, they were among the most important days in the Third Polish Republic’s history. For others, not only the Jedwabne residents (only Mayor Godlewski and Stanisław Michałowski, a municipal council member, took part in the events), but also the vast majority of representatives and supporters of the right, disapproved of the Jedwabne events, and of President Kwaśniewski’s address, in particular. In Strzembosz’s opinion:

President Kwaśniewski has not offered an equally fervent apology to any other citizens of the Polish state, even to those murdered by functionaries

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104 A characteristic opinion: “On July 10, chauvinist Jewish circles assisted by politicians from Socjaldemokracja, Unia Pracy, and Unia Wolności held a hate session against Poland and Poles, with the purpose of confirming Jan Tomasz Gross’s claims about the Polish responsibility for the massacre. The 1941 tragedy [that befell] the Jewish residents of the town was ruthlessly exploited to unleash another wave of hysteria.” See Piotr Jakucki, “Seans nienawiści,” Nasza Polska, vol. 29 (2001). Even the popular Polish musician Kazimierz Staszewski, who goes by the stage-name “Kazik,” expressed his disapproval of the apology “in his name.” It later turned out that he had not read Kwaśniewski’s address, “Rozmowa z Mikołajem Lizutem,” Gazeta Wyborcza, January 9, 2003.
of the political group, of which he was a high-ranking member for many years, and the financial and moral heritage of which has been taken over by the political party he has led for several years. Yet, several hundred times more citizens of the Second Polish Republic died at the hands of that group and its eastern allies than in Jedwabne and Radziłów.... It is so easy to “beat other people’s breasts,”...of the poor and simple people of Jedwabne, rather than one’s own Communist...breast...

He also leveled some criticism at the State of Israel, which was waging an immoral conflict, according to him, against innocent Palestinian children.\footnote{105 Tomasz Strzembosz, “W związku z 10 lipca w Jedwabnem,” Tygodnik Solidarność, no. 31 (2001).}

As the CBOS survey suggests, 61 percent of society had no interest in the events, while 38 percent followed media reports about them.\footnote{106 A survey report, September 2001.} Among those polled, 44 percent believed that acts of expiation would not contribute to friendlier relations between Poles and Jews, while 36 percent held the opposite view.\footnote{107 Ibid.} This applied both to events in which the president participated, as well as those attended by the highest church representatives.

The Position of the Catholic Church

The response of the Church hierarchy to the discussion about Sąsiedzi was varied and predictable, considering earlier statements by bishops on Polish-Jewish matters. Representatives of the Church hierarchy took a stance on the issue relatively late, only after the announcement of Kwaśniewski’s intended apology. As in the case of the Catholic press, the reactions of the Church hierarchy were inevitably characterized by very pronounced differences. The Archbishop of Lublin Józef Życiński spoke against the relativization of the Jedwabne massacre:

We do not know of any documents that would suggest that they [the residents of Jedwabne — D.L.] attempted to express elementary solidarity with their Jewish brothers...on the day of the tragedy. We could endlessly debate to what extent that barbaric situation resulted from a
Nazi provocation and to what extent it expressed individual feelings of the Jedwabne residents.

He also stressed that “attempts at mathematical definition...of those feelings are doomed to failure from the start.” 108 The Archbishop of Kraków Henryk Muszyński spoke in a similar vein. He pointed to the difficult heritage of the Communist system:

As to our countrymen’s participation in the killing of Jews, the tragedy is that historical truth, distorted by the Nazi ideology, was distorted again by the Communist ideology. There was a similar situation in Katyn, where Soviet crimes were ascribed to the Nazis, and in Auschwitz, where the number of Jewish victims was minimized. We were told to pray at some monuments and forbidden to pray at others. That is why, watching the removal of the old monument in Jedwabne on TV, I saw it as a symbol: the beginning of the end of the era of hypocrisy, instrumentalization, and ideologization of truth. 109

Statements by other Church hierarchs who spoke on the matter covered a whole spectrum of themes associated with Polish-Jewish relations. In some of them, along with good will, there was evidence of suspicions, anti-Jewish stereotypes, and, sometimes, also references to the conspiracy theory. It is worth stressing that Pope John Paul II apparently did not make any public statements on the massacre in Jedwabne, and whether the Holy Seat intervened in any way in the Polish episcopate’s activities is not known.

Primate Józef Glemp, who first spoke about the subject on March 4, 2001, was far from questioning the facts that emerged from the historical sources. However, his statements included suggestions that Gross’s work had clearly been written “to order.” He also categorically rejected claims about connections between the pre-war antisemitism and Catholicism, or the religious inspiration behind the actions of “the mob.” Primate Glemp even formulated a peculiar theory:

As far as the resentment against Jews is concerned, religious considerations did not play an important role in pre-war Poland. Jews were disliked for their strange folklore. Resentment for such reasons can be observed today, for instance between followers of different football teams in Łódź.  

Questioning whether authentic antisemitism and anti-Judaism existed was combined with “reminders” of anti-Polish activities of “Jews” after the war. In his homily, delivered in Jasna Góra in Częstochowa on May 3, 2001, he also recalled the conflict around the Carmelite convent on the grounds of the former death camp at Auschwitz: “Today the [media] demand for Weiss and Carmelite nuns has ceased, and a demand for Gross and Jedwabne has appeared.” Referring to the pressure exerted on the Church, the primate promised an “apology...for the evil, for the man possessed by Satan and his hatred. Satan managed to confuse Germans, Poles, Bolshevik Russians, and Jews by means of his hatred.” He added that he would also pray about the evil “which had been done to Polish citizens of Catholic faith...[by] Poles of Jewish faith [when] Communism was introduced into Poland.” He also expressed hope that “the Jews...would examine their consciences and find themselves [able] to apologize to Poles for those crimes.”

The appearance of Church representatives at the celebrations on July 10, 2001, was immediately declared impossible on account of technical and organizational obstacles. The date of a penitential service was set for May 27, 2001, and synchronized with the anniversary event of Primate Stefan Wyszyński’s death on the following day. The explanation was not entirely convincing. Apparently, the Church was afraid to get entangled in the political context, and perhaps also feared discontent among some of the faithful. Primate Glemp saw no reason to wait with an act of repentance until the completion of the IPN investigation:

From the moral point of view, it is not decisive...whether the findings of the investigation prove more or less favorable to us, whether they present Poles in a better or worse light. For the fact remains, in Jedwabne,
there were people who contributed to the death of their fellow citizens. Whether it was done by order, out of fear, to avenge past injuries, at German instigation, or for profit are questions to be resolved.\textsuperscript{113}

There is no room to doubt the intention of these words.

At the same time, the Church turned down an invitation from Rabbi Michael Schudrich to participate in joint prayers at the Warsaw Synagogue on July 10. Stanisław Stefanek, Bishop of Łomża from 1996 to 2011, took a different position. In a long-awaited sermon, delivered at the parish church during the period when the Committee for the Defense of the Good Name of Jedwabne was being formed, he claimed that, behind the publication of \textit{Sąsiedzi} (a well-prepared provocation), there were circles who wished to “earn money at the expense of our fertile, peaceful land,” especially “the Shoah business’ which makes profits” on “the blood of innocent murdered Jews.” His statement also expressed empathy for the victims (presumably of the Nazis).\textsuperscript{114} These words were tantamount to unqualified support for the local parish priest. In practice, only Rev. Stanisław Musiał, who had been engaged in the Christian-Jewish dialog for several years and had severely disapproved of the activities of the Polish Church hierarchs, uncompromisingly criticized Bishop Stefanek’s position:

I would expect the shepherds of the Catholic Church in Poland not to waste their time searching for circumstances that would diminish the extent and significance of the Jedwabne massacre, but rather to help Catholic Poles, whose countrymen stained their hands with innocent Jewish blood, to find ways to God, civil society, and to [making] peace with themselves. Unfortunately, the Church in Poland did not undertake this pastoral work either immediately after the war or later. I would also expect them to use their authority to condemn any manifestations of hatred, especially those in the Catholic media, for inclinations to hatred never disappear, but sooner or later result in crime, as vividly evidenced by Jedwabne.\textsuperscript{115}

Musiał spoke in this vein on several other occasions, invariably meeting

\textsuperscript{113} Interview with the Catholic News Agency, May 15, 2001.
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Gazeta Wyborcza}, March 14, 2001.
THE DEBATE AROUND THE JEDWABNE MASSACRE

with criticism. Commenting on the ambivalent attitude of the Church, he wrote on July 10, 2001:

Ignorance of the past can be dangerous and might result in repetition. It is worth talking about Jedwabne because that massacre reveals a new, dark aspect of human nature. It was not perpetrated behind a death camp fence, but in a small town where people knew one another and met on a daily basis. Jedwabne brings a new quality to the Holocaust: a massacre committed by neighbors on neighbors.116

However, this was a minority position in Church circles.

Far more representative of these circles was the position of Rev. Waldemar Chrostowski, who was among the leading figures in the Christian-Jewish dialog in the 1980s and 1990s. In his interpretation, the massacre in Jedwabne was a reaction to crimes committed by Communists of Jewish origin: “Such was the background of the ghastly manifestation of despair and enmity, which was deliberately provoked by Nazi invaders on July 10, 1941.” In his opinion, “ignoring the memory of one of the sides of the conflict [the Polish one — D.L.] entirely precludes any dialog.”117 He repeated this view more emphatically elsewhere:

The tragedy of Jedwabne...[was] that Jews had equal reason to be afraid of Poles, as Poles did to fear Jews. It was a mutual spiral of resentment and prejudice, which reached a peak after September 17, 1939.

He expressed this opinion on several subsequent occasions.118 The student government of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, where


118 “Kto utrudnia dialog? Rozmowa z Chrostowskim,” *Życie*, April 10, 2001. Chrostowski made even stronger statements in a lecture for military chaplains in Jasna Góra: “Jedwabne” was allegedly “carefully and precisely” prepared for three years in order to shift the blame for the Holocaust onto the Poles. He deplored the fact that all warnings had gone unheeded: “We warned the president’s and prime minister’s chancellery that one must not allow a situation [to develop] in which the Polish government would apologize to Jews, [since] in diplomatic language, apologies are followed by
Chrostowski lectured, sent a letter of support to Bishop Stefanek. Other priests soon expressed their opinions. Zdzisław Peszkowski, chaplain of the Katyń Families, and Henryk Jankowski, parish priest of St. Bridget in Gdańsk, were among the founders of the Committee for the Defense of the Good Name of Poland that aimed to oppose “the smear campaign, which ascribes the responsibility for the killing of Jews in Jedwabne to Poles.”

During the Easter period, Rev. Jankowski referred to the Jedwabne issue, invoking the theme of God-killing in the design of the grave of Jesus in St. Bridget Church in Gdańsk. The installation was quickly removed by order of Tadeusz Gocłowski, Archbishop of Gdańsk. As a counterbalance, the Easter decoration prepared by Rev. Wojciech Lemański from Otwock aimed at bringing the faithful to repentance and reflection. Explaining his intentions, he rejected the constantly recurring idea of moral accounting in debates over Jedwabne.

For even if we found a thousand pieces of evidence that all Jewish men from Jedwabne were collaborators and traitors..., that all local Jewish women drew up lists of Poles for transportation, and that all Jewish elderly people had some criminal past, the fact that children were murdered is enough for us, Catholics and Poles, to kneel down and say: “Forgive us for this crime.”

The penitential service was held on May 27, 2001, at the All Saints’ Church in Warsaw. Fifty bishops attended (on the following day, on the anniversary of Primate Wyszyński’s death, 70 bishops were present). Among those present was Archbishop Józef Kowalczyk, apostolic nuncio in Poland. Rabbi Schudrich did not attend, since the Jewish Shavuot festival fell on that day. The venue was well chosen, since during the German occupation, 1941–1942, the Grzybowski Square Church was within the ghetto borders, and Marci Godlewski, the parish priest, provided assistance to Jewish converts and Jews. It seems that no one realized that Godlewski had worked as an assistant curate in Jedwabne and the vicinity since about 1890. Primate money.” This is well demonstrated by African American compensation claims “for slavery, for this and that, etc.”

120 For more information on the priest’s motives, see his moving article, “Chrystus w zgłoszczach stodoly,” *Więź*, vol. 6 (2001), pp. 78–85.
Glemp, accompanied by Cardinal Franciszek Macharski and Cardinal Henryk Gulbinowicz, celebrated the mass. In his introduction to the penitential liturgy Bishop Stanisław Gądecki, Chairman of the Episcopal Commission for Dialog with Judaism, stated:

As shepherds of the Church in Poland, we want to stand in truth before God and the people, especially before our Jewish brothers and sisters, referring with sorrow and contrition to the crime which took place in Jedwabne and elsewhere in July 1941. The victims were Jews, and the perpetrators also included baptized Poles and Catholics. The horror of these crimes is greater since, during the period of National Socialism, the Jewish people, who had received the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” from God, suffered particularly from the killing, as Pope John Paul II pointed out in the homily delivered in the grounds of the former Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. We profoundly deplore the actions of those who, throughout history, caused suffering to and even killed Jews, especially in Jedwabne and other localities. We also speak of this crime so as to be able...to take responsibility for overcoming all the evil existing today. The effort to “cleans the memory” becomes the difficult task of “cleansing consciences.” We undertake this task, and once again condemn all manifestations of intolerance, racism, and antisemitism, which are known to be sinful.121

The introduction concludes with the words:

Seeking reconciliation with God and people, we wish to begin the new century with an even greater faith and trust.... May [such events as] the Katyn [massacre], Kolyma [Soviet forced labor camp], the Auschwitz...[concentration] camp, and Jedwabne never happen again.122

The Liturgy of the Word concluded with the General Intercessions introduced by the primate. The above introductory statement refers to the words of Pope John Paul II from 1990, as well as the episcopate’s earlier declarations on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Nostra Aetate, and the letter of the Episcopate of Poland’s Council for Religious Dialog, which spoke about

122 Ibid.
sins and omissions during the Holocaust. The statement was almost universally viewed as immensely significant, although some Catholic magazines found it difficult to interpret. However, there was also the other side of the coin. The act of repentance did not include any references to the most important problem: the role of the Polish Church in propagating antisemitism in pre-war Poland, and in the Łomża diocese, in particular. Ironically, the vaults of the Church housed a bookshop for the Antyk publishing house, which, despite protests submitted to Primate Glemp, and the fact that the case had been brought for prosecution, continued to sell antisemitic literature, including many publications on the Jedwabne case.

Rev. Orłowski proved a negative figure again. It was mainly his campaign that led the local residents to oppose the events in Jedwabne on July 10, 2001. For months, he increased their sense of uncertainty, stirring up emotions and fear. For some time, he even insisted on organizing counter-celebrations and erecting a monument to the Polish victims deported into the depths of the USSR because of the Jews. Finally, his actions created an atmosphere of intimidation toward people who decided to tell the truth. He went as far as to dictate the “testimony” of Józef Kębliński, the wartime parish priest of Jedwabne, with whom he had worked for several years, which fully “confirmed” his own version of events. He was never reprimanded for these activities either by his superiors or, less importantly,
by professional historians, especially those who emphasized the method- 
ological aspects of the debate. Moreover, in the eyes of the Łomża clergy, 
the parish priest of Jedwabne remained a genuine hero. Orłowski’s author-
ity was demonstrated by reactions to his death. Four bishops and about 
200 priests participated in his funeral. Archbishop Juliusz Paetz presided 
over the funeral Mass. The homily was delivered by the parish priest of 
Zambrów, Prelate Henryk Gołaszewski, who recalled Orłowski defending 
the Jedwabne residents against “defamatory accusations.” A biographical 
ote note on Orłowski, available at the Curia in Łomża’s website, states that he 
“also devoted a great deal of energy to defending the good name of the Jed-
wabne residents, accused by Jewish circles of active participation in the Jed-
wabne massacre in July 1941.” After his death, the residents consistently 
boycotted annual commemorations of the Jedwabne massacre. Support by 
some bishops of such an attitude also contributed to this situation. 

After the results of a partial exhumation in Jedwabne were announced, 
Bishop Józef Michalik from Przemyśl did not refrain from expressing tri-
phe and condemning Gazeta Wyborcza:

...[which], for many weeks, violated the right of Poles to truth and 
dignity. Despite circumstances and facts, [Gazeta Wyborcza] repeated 
imaginary numbers of victims of the horrible, barbarous act; [and] also 
glossed over the enslavement of Poles through the invaders’ terror, and 
the presence of armed Nazis who shot at the poor, frightened victims. 
Over 80 cartridge cases were found in the mass grave. How can we 
check if some bullets did not also hit Poles?

Bishop Stefanek, in turn, made another reference to the conspiracy theory. 
In his interpretation, President Kwaśniewski took upon himself a two-

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130 Strzembosz, who met the committee members, supported the theory, endorsed by 
Orłowski, that the residents of Jedwabne had been forced by the Germans to partici-
pate in the pogrom.

131 Pope John Paul II accepted the resignation of Juliusz Paetz (who served as Bishop of 
Łomża from 1983 to 1996) from his post as Archbishop of Poznań, in March 2002, in 
connection with sexual molestation of seminarians.

132 Strzembosz, who met the committee members, supported the theory, endorsed by 
Orłowski, that the residents of Jedwabne had been forced by the Germans to partici-
pate in the pogrom.


stage task: “To destroy the good name of Poles [and] to divest them of their money...[but] the economic motive is deeply concealed, of course.” He also commended the local community for “maturity” in refraining from justified protests against the injustice caused by changes in the political system after 1989. The conclusion of his address can hardly be regarded as anything but an oddity:

Visitors took no interest in us or our difficult situation. They were an entirely alien, highly protected group, surrounded by an extraordinary number of policemen; they came, carried out a program, and left.135

Rev. Orłowski and the Church were criticized by the well-known playwright Tadeusz Słobodzianek.136 Krzysztof Jasiewicz, who was much more critical of the Church, wrote the following in the introduction to his book:

The greatest failure of Catholicism and the Orthodox faith in those local communities — killing other communities of their “elder brothers in faith” — whether spontaneously or at someone’s instigation, is a minor issue after all. It is a kind of...Christian ritual murder.

The study of Polish testimonies led him to radical conclusions: “This nation, proud of Catholicism and tolerance, took hatred and the weakness of faith as the main message of testimonies from the Soviet occupation period between 1939 and 1941.... As we would much prefer, it was the Polish Church rather than Germans that played the most important role in the conspiracy of silence and complicity, through consenting to those crimes — broadly understood, of course.”137

Conclusions of the IPN Investigation

On July 9, 2002, after interrogating 98 witnesses, Prosecutor Ignatiew presented the final findings of the investigation:

137 Jasiewicz, Pierwsi po diabeł, p. 34, 37. In an appendix to his work, he included the full text of an extremely antisemitic “Church Report,” written in Poland, in July 1941. Only a few Polish historians knew about this document.
It can be assumed that the Jedwabne massacre was perpetrated at German instigation.... In terms of criminal law, ascribing the responsibility *sensu largo* for the...[massacre] to Germans is justified. [However,] the perpetrators *sensu stricto* of those crimes were 40 or more Polish residents of Jedwabne and the vicinity.

Referring to the role played by Germans, he stated that “probably a small number assisted in driving the Jewish victims to the market place, and their active role was limited to this.” It is unclear whether they “participated in escorting the victims to the place of mass murder and whether they were present at the barn,” since witness testimonies vary considerably in this respect. As to the number of victims: A group of 40–50 men, who had been forced to parade with a monument of Lenin, was murdered and buried in the barn. Sometime later, “probably about 300 people,” including women and children, were burned to death there. Apart from this, individual murders were committed before the people were led away from the market square.”138 On this occasion, as Leon Kieres, Head of the IPN, stressed, these findings constituted proof that Poles were able to review their past critically. Ultimately, the investigation was discontinued on June 30, 2003, after the interrogation of 111 witnesses, since no living perpetrators of the crime were identified other than those who had already been sentenced by the Polish judiciary.

In November 2002, the IPN Public Education Bureau launched a two-volume publication, *Wokół Jedwabnego* (Around Jedwabne). The first volume of this 1,600-page work contained eight studies on the broad context of the Jedwabne massacre, authored by historians from the IPN and elsewhere. The second volume included all the available archival material.139 It established that murders and pogroms of Jews occurred in 23 localities in the Białystok region and Podlasie. Another important finding was that, in the immediate post-war period, in the courts in Białystok, Łomża, and

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138 “Informacja o końcowych ustaleniach śledztwa S/1/00/Zn w sprawie brania udziału w dokonaniu zabójstw obywateli polskich narodowości żydowskiej w Jedwabnem w dniu 10 lipca 1941 r., tj. o czyn z art. 1 pkt 1 dekretu z dnia 31.08.1944 r. (streszczenie),” quoted in: www.polish-jewish-heritage.org/Pol/koncowe_ustalenia_IPN.htm (accessed, October 20, 2009).

Elk, over 60 trials of over 100 Poles charged with various kinds of crimes against Jews (robberies, denunciations, killings, and participation in mass murders) were held in the summer of 1941. Twenty-seven Poles received sentences from two-and-a-half years to life imprisonment; and four death sentences were passed, and one carried out. According to Ministry of Justice data, tens of thousands of people were tried in Polish courts under the decree of August 31, 1944, and 18,000 were sentenced. A few thousand were sentenced for collaboration, mostly for crimes against Jews. Among the principal motives of crimes in the Łomża region, apart from political ones, such as “revenge” for authentic or imagined collaboration with Soviets, the authors mentioned widespread antisemitism in the region (fanned by nationalists and the clergy), as well as demoralization and robbery.¹⁴⁰

Historians differed in their interpretation of the role played by the above factors and their assessment of the role played by Germans. It was noted that anti-Jewish incidents, despite the orders on initiating “cleansing actions,” issued by RSHA Chief Heydrich, did not develop according to a uniform scenario. In some cases, they were instigated by the special local Security Police units, while, elsewhere, acts of violence and individual and/or mass murders were carried out spontaneously.¹⁴¹ Particularly important were Andrzej Żbikowski’s research attempting to reconstruct particular murders and pogroms of the Jewish population; Andrzej Rzepliński, whose analysis of the trials of the perpetrators of the Jedwabne massacre suggests that they did not have a political character; and Krzysztof Persak’s monographs on archival documents.¹⁴²

Neither of the volumes of Wokół Jedwabnego attracted much attention, even in academic circles, and were seldom discussed in the media.¹⁴³ The


findings of the investigation were reviewed almost exclusively by more or less radical polemicists, who perceived the IPN activities as “consolidating” a black, anti-Polish myth. The publication of their findings fully confirmed their fears. It is also worth noting Bishop Stefanek of Łomża’s opinion, who made accusations against the IPN even before acquainting himself with the book:

The intention, which may have been very noble and well meant, was not combined with honesty, and consequently failed to produce the desired result.... The two-volume work published by the IPN did not advance our knowledge on the subject. Rather, it reprinted archival documents that can be read elsewhere. [It is] so incomplete that it fails to explain the case and is therefore quite meaningless.

Short- and Long-Term Consequences of the Debate around Jedwabne

Recapitulating on the first phase of the debate, historian Andrzej Paczkowski distinguished four basic attitudes toward the discovery of the Jedwabne massacre: “affirmative,” “defensive and open,” “defensive and closed,” and “rejecting.” This categorization not only referred to the positions of historians, although each group invoked historical arguments and quoted academic authorities. Adherents of the “affirmative” position fully agreed with all Sąsiedzi’s hypotheses, stressing the moral aspect of the case, above all, and considering individual and collective expiation as essential. While recognizing the participation of Poles in murders of Jews as indisputable, those representing the “defensive and open” attitude expressed criticism of Gross’s work, emphasizing the need for further investigations of both the events at Jedwabne and their context. The more radical, “defensive and...
closed” position stressed the key role of Germans in the Jedwabne incident and the effect of the context of the German occupation on Polish attitudes. Those adopting the “rejecting” or negationist position invoked the conspiracy theory, presenting the participation of Poles in the Jedwabne events as marginal, if any, and focused on the negative attitude of the Jews to Poles. This division persisted until the debate died down.

The discussion around Jedwabne revived a number of themes in the 1967–1968 anti-Zionist campaign. In the extreme version, they appeared in the rhetoric of the negationist group, but it would be an oversimplification to claim that such arguments were limited to these circles. The conspiracy theory did not only come up in the antisemites’ statements. Predictions were made about disastrous consequences of the debate for Poland’s image abroad, as well as a long list of charges against Jews. In the discussion around Sąsiedzi, the “Judeo-Bolshevism” stereotype reappeared. Particularly frequent references were made to Polish heroism and the services Poles rendered to “ungrateful Jews” during the Nazi occupation. The same themes recurred in the debate over Gross’s second book, Strach (Fear), on post-war antisemitism, which was published in Poland in 2008, as well as during less significant yet highly emotional discussions, such as that provoked by the American feature film, Resistance, on the Bielski brothers, who were partisans. However, none of these matched the debate initiated by the publication of Sąsiedzi, which went on for several months.

In the introduction to Wokół Jedwabnego, published by the IPN, Paweł Machcewicz expressed his conviction that:

The debate around Jedwabne has certainly been one of the most important to have taken place since 1989, not only with reference to Polish-Jewish relations, but also [with respect to] the picture of Polish history in the twentieth century. It touched upon matters that shape our own image on issues important for Polish identity, such as the Second World War, the German and Soviet occupations, and attitudes of the Poles to Jews and Germans. It even went beyond the twentieth century, questioning the legitimacy of the traditional notion of the history of Poland,

149 This film was released in early 2009.
which focused on the struggle for freedom, national uprisings, and suffering inflicted on Poles by other nations.\footnote{Paweł Machcewicz, “Wokół Jedwabnego,” in Machcewicz and Persak, Wokół Jedwabnego, vol. 1, p. 9.}

As already mentioned, at various stages in the debate, many participants and observers expressed their satisfaction and pride that Poles had been able to deal successfully with the burden of the past. For some of them, it seemed to be the harbinger of a major breakthrough.

The debate led to important changes in the thinking about the recent history of Poland. As historian Marcin Kula observed, it started at the point of declining interest in history, after People’s Poland and the period of political transformation. This discussion undermined the romantic Polish auto-stereotype, and was another step in demythologizing national history.\footnote{Marcin Kula, “Dyskusja o Jedwabnem czy o Polsce?” in Marcin Kula, Uparta sprawa: Żydowska? Polska? Ludzka? (Krakow: Universitas, 2004), p. 132.}

The historian of ideas, Marcin Król, Editor-in-Chief of the periodical Res Publica Nowa, expressed this idea much more radically:

Poles can no longer think of themselves in a certain way that is rooted in the tradition.... According to that way of thinking, we belong to a community described as “Polishness” or “homeland”, which have passed away. I do not, and do not wish to, have anything in common not only with those people who committed murders in Jedwabne, but also with those who have any doubts about when one should bow one’s head and be ashamed. Whatever community might come to exist, described [either] as “homeland” or “Polishness,” it will have to be rebuilt on ruins almost from scratch. All those elements of collective memory, which worked well so far — Romanticism; [Maurycy] Mochnacki’s “turning ordinary men into angels”; “paving Poland with coats of arms”; and memories of our parents’ and grandparents’ generations since the time of the Home Army and...[other] traditions, will not be of any use in the reconstruction process. These myths, stereotypes, and symbols are not acceptable anymore.\footnote{“Akt skruchy i co dalej. W rozmowie redakcyjnej udział biorą: Marcin Król, Paweł Śpiewak i Marek Zalewski,” Res Publica Nowa, July 2001, p. 6.}

However, his voice proved to be an exception. The anthropologist Joanna

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Tokarska-Bakir’s view of the “obsession with innocence” was prevalent.\footnote{Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “Obsesja niewinności,” \textit{Gazeta Wyborcza}, January 15, 2001.} As well as the plans to create a Center against Expulsions in Berlin, the conflict around the [Ukrainian] crimes in Volhynia, the debate over Jedwabne had direct influence on the formulation of a new “historical policy,” calling for the control of academic research and its popularization by state agencies. The domestic and foreign repercussions of this “shock therapy” were among the recurrent subjects of the debate, which was thought to have exacerbated the national identity crisis that had been going on for several decades.\footnote{“Jedwabne bez stereotypów. Z prof. Tomaszem Szarotą, historykiem II wojny światowej, rozmawiają Agnieszka Sabor i Marek Zając,” \textit{Tygodnik Powszechny}, December 9, 2000.} In August 2001, Professor Andrzej Nowak from Jagiellonian University, Editor-in-Chief of the conservative monthly \textit{Arcana}, made a fundamental criticism of IPN policy, which, in his opinion, gave precedence to research on the Holocaust, including the issue of collaboration, over far more important aspects of recent history. He warned that the primacy of “critical” history, symbolized by Jedwabne, over “monumental” history, exemplified by Westerplatte, would undermine social bonds.\footnote{Andrzej Nowak, “Westerplatte czy Jedwabne,” \textit{Rzeczpospolita}, April 30, 2001. In December 2004, he reiterated his conviction that the debate on Jedwabne “was supposed to turn the remainder of our historical consciousness into a community of shame.” At the same time, in Germany and Russia, a different trend of “pride and a sense of injustice” emerged. See idem, \textit{Zaproszenie do Jałty} in \textit{Polityka historyczna. Historycy-politycy-prasa. Konferencja pod honorowym patronatem Jana Nowaka-Jeziorańskiego} (Warsaw: Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego, 2005), p. 243.} According to Tomasz Merta, Head of the newly established Institute of National Heritage, “One must not allow the history education of Poles to be reduced to...a trail of disgrace and shame.”\footnote{Tomasz Merta, “Wspólnota potrzebuje ideałów,” \textit{Rzeczpospolita}, September 1–2, 2001. (Merta died in a plane crash near Smoleńsk, April 10, 2010.)} History policy soon became a significant element of the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość’s political program, and after the party’s victory in parliamentary elections, the policy of “rehabilitating the national community” began. Dariusz Gawin, who was among the initiators of this approach, radically questioned critical reflection on national history symbolized by Lipski’s and Błoński’s essays, raising charges of political naïveté, “disloyalty to one’s own community,” and “lack of understanding of one’s own people,” which, in his opinion, resulted in “morally disarming of the Poles.” Although the adherents of “critical patriotism” were not explicitly accused of national apostasy, their attitude was dismissed as a harmful
anachronism, which propagated a “foreign” interpretation of history. Merta spoke about the matter with considerably greater restraint. In his opinion, after 1989, the removal of distortions concerning Polish-Jewish relations was an imperative “stemming from the need to confront dark episodes of our past.” There could be no question of evading responsibility or a selective treatment of history. As the debate around Sąsiedzi showed, Poles, “as a community, are capable of a serious examination of conscience.” He nonetheless opposed generalized judgments, e.g., about antisemitism, calling for “a sense of proportion” in dealing with the past.157 In fact, this demand was repeatedly made in the Jedwabne debate. But from the viewpoint of the proponents of the new “historical policy,” few of whom were historians and none who specialized in recent history, Polish-Jewish relations were neither a point of controversy nor a matter of primary importance.158 One way or another, the new “historical policy,” established during the debate on Jedwabne, departed from the critical paradigm in the Polish historiography, which was constantly present in the independent historical discourse and predominated after 1989, aiming to “put history straight, fill gaps, and make up for the neglect during People’s Poland.”159

During the Jedwabne debate, the IPN, including its chairman Leon Kieres,160 Prosecutor Ignatiew, and the Public Education Bureau, was the object of harsh and sometimes extremely heated criticism.161 After changes in the IPN authorities in December 2005, with the nomination of Janusz Kurtyka as head, those known for their radical skepticism about the institute’s

157 Dariusz Gawin, “O pożytkach i szkodliwości historycznego rewizjonizmu,” in Robert Kostrz and Tomasz Merta, eds., Pamięć i odpowiedzialność (Krakow-Wroclaw: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, Centrum Konserwatywne, c. 2005), pp. 1–29; Tomasz Merta, “Pamięć i nadzieja,” ibid., pp. 84–85. It is interesting to compare the debate on Jedwabne with the discussions on murders in Volhynia.

158 The Warsaw Rising Museum, opened in 2004, is an important institution, and others are being planned, including the Museum of the History of Poland.


160 The head of the IPN was ruthlessly attacked by the press, as well as in anonymous letters and threatening telephone calls (see “Rozmowa Teresy Torańskiej z Leonem Kieresem,” Gazeta Wyborcza [Magazyn], July 5, 2001).

161 According to the editor-in-chief of Myśl Polska, the IPN “has hardly anything to do with national remembrance, being almost exclusively preoccupied with searching for imaginary ‘crimes’ committed by Poles against Jews, Germans or Ukrainians.” Myśl Polska, no. 11 (2001).
work on Jedwabne gained a dominant position. As a result, they began to implement their own concept of “historical policy.” The researchers who had previously dealt with the Holocaust were marginalized and accused of “uncritical adoption of the intellectual model applied in the West, which is essentially an anti-scholarly construct.” The “traditional” model of Polish-Jewish relations, emphasizing Polish assistance to Jews, was readopted. As a matter of fact, the question of omission with regard to the Poles who had saved Jews was repeatedly raised in the Jedwabne debate. Source-based research was replaced by juggling with figures, based on the principle “the more the Righteous the better,” while the actual and often tragic context of assistance to Jews was neglected. Antonina Wyrzykowska, who was hounded and intimidated and compelled to leave her hometown, is not the only example, but others awarded the Righteous Among the Nations medal were also excluded from local communities.

In a different political context, the IPN’s position on Jedwabne would have been entirely different. This is supported by the institute’s publications on the Kielce Pogrom, and the controversial response to Gross’s second book, Strach. A new interpretation of the events in the Białystok region in the summer of 1941 was presented in educational material on assistance to Jews, prepared by the IPN for use in schools. After the statement that Jews also fell victim to Soviet persecution, comes the following passage:

162 See, for example, Andrzej Friszke, “Gross i chłopcy narodowcy,” Gazeta Wyborcza, February 23, 2008.
164 Mayor Godlewski moved away from Jedwabne. Obliged to resign his post in November 2001, he later left for the United States. Leszek Dziedzic, one of the few members of the local community who told the truth about the pogrom, also left the town.
165 Jan Żaryn and Łukasz Kamiński, ed., Wokół pogromu kieleckiego, vol. 1 (Warsaw: IPN, 2006); Leszek Bukowski, Andrzej Jankowski, and Jan Żaryn, eds., Wokół pogromu kieleckiego, vol. 2 (Warsaw: IPN, 2008). The latter publication included a series of articles by Jerzy R. Nowak, “Kulisy zbrodni kieleckiej,” which originally appeared in the daily Nasz Dziennik. Nowak was not only one of Gross’s principal antagonists, but also a critic of the investigation into the Kielce Pogrom, carried out on behalf of the IPN (pp. 447–469).
166 The IPN published and promoted a translation of a book by Marek J. Chodakiewicz, Po Zagładzie. Stosunki polsko-żydowskie 1944–1947 (Warsaw: IPN, 2008), which has been widely criticized both in Poland and abroad.
However, in the collective memory, especially since 1941, when the residents in the General Gouvernement learned about their behavior under the Soviet occupation, the Jews have come to be regarded as a community of collaborators. This fact was cynically exploited by Germans. Pogroms and murders inspired by the Germans, in which some Poles also took part, occurred in towns such as Jedwabne or Radziłów.

A footnote specified: “These data come from the criminal court records: a highly unreliable source on account of repression to which prisoners were subjected at the time.”¹⁶⁷ All these statements stand in flagrant contradiction to the findings presented in earlier IPN publications. Neither Wyrzykowska (see above), who saved seven Jews, including Wasersztejn, nor any other “Righteous” from the Białystok region, were mentioned in this material. At the same time, the institute undertook activities aimed at glorifying the Polish Nationalist Movement and its founder Roman Dmowski. Many publications tended to minimize the significance of antisemitism in the Second Polish Republic and nationalist ideology.¹⁶⁸ It is difficult to predict how lasting this phenomenon will prove to be and to what extent this approach to history might evolve in a new political environment.

The debate around Jedwabne changed the direction of Polish research on the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations. The need to explain the mechanism behind the massacre in Jedwabne, Radziłów, and other places led to serious debate. New publications appeared, which expanded knowledge about crimes against Jews in the Łomża region. The most important are the above-mentioned book by Bikont, My z Jedwabnego, a record of her research as a reporter on the pogroms at Jedwabne and Radziłów; and a monograph by the historian Andrzej Żbikowski, who established that the Polish population participated in anti-Jewish incidents in 67 localities of western Byelorussia, 51 of which took place before the special German police unit (Sicherheitsdienst) came to Białystok from Warsaw.¹⁶⁹

As Gross pointed out, Jewish testimonies, which until then had been used relatively seldom and unwillingly by Polish scholars, should be treated seriously. As mentioned before, this provoked a sharp protest, since it

¹⁶⁸ A characteristic example of this tendency is the issue of the Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej on the Nationalist Movement (no. 8–9 [2007]).
was interpreted as a call for “privileged” treatment of Jewish testimonies. However, the importance of the Jedwabne case lay elsewhere: It brought to light a great amount of hitherto unused source materials on Polish-Jewish relations. Apart from testimonies, this material includes, above all, records from post-war inquests and trials of those suspected of collaboration with German invaders. At present, these sources are systematically described and increasingly used in analyses of the German occupation of Poland. It also revealed selective archival research of the very rich documentation of the Polish underground movement, kept in Polish and foreign archives, and material generated by the German occupation. Recently, new studies on the German occupation in Poland have been published and further ones are expected.

Meanwhile, investigations of the crimes in Radziłów and a cruel massacre in Wąsosz on July 5, 1941, in which all the Jewish residents were murdered with sticks, clubs, and axes, have come to a halt. Prosecutor Ignatiew was carrying out the latter, launched after Bikont’s article in Gazeta Wyborcza on March 16, 2006.

The annual events at the Jedwabne monument are very modest. The few participants, consisting exclusively of out-of-town guests, include representatives of the state authorities (the president and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the IPN, the Jewish community, and the Israeli Embassy. Rev. Wojciech Lemański, together with the Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich, conducts the service. The local community boycotts these events.


171 See, for example, Adam Puławski, W obliczu Zagłady. Rząd RP na Uchodźstwie, Delegatura Rządu RP na Kraj, ZWZ-AK wobec deportacji Żydów do obozów zagłady (1941–1942) (Warsaw: IPN, 2009).

172 An inquest into crimes against the civilian population in Wąsosz in 1941–1945 has been ongoing since January 2004. After Bikont’s article, the massacre of July 5, 1941, became the subject of a separate investigation.

Ethnographic Findings on the Aftermath of the Holocaust through Jewish and Polish Eyes

JOANNA TOKARSKA-BAKIR

...It is infinitely more difficult to comprehend the thought of a simple man than the thought of Spinoza or Dante.

Giorgio Agamben

Comments on Methodology

The study reported in this article was carried out in Sandomierz, a typical small town in central southern Poland. Oral history recorded in the Sandomierz region 60 years after the war, and accounts of Jewish Holocaust survivors taken immediately after the war served as the source material. As far as possible, this has been supplemented with preliminary archival research, although

1 This paper is based on ethnographic field research carried out in Sandomierz and the surrounding area between 2004 and 2008, presented in part in Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, Legendy o krwi. Antropologia przesądu (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo WAB, 2008). The numbers in square brackets refer to two different systems of numbering the interview pages (indicated by the letters N and W, respectively).

2 AŻIH, unit 301. See also Relacje z czasów Zagłady. Inwentarz. Archiwum ŻIH INB, vols. 1–5 (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny [ŻIH], 1998–2009). Some aspects of these accounts are supplemented with contemporary memoirs in the same archive, such as those of Lejb Zylberberg, cat. no. 302/37. Zylberberg’s account was published in book form as A Yid fun Klementov dertseylt (A Jew from Klimontów Recounts) (Warsaw-Lodz-Krakow: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna, 1947), extensive excerpts of which were translated for the author of this article by Sara Arm. The author is grateful to Professor Feliks Tych for allowing her access to this rare book, to the AŻIH staff for their assistance during her research, as well as to Sara Arm for her countless translations from Yiddish.

3 This research was carried out for the author by Magdalena Prokopowicz, M.A., in the Sandomierz branch of the State Archive in Kielce, the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej — IPN), and the National
neither this nor the factographic conclusions is the main thrust of this article.

Ethnography, the most direct examination of reality, takes a different approach to sources than history, which values them only inasmuch as they contribute to establishing facts. While ethnographic sources may be of assistance in this respect, the ethnographer looks at them, above all, in the light of their autonomous value, seeking testimonies of collective conceptions — fears, aspirations, dreams, phantasms, stereotypical reactions, and standards. Thus, real values are contrasted with declared values, only the fullness of which produces what sociologists call “attitudes.” In criticism of historical and sociological sources, these concepts play a vital role. Pains-taking attention to the language used by the informants is of central importance to their reconstruction. Toward this end, this article presents extensive citations, which are analyzed by a special method. In language, “that which has passed, that which, because of language cannot be divested once and for all, remains indelible”; the same also applies to information lost in other historical sciences for various reasons. In ethnography, such language, while apparently comprehensible, is treated like a code that requires divulging. Its manifold “incorrectness” is no problem to the ethnographer; on the contrary, it presents an opportunity to pay attention to things passed over by the historian and the sociologist.

In 2005 and 2006, when the interviews cited in this article were carried out, people in the Sandomierz region were fairly keen to talk to anthropologists about issues from the war period, and even seemed to have been waiting for such an opportunity. However, unwillingness and barriers surfaced with respect to neighborhood murders. In such cases, some perpetrators
never wanted to talk about expiation, while with others, once guaranteed absolute anonymity, the desire to bear witness usually won through. During one such interview in Klimontów, Helena Tyszka, a member of the research team, heard about the murder of several Jews, including a woman in the late stages of pregnancy, “on a roof on Sandomierska Street,” in April 1945, i.e., shortly after the Germans had been driven out of Poland. This incident was mentioned a few days later by the president of Poland, Bolesław Bierut, at a press conference in Moscow. Thus, this event, which was deep in historical oblivion for decades, resurfaced in oral history.

The Research Hypothesis: “The Excluded Economy”

In a much-publicized essay, in 1945, Kazimierz Wyka wrote:

Anyone who wants to comprehend the social psychology of Polish society on the threshold of the [country’s] third [period of] independence should look back at economic issues during the occupation....

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7 “On the night of April 16–17, unknown perpetrators staged an attack in Klimontów, where they murdered five people. The co-proprietors of the mill in Klimontów” (probably Chil or Chaim Penczyna and his family) were among the victims. Report from the Sandomierz district authorities (Starostwo) offices to the Department of Supply and Commerce, the voivodeship offices in Kielce (UWK), June 21, 1945; APK, Sandomierz branch, Sandomierz district offices (OS SS), file no. 579. This report includes two other accounts of attacks on nearby mills, in Kleczanów and Słabuszowice. The latter mentions that the group of attackers identified themselves as the “‘Rys’ Independent White Eagle Commander Hit Squad.” Rafał Wnuk, ed., Atlas polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego 1944–1956 (Warsaw-Lublin: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [IPN], 2007), p. 276, mentions activities in the spring of 1945, in a nearby area by the “Huragan” group, describing themselves as Nationalists, led by “Rys” (identified as Eugeniusz Majewski), among others.

8 This was mentioned in 1999 by Professor Eugeniusz Niebelski, a regional historian from the Catholic University of Lublin, whose ideas are discussed later in this article; and in 2001 by Radosław Januszewski, a journalist for the Rzeczpospolita daily newspaper and author of the article “Szkola tysiąclecia,” from which extensive excerpts are quoted in this article.

The claim that psychological effects always persist longer than the factors that caused them is well substantiated.10

These opening sentences did not get the attention they deserved, although they pointed to a research direction. It is worthwhile analyzing the reasons for this. The ethnographic material collected 60 years after the war near Sandomierz justified a return to the issue Wyka pointed out. Without examining the “economic issues during the occupation,” it is impossible to understand the present-day memory of Jews in the Polish provinces and, even more so, the immediate post-war reality, with clashes of interests among players who were not always overt. This would also help to decide between two historical, mutually repudiating discourses: on the one hand, the Communist discourse viewing the entire post-war reality in terms of “for or against the people’s power”; and on the other, the independence discourse,11 which was similar, except for a different definition of “the people.”12 It is easy to see how these discourses developed another similarity. In spite of numerous declarations to the contrary by the Communists,13 expressed in different ways, there was soon no place for the Polish Jews who

11 This article expresses indirect criticism of both discourses, treating both the terms “Communist discourse” and “independence discourse” as unclear and problematic. This issue, which is fundamental to the sociology of knowledge and is worthy of a separate study (e.g., in the spirit of Karl Mannheim’s Ideology and Utopia) is only touched on when necessary.
12 See, for example, the following excerpt from an order by Mieczysław Liniarski, “Mściław,” a senior officer in the Polish Anti-Communist Guerilla group, Propaganda Summary no. 14, issued by the Home Army’s information and propaganda office for the Białystok District, on May 15, 1945: “We represent the entire Polish Nation. We want to create a divide between Poles and Soviets.... Being prepared to fight means: a) Immediately cleansing the area of all ‘narks,’ because it will be too late once the NKVD arrives.... b) ...Convincing society that the whole nation is with us, and that there are only Soviets and Jews on the other side,” in Kazimierz Krajewski and Tomasz Łabuszewski, Białostocki Okręg AK-AKO, VII 1944–VIII 1945 (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza VOLUMEN, Dom Wydawniczy Bellona, 1997), p. 145. The Home Army was disbanded on the order of General Leopold Okulicki, the last commander, on January 19, 1945.
13 For a discussion of declarations by the Communist Polish authorities, who claimed to offer equal rights to the Jews in post-war Poland, see Leszek Olejnik, Polityka narodowościowa Polski w latach 1944–1960 (Lodz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2003), p. 351ff.
had survived the Holocaust. Based on Wyka’s approach, this article aims to outline, on a microhistorical scale, the dematerialization of the Jews in Polish provincial life in the immediate post-war years.

**Klimontów and the Surroundings**

Klimontów, near Sandomierz, was home to 3,100 Jews before the war. In June 1942, a ghetto was established there for some 5,000 Jews, including those brought in from nearby villages and 200 deported from Vienna. The Nazis began liquidating the ghetto toward the end of October 1942. One hundred sick and weak, including children, were shot on the spot, 300 were sent to Sandomierz as forced labor, and all the rest were sent on foot to Złota, and then to the railway station in Nadbrzezie outside Sandomierz, where they were put into cattle wagons and taken to the death camp at Treblinka.

In August 1944, the starosta (district governor) of Sandomierz reported that the Jews, “during the bridgehead [at Baranów], after leaving their hiding places, mostly went to Lublin, [and] after the front moved west, they returned in greater numbers to all the towns and settlements.” In June 1945, there were 103 Jews among the residents of Sandomierz. Also, at about the

14 Data from Michał Grynberg and Maria Kotowska, eds., Życie i zagłada Żydów polskich 1939–1945. Relacje świadków (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 2003), p. 194. The total population of the town was 4,500 in 1939.

15 Mordechaj Penczyna adds the following precise information: “During liquidation of our settlement on October 30, 1942..., there were 8,000 Jews in Klimontów”; Mordechaj Penczyna, “Khurbn Klemontov” (The Extermination of Klimontów), YIVO Bleter, vol. 30, no. 1 (1947), pp. 147–152. The author is grateful to Mark Web from YIVO for a copy of this article.

16 Penczyna, “Khurbn Klemontov,” p. 149.

17 Battles were fought for the “Baranów bridgehead” (in August 1944; and Sandomierz was liberated on August 18, 1944), and then for the “Warka-Magnuszew bridgehead.” An offensive launched on January 14, 1945, culminated in the liberation of the entire Kielce voivodeship.


19 Penkalla, “Władze o obecności Żydów,” p. 559. According to AŻIH, file no. 301/4821, dated 1945 (more precise date not known), Celina Grünszpanowa states that “in Poland, there are around 40 [Jews] from Sandomierz: 17 in Łódź, 3 in Wrocław, 8 in Silesia, and 10–12 in Sandomierz itself.”
same time, in a telling report on the situation, the starosta of Sandomierz stated: “Jews...are turning up here and there at present in order to let or sell property mostly ruined during the German occupation.”²⁰ In June 1945, there were no longer any Jews in any of the localities in the district apart from Sandomierz (see below).²¹

In November 1948, Nachman Blumental, then Director of the Jewish Historical Institute, resolved to check out this situation. Toward this end, he sent out letters to urban district starostowie requesting data from all the localities in their regions.²² In the Sandomierz branch of the State Archive in Kielce, there is a list with reports from the boroughs attached. Some of them are worth quoting (the style reflects the original):

[Sandomierz — town, December 7, 1948] I report that: 1) In 1937–1939, the number of Jews was 2,391; 2) On the day of displacement (i.e., deportation of the Jews to the death camp), the number of Jews was approximately 4,000; 3).... At present, 19 people of Jewish nationality reside in Sandomierz.²³

[Samborzec, December 31, 1948] The borough executive reports that 125 Jewish people resided in the territory of this borough, from 1937 to 1939; in 1942, the entire [Jewish population] of 125 people was deported, and, at present, no Jewish people reside in the territory of the borough.

2. On the day of displacement there were 5,410 [Jewish people] in the permanent population of the town of Staszów, plus fugitives from western countries, larger towns, and displaced from localities around Staszów, a total of 6,670 persons.... At present, in the territory of the town of Staszów there are no persons from the Jewish population residing.

²² Letter dated November 15, 1948, to the starosta of Sandomierz; APK, OS SS, file no. 219.
²³ APK, OS SS, file no. 219. Subsequent quotes from the same archival resource.
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[Klimontów, December 31, 1948] 1) In the years 1937–1939 the number of Jews in the territory of this borough was approximately 5,000; 2) On the day of displacement approximately 7,000; 3) Date of displacement of the Jews — October 10, 1942, [and] the number of persons displaced approximately 6,000; 4) At present, there are no Jews in the territory of this borough.

The gist of the reports from Zawichost, Dwikozy, Jurkowice, Koprzynica, Lipnik, Łoniów, Osiek, Polaniec, Rytwiany, Wilczyce, Wiśniowa, and Strużki is similar.

The “disappearance” of the Jews had a marked effect on the economic and property situation. This is apparent in the Inventory of Occupiers of Former Jewish Houses in Klimontów from the 1950s, listing 125 properties (houses and lots), and, in keeping with the execution dates of the ownership contracts, names. The report citing the absence of Jews in the region, features only Polish owners.24 The sixth item in the inventory is noteworthy: “Is [the property] occupied on the basis of a contract and when...was the contract executed[?]” With the exception of three entries from the 1950s, in 122 cases in the inventory, the year 1943 is given. Under “First and last name of former owner,” there are numerous entries with the names cited later in this paper: Zylberberg and Penczyna (both twice),25 as well as names of the Lederman family members, murdered in the spring of 1945 (see below).26

The Story of the Four Mills That Belonged to Penczyna, Pelerman, Kupferblum, and Two Other Penczyna Family Members

Why did Jews who survived the Holocaust in hiding, and, as notes and archival material show, throw themselves wholeheartedly into rebuilding

24 APK, OS, Klimontów Borough Archive, file no. 82.
25 “Zylberberg” (Mejr, Ossolińska St.) is no. 30 on the list and no. 46 (Bajła-Rywka, Osiecka St.); and “Penczyna” is no. 90 (Dawid, Osiecka St.) and no. 12 (Henryk, a house on the market square).
26 APK, OS, Klimontów Borough Archive, file nos. 82, 95, and 111 (Krakowska St., entry: “Lederman” or “Zederman”) and no. 118 (Opatowska St., entry: "Ledeman"). The inventory also features the names of those Jews who left Klimontów before the murder, e.g., Fantuch (a house on the market square, no. 96) and Weisbrod (a lot on Opatowska St., no. 101).
their lives after liberation, “disappear” from the Sandomierz area in the early post-war years? The first source used to answer this question relates to the fate of the local millers — Szmul Penczyna, owner of a mill in Trzykosy; Aron Kupferblum, owner of a mill in Góry Wysokie; Józef Pęczyna, a miller in the Chwałki district of Sandomierz; and Mordechaj Penczyna, a miller in Klimontów.

1) Everything known about Szmul Penczyna is reported by his friend Zelman Baum, who was in hiding in this area from 1940 onward:

   Szmul Penczyna, who had a mill in Trzykosy, gave it up to a Pole [in exchange] for hiding him and his family. The peasant took the mill and shot the Jew.27

Documents in the Sandomierz archive confirm the name, but distort the surname of the mill owner. It is given as Szmul Pelerman in the testimonies of two people who “willfully,” according to other documents,28 took possession of the mill: Stanisław Skrzek and his son-in-law, Edward Śliwiński,29 a

27 AŻIH, file no. 301/2425. For more information about Baum, see note 63.
28 APK, OS SS, file no. 580, official letter from the superintendent of the District Citizens’ Militia in Sandomierz, dated October 31, 1944, to the District National Council in Sandomierz. Attached was a Contract for Lease of a Mill, executed on August 12, 1944 (i.e., shortly after the invasion of the Red Army, a week before the liberation of Sandomierz) between the Mayor of Koprywnica, Edward Śliwiński, and Stanisław Skrzek, as well as a copy of a document, dated November 10, 1943, and signed “Superintendent O.S.,” nomme de guerre “Lampart,” who testified to the sale of “millstones from the former Jewish property in the village of Trzykosy...to Spółka Młyńska [sic; the mill company] in Bazów by Tajna Organizacja Polska [Secret Polish Organization] for the price of 600 kg of rye” (APK, OS SS, file no. 580).
29 Prośba do Ob. Wojewody Kieleckiego (Request to the Kielce Voivode), November 14, 1944, APK, OS SS, file no. 580. The signatories request annulment of the plan to nationalize the mill of which they took possession as “abandoned former Jewish property.” Attached to the request is a statement from the Soviet military authorities, dated November 5, 1944, confirming the supply of flour to the army. On January 16, 1945, Jarosz, Superintendent of the Citizens’ Militia station in Koprywnica (see reference to a person of this name who murdered Jews during the war, according to Zelman Baum, in Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “The Unrighteous Righteous and Righteous Unrighteous,” Dapim. Studies on the Shoah, vol. 24 (2010), pp. 11–64), who intervened on behalf of Śliwiński and Skrzek. Exchange of correspondence on this matter continued for nearly a year, and ended with the decision by the starosta of Sandomierz to confiscate the mill from Śliwiński and Skrzek. Enforcement of the decision provoked “violent and resolute resistance on the part of the previous tenant.” See the official letter from the starosta to
pre-war Polish policeman, member of the Home Army (this is mentioned in the favorable character reference given to Śliwiński by J. Jarosz, Superintendent of the local Citizens’ Militia station), and member of the Polish Socialist Party after the war, whom Zelman Baum, in his account cited above, accuses of murdering Jews. Śliwiński was to have taken “a weekly fee from all the Jews of the town of Koprzywnica, and from us privately, for not informing on the Jews.” Baum also gives a detailed account of an attack on a bunker in which Jews were hiding, incriminating Śliwiński as the leader.

In the documents cited above, both the interested parties, i.e., Skrzek and Śliwiński, claim that “Szmul Pelerman was shot dead by the Germans and his family deported, and, to date, there has been no information about them.” However, people in Trzykosy remember the murder of Szmul’s family at Polish hands:

[406N] Did he not take all his money off him? He wanted to be rid of him, because he was afraid that if they caught him, they would kill the whole family. So, one night, my wife saw it, one of them hauled the Jews out one by one and killed them with an axe. (Silence) And Szmul’s lot, were lying there, someone or other killed them too.

2) Of Aron Kupferblum, the owner of the second mill, which was built on the River Opatówka in Góry Wysokie, the interviewees said: “Kupferblum was the type that would even give to the Church.... He considered himself a guy who owed a lot to the Poles.” They also related that when a road was

the public prosecutor at the Sandomierz District Court with respect to bringing criminal charges against Stanisław Skrzek for resistance to authority, dated July 30, 1945 (APK, OS SS, file no. 580). The same letter contains details of Śliwiński’s membership of the Home Army.

30 AŻIH, file no. 301/2425.
31 Prośba do Ob. Wojewody Kieleckiego (Request to the Kielce Voivode), November 14, 1944, APK, OS SS, file no. 580. In other sources, they testify that the mill belonged to “former proprietor Szmul Pelerman, who died, and whose heirs went off in an unknown direction, and, until the present time, no one knows anything about their lives” (Contract for Lease of a Mill).
32 Seweryn Małkiewicz, who is mentioned later in this article, recalls that he was even respected by Fr. Bastrzykowski, a regional historian; see Aleksander Bastrzykowski, Monografia historyczna parafii Góry Wysokie Sandomierskie (Sandomierz: Diecezjalny Zakład Graficzno-Drukarski, 1936). See [1066W], “The Jew was a decent guy!.... When we bought it and moved in, the hired servants who had been there under Kupferblum Aron, spoke very highly of him.” See also [1217W]: “It all used to be different, they were
built through his land, Markus Kupferblum, Aron’s grandfather, would not allow destruction of the graves of insurgents from the January 1863 Polish uprising, which were there [2166–2167W]. Some people in the area remember this to this day. People from the Kupferblum family were members of the Sandomierz town council for many years.33

Aron Kupferblum spent the first two years of the German occupation in prison in Sandomierz Castle.34 In 1940, he was joined there by Seweryn Małkiewicz,35 a soldier from the underground, a miller and owner of the mill in Dwikozy, who had been his business rival before the war. After his time in the castle prison, Małkiewicz was taken to Sachsenhausen, while Kupferblum, on his release from prison, went into hiding in the country near Sandomierz.36 He did not survive until the end of the war.

more true to their principles, those Jews. But, for example,...for Christmas Eve,...this Jew had a Polish cook, so he said: ‘Make them a Christmas Eve dinner like the Catholics all have,’ and so they really felt brotherly concern. They sympathized with them all because they had been resettled,...so on his small estate, he gave them a place to live.... Those Poles of ours were [with him] for a long time.”

33 From Robert Kotowski, *Sandomierz między wojnami* (Sandomierz: Zarząd Miasta Sandomierza, Muzeum Okręgowe w Sandomierzu, 1998), pp. 78–79. On the *Lista imienna Ob. Ob. Żydów zamieszkałych i zameldowanych w Sandomierzu, będących członkami Kongregacji Wyznaniowej Żydowskiej w Sandomierzu* (List of Names of Jewish Citizens Resident and Registered in Sandomierz, As Members of the Sandomierz Jewish Religious Community), drawn up on October 15, 1947, two Kupferblums were listed as having no party affiliation: Abram (born in 1903), and Rozalia (born in 1918), both resident at 28 Basztowa St. in Sandomierz. The other two of the same surname, Tanchuma (born in 1907, Chairman of the Religious Congregation in 1947) and Mala (born in 1912, address as above), are listed as Zionists; APK, OS SS, file no. 224.

34 His daughter, Ziwa, claims that this was for “inopportune expression of his views”; IPN BU, file no. 0193/2817.

35 [1044W] “When there were no Germans around, they would let me out to walk around the castle, which had a courtyard because it had formerly been a prison.... Once, when I was out on a walk, this Aron Kupferblum — that was his name — was standing in a doorway. Well, I bowed to him, because I was a lot younger, I was 22 then, and he was already an elderly man. We greeted each other with these exact words: ‘Mr Małkiewicz, a mutual misfortune has befallen us, we are in prison together.’ As we had been to court over water damming, he said: ‘Those court affairs that were between us, it wasn’t me, it wasn’t me who did it, it was that stupid attorney of mine.’ He laughed. So there, we had a nice little conversation!” See Małkiewicz’s account of his time in prison in Józef Myjak, “Rekietowy dół,” *Ożarów. Samorządowe Pismo Społeczno-Kulturalne*, no. 2, vol. 70 (2005), p. 1; and also the story of his meeting with Kupferblum in his own book, Seweryn Małkiewicz, *Młynarz* (Stalowa Wola: “Sztafeta,” 2004), p. 42.

36 Małkiewicz, *Młynarz*, p. 43, probably in Garbowice; see Małkiewicz, *Młynarz*, pp. 94–95; Ziwa Kupferblum said about her father’s death: “The next day [after escaping
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[226W] .... Someone killed him in the pits there...37

Who was this Kuperblum?
He was a very rich Jew...under the Germans, he was in hiding. Later, someone held him there. People are like that: one is like this, and one like that. Someone took revenge on him there.

As an example, the expression with which this informant’s statement ends shows the importance of distinguishing between the Polish commonly used by ordinary people and literary Polish in analyzing interview transcripts. The difference is the meaning of the expression, “take revenge,” which, as the wider context of this statement shows, was used here in the sense of “be cruel to,” or “torment,” in the sense of taking revenge but not for wrongs committed.38 Such subtle differences in shades of meaning, if they go unnoticed, could be the root of false historical descriptions. There is no evidence that Kuperblum, whom Fr. Aleksander Bastrzykowski claims was “a Jew of exceptional honesty” [1043W], had done anything wrong to anybody — on the contrary. Just as there is no evidence that Orenstein,39 a rich Jew who survived the war and had to flee the town in fear of similar “revenge,” had also done no wrong.

[1018–1019W, Zawichost] —

Husband: I remember this guy, Orenstein. Orenstein it was.

from the Zawichost Ghetto, on October 22, 1942], I found out about the death of my father, who was murdered in a treacherous way,” IPN BU, file no. 0193/2817.

37 For more information about “‘the pits’ outside Dwikozy,” see Malikiewicz, Mlynarz, p. 39. See also [1174W] “...The partisans took him somewhere, or some such thing.... I heard that they killed him somewhere.”

38 See also the expression “taking revenge on children” [1257N], which stresses the innocence of the victims even more. This turn of phrase was used by an informant with a degree in Polish to describe the persecution of Jewish children. It is also used intransitively — without an object — with respect to the treatment of Poles: [300N] “The Germans took revenge.”

39 [726N] Zawichost, interviewed by Karolina Walczak and Anna Ossowska, “This Yid Orenstein, he was rich, too, had a wood yard...came to see my father here. He really wanted [us] to take him into hiding. Well, Father... said: ‘But where will I hide you?’ ‘In that barn.... Hide me in that barn.’ He [said], ‘Yes, but how will I...?’ All this was right by the front, and he wouldn’t have survived. He wouldn’t have survived. He gave [his money], all his fortune, gave it to someone or other for the children, to hide them, and that someone took the fortune, but didn’t hide the children, and handed them over to the Germans afterward. Yes.”
JOANNA TOKARSKA-BAKIR

Wife: Which house? By the doctor’s there...
Husband: Hang on, hang on.
Wife: It was Orenstein who did...
Husband: No, the one who survived. He traded in horses. The Jew. Well, they soon started treading on his heels. He found out quickly right away and...
Wife: Vanished!
Husband: Fled.

Who started treading on his heels?
Husband: Our lot. Our lot. He’d obviously been good to some Poles too. Obviously given someone or other a hard time.
Wife: Given someone away for wanting to finish him off.
Husband: Yes. He got a warning straight away and fled smartish.

The underground?
Husband, coughing throughout: No, no, the underground had gone by then! This was after the liberation...this was in 1945 or 1946.

Aron Kupferblum had three children, among them a daughter, Ziwa, who, so they say in the Sandomierz area, was rescued by schoolmates from the railway siding (in Dwikozy), from where Jews were transported to the death camps.40

After the war, Seweryn Małkiewicz, freed from the camps, bought the mill from the heirs of the late Kupferblum.41 From the vague words of one informant, it seems they only came forward for the property when the

40 [563W] “...[Kupferblum] had three children there, one was Ziwa, a daughter my age. We were the ones who got her off the ramp.... She saw us...there. When I saw that she was standing amongst some Jews, I sort of went a bit closer.... But really...the Germans were just giving the orders, and everything was being done by Latvians.... They were [real] Latvians, and liked their drink. Well, we had this vodka, so we gave...[it] to one or two of them, and they walked off to drink it. We then had the chance to grab Ziwa and get her out of there. Because they waited for three days for wagons to be sent in.” There is no mention of this incident in Ziwa Kupferblum’s résumé, cited in note 45.
41 Lista imienna Ob. Ob. Żydów zamieszkałych i zameldowanych w Sandomierzu, będących członkami Kongregacji Wyznaniowej Żydowskiej w Sandomierzu (List of Names of Jewish Citizens Resident and Registered in Sandomierz, as Members of the Sandomierz Jewish Religious Community) from October 1947, includes four other people with this surname, but does not mention either Ziwa, her brother, Gerszon [Gierszon] or their sister, Miriam; APK, OS SS, file no. 224.
court ordered Małkiewicz to place a notice in the newspaper. In his book, Małkiewicz describes how the contract was executed in detail:

Władysław Ichnowski, the husband of the eldest daughter of the late Aron Kupferblum, ...was the plenipotentiary for the sale. Władysław Ichnowski, who was of Jewish origin, had a different name before and changed it.... He was a decent man, but Gierszon Kupferblum, the son of the late Aron, I knew since 1938, and I didn't like him.... There were three heirs: Maria Ichnowska, Gierszon Kupferblum, and Ziwa Kupferblum. She had also changed her name to Kwiatkowska. .... At the start of the conversation, to which Ichnowski was also a party, Gierszon asked the question:

“Mr. Seweryn, which of the Garbowice people killed my father?”

“People say different things, but you know that, for five whole years, I wasn't there. I was in a concentration camp. What people say is not a document. I can't and won't pass on what people say, because I don't know, and I have no proof of how it really was.”

Then, Kupferblum's brother-in-law spoke up: “Our father is dead, you can't raise him again. If you were to make Father come alive again, go there, find out, and hang the scoundrels. This is still an uncertain time. There's no knowing what else could happen. Leave it.”

42 [1043W] “After that I put an advertisement in the paper, because there was a court there, for interested parties to come forward. One of those who came forward was a Jew, who offered to let us buy this property. I wasn't all that keen on taking him up on it, but my late mama accepted his offer and we bought [it] from that Jew...” Could you tell us which year that was exactly? “I bought it? In '47.”

43 Garbowice is a village not far from Klimontów, Iwaniska borough, Opatów district.

44 Małkiewicz, Młynarz, pp. 94–95. At the end of the transaction, Gerszon Kupferblum reserved the contractual right for “the little room upstairs with the balcony on the north-facing side...[to be] reserved for [him] every time he came to Góra.” After the contract was signed, Małkiewicz came back to this point: “That’s all very well, but you didn’t secure yourself entry to the room, so how will it be?’ We all laughed, .... ‘Oy, Gerszon, what a lawyer you are.... Now you’ll have to travel with a ladder and put it up to the balcony, but you’ll only get onto the balcony, because Seweryn will keep the door to the balcony closed. You can’t stage a break-in, because they’ll punish you.’ There was lots of fun because of that.” His sister stated in a questionnaire that Gerszon Kupferblum then emigrated to Palestine; IPN BU, file no. 0193/2817. In Kwestionariusz dla przedsiębiorstw przemysłu spożywczego (Survey of Food Industry Businesses), dated September 12, 1945, on the watermill in Dwikozy, then the property of Lucyna, Małkiewicz’s mother, the fact that the mill had been owned by Jews is omitted:
No one knows what happened to Ziwa Kupferblum after the war. People recall that she wore a military uniform and held the rank of captain [2172W]. Someone remembered meeting Ziwa in Łódź:

[1661W] There was this Ziwa Ferblum. Małkiewicz bought it [the mill in Dwikozy] from them. Well, I met her after the war in Łódź, and thought I would go up to her, “Hey, we know each other!” “No...,” she answered me, putting on an unpleasant tone of voice, “I am Zosia Kowalska!” And she walked away.

We know that Ziwa Kupferblum did indeed take the surname Kwiatkowska (not Kowalska, as the informant mentions in the above testimony) and emigrated to Argentina under this name. However, she visited Dwikozy twice after that.

[566W] She was called Kuferblom Ziwa.... When she came to visit us here, it was from Argentina.

[When]...did she come? Well, she came...I can’t remember, but it was about ’40-something...after we’d returned from expulsion.... It was about ’49 or ’50. In the ’50s. Did she come back again, or [did she] just [come]...once? She was only here twice. Twice she saw her [property]...she knew it

“The mill has been there since time immemorial — improved in 1934”; APK OS SS, file no. 654.

45 The IPN archive contains a file on Ziwa Kupferblum, who was born on August 13, 1926, file no. IPN BU, 0193/2817. It indicates that in October 1944 Ziwa joined the Polish Army, where she worked as a typist in the Military Censorship Department. In December 1944, she was sent as a candidate to the Polish Army School for Political and Educational Officers (the documentation breaks off here). From Ziwa’s résumé, dated November 11, 1944: “Two days before the [displacement] campaign on October 24 [1942], I escaped from there [from the Zawichost Ghetto], hiding in a friend’s cellar. ....I owe my survival to Jan Mikołajski, the greatest and wisest PPR activist in the Sandomierz region.”

46 On the website of Biblioteca y Centro de Documentación del Museo del Holocausto-Shoá in Buenos Aires, an account by Zofia Kwiatkowska was recorded, ref. ARG 39, “Testimonio niña refugiada (Testimony of a Daughter Who Escaped). Testimonio tomado por Bejla R. de Goldman. 4 pp., carpeta, adjuntos: Testimonio de la señora Ziwa Kupferblum, nombre actual Zofia Kwiatkowska.” (Testimony given by Ms. Ziwa Kupferblum, present name: Zofia Kwiatkowska). To date, the author has not been granted access to it.
had been sold. [Her] father had been given money for it, and she had nothing against the owner.

**Did any other Jews come back here?**

Only she did.

3) The large Penczyna family, whose members left a great deal of information about the fate of post-war Klimontów, had a mill in the Chwałki district of Sandomierz. According to Pesla Penczyna, it was owned by Józef and herself. Józef Penczyna was killed by Poles two weeks before the Red Army arrived, and Pesla survived the war on Aryan papers in Wieliczka, and then moved to Łódź with her child.

Pesla Penczyna says that Maksymilian von Kenszycki was appointed *Treuhändler* (trustee) of their mill. He reported on the issue of flour out-

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47 Aron Kupferblum was dead by the time the mill was sold.
48 Account by Pesla Penczyna, born in Klimontów in 1914, AŻIH, file no. 301/2927, October 21, 1947, Łódź; see also APK, OS SS, file no. 662, *Ankieta dla przedsiębiorstw przemysłu młyńskiegnego*.
49 Account by Pesla Penczyna, AŻIH, file no. 301/1525, July 29, 1946, Łódź, p. 10, manuscript: “[Józef Penczyna] went back to the village of Sieprawa and stayed with a farmer, Pietrzyk. On December 31, [1944], some thugs went there at night and took him away, as a Jew. There were also two Soviets on the cart. They shot them together and buried them in the cemetery... Franek Pietrzyk and Bojda Henryk were among the criminals.”
50 Their child, who had been placed in a village outside Kraków, also survived. This was probably Debora Hana Penczyna, whose name is mentioned in *Wykaz Żydów zarejestrowanych na terenie m. Sandomierza* (“registered before 14/12/1945”) directly below Pesla Penczyna. The child was taken in by the Kowalczyk family from the village of Żentary near Kraków. “The child was very happy with Mrs. Kowalczyk. They treated her like their own child.... [After the war], Mrs. Kowalczyk didn’t want to give up the child.... She said that ...[for] 80 liters of vodka (one liter cost 1,000 złoty), she would give the child up.... We gave her flour worth 30,000 zł. The little one didn’t want to leave her at first, and said so to the farmers: ‘Mama — a Jew!’ She would say prayers under the table every day.” AŻIH, file no. 301/1525.
51 Maksymilian von Kenszycki features in Pesla Penczyna’s account (AŻIH, file no. 301/1525) as “Kęszycki.” Mordechaj Penczyna, who also had a small mill in Klimontów, gives “Strzelnicki” as the name of the *Treuhände*. After losing his own property, the author of this account worked in the Penczyna family’s mill; see Penczyna, “Khurbn Klemontov,” p. 148; “For a short time I was employed in one of the bigger mills in the town. Strzelnicki, a Pole, who was the owner of a mill himself, somewhere in the Łódź voivodeship, was moved to there. He was sent to Klimontów from there and appointed as receiver of the mill. In accordance with the directives of the German authorities, he removed all Jews from the mill.” A similar name (“Stenszycki”) features in Lejb Zylberberg’s memoir, cited below.
side official rations, which put Józef Penczyna in Sandomierz prison for nine months and cost the lives of his wife’s brother and two others, who were accused of being Communists. In August 1947, Pesla, who was living in Łódź by then, met Kenszycki in Sandomierz and reported him twice.

In her statement dated July 29, 1946, the widow gives this account about the end of the war:

I was in the manor [in Wieliczka] when the liberation [took place]. I spent another month there waiting for my husband, because I didn’t know he had been killed.... I went to my husband’s family in Klimontów. I stayed there until they started murdering Jews. Two days before the Jews were murdered, I left.

The list of Jews registered in Sandomierz at the end of 1945 includes 71 people, with Pesla Penczyna as no. 30. Nothing more is known about the widow and her daughter; including whether she kept her husband’s wish, “to bring up the child in the Jewish spirit, and sell everything and go to Palestine after the liberation.”

4) The last miller mentioned, Mordechaj (Motel) Penczyna, owner of a mill in Klimontów, plundered by the Germans, who shipped the machinery to the Reich. After fleeing Klimontów on October 30, 1942, he first hid in a crypt in the collegiate church or monastery, then passed through the

52 Pesla also accused Kenszycki of taking furs from her family under the pretense of preventing their confiscation, AŻIH, file no. 301/2927 and 301/1225. Further research should be done on the fortunes of the Volksdeutscher Kenszycki.
53 AŻIH, file no. 301/1525, “Back then [in Sandomierz], I didn’t hand Kenszycki over to the authorities because I was frightened.” A month before, in September 1947, Pesla Penczyna reported this to the Voivodeship Security Bureau in Warsaw.
54 Pesla Penczyna, AŻIH, file no. 301/1525. The murder in Klimontów is also mentioned in Sala Ungerman’s account, AŻIH, file no. 301/1184; “I wanted to go to Klimontów, but on the way I met friends, and they told me not to go, because some Poles killed five Jews there after the liberation.”
55 With the addendum: “registered by 14/12/1945,” APK, OS SS, file no. 223.
56 Documents in the Sandomierz Archive indicate that Pesla Penczyna let the mill in the Sandomierz district of Chwałki to Wacław Sierant and Władysław Budziński for a period of three years. In Ankieta dla przedsiebiorstw przemysłu młynarskiego (APK OS SS, file no. 662), however, Adolf Hlawacz is mentioned as the owner.
57 AŻIH, file no. 301/1525, p. 10.
villages of Goźlice and Przybysławice, and ultimately found help from a farmer called Rak in Śniekozy. For a year, he hid out in the woods, and in the farmer’s loft, first with his permission and then without it.

Penczyna wrote one of the most shocking accounts of the post-war fate of Klimontów’s Jews. This is how it ends:

On October 7, 1944, Klimontów was occupied by the Red Army. I was still afraid to show myself there. Even after the Red Army entered, there were incidents of Jews being killed, so there would be as few witnesses as possible to what had been happening to us here. Not until the front passed and halted around Włoszczowa did I go to Klimontów. There, I met a few other Jews who had been saved: Jechiel and Saul Lederman, Lejbchze [author of the diary] and Mojsze Zylberberg, Jechiel Gotlib, Abraham Złotnicki, Szejna Wajsbard, Pesla Goldwaser, Chaim Penczyna and his wife from Wiązownica, and others. We all lived in Fajntuch’s house. I worked in our mill again...for the Red Army. But it was unsettled — there were still incidents of Jews being killed, especially in smaller places ([such as] Połaniec and Staszów). Some people decided to move to Łódź, where we heard that Jews were settling. I stayed in Klimontów a bit longer, and then I moved to Łódź too. Those who stayed in Klimontów were: A. Złotnicki, Ch. and Sz. Lederman, Ch. Penczyna and his wife (who was pregnant), and Tobcia Stecka. On May10, 1945,

58 In Kozlice, MP 149: “I asked [a Christian friend] whether I could stay a few days. He didn’t let me.”
59 “A few days before the deportation, I gave Skuza, a Christian there, a lot of valuable items for safekeeping. As soon as Skuza saw me, he said: ‘Get out of here fast, or I’ll turn you over to the gendarmes!’,” ibid.
60 “In a woodland thicket, like an animal, I dug myself a hole, where I hid during the day,” ibid.
62 The mill, whose former owners are cited in documentary sources as “Jakub Penczyna and Company,” was passed on to Stefan Grudzieň to administer, APK, OS SS, file nos. 324 and 580.
63 See Zelman Baum’s account, AŻIH, file no. 301/2425, 34: Baum, who was born
they were all murdered in a brutal fashion; they were found with arms and legs severed. Only Tobcia Stecka survived, who happened to have been sleeping at the house of some Christians that night. Afterward, she came to Łódź and told about it all.

**Lejb Zylberberg’s Story**

Mordechaj Penczyna’s story can be adjusted on the basis of the diary of Lejb (Lejbcze) Zylberberg, a tailor. The Zylberbergs, who were also known in Klimontów as the “[H]orensztajns,” commanded similar respect to the Kupferblums in town. The author of this memoir, from which a long excerpt is quoted, does not appear in the post-war register of Jews in the

in Sandomierz, on January 20, 1924, was in hiding from 1940. At first, alone in Wiązownica, later with his family (his parents, three sisters, and brother aged 12) in the settlement of Strączków, and subsequently with his siblings and cousins (including Chaim Penczyna) in the villages of Przywłoka, Pawišle-Chodków, Krzcin, Postronna, and Byszewo. There he was captured by some Ukrainians and imprisoned in the castle at Sandomierz, and then in Ostrowiec, after which he was sent to the Leitmeritz camp in Bohemia. On his release, he returned to Sandomierz. He cites a conversation with a Pole he met at this point: “He told me that there had been a small handful of Jews here recently, but they had finished them off. He told me about what happened in Klimontów, where they killed four Jews shortly after the liberation. Later, I found out that the people who had been killed by Poles in Klimontów were my cousin and his wife [Chaim Penczyna and his wife Rywka], and two friends we had helped find hiding places during the German occupation [the Ledermans].” Zelman Baum’s parents and brother were also killed by Poles. AŻIH, file no. 301/2425.

64 AŻIH, file no. 302/27. Excerpt reproduced in Grynberg and Kotowska, Życie i zagłada Żydów, pp. 195–201. The excerpt was translated by Sara Arm.

65 [1759W] “They used to be known as the Horensztajns [Orensztajns], but they were called the Zylberbergs. They had a wood and plank store.”

66 A story about Orensztajn-Zylberberg, as written down in Zawichost: [242N] “My father put up a house, and very soon afterward, it burned down, because..., someone else’s burned down, and his [caught fire]...from it.... This is what my father told me, a Jew came past, a very rich Jew, and said: ‘Sir, if you want wood, please come, take some, you need to repair your house...’”

67 From Klimontów, Zylberberg and his brother were taken to the Sandomierz Ghetto. Afterward, they were transferred to a camp in the village of Kamień, five kilometers from Sandomierz. They worked in the Metan glassworks there. Next, they were taken to Pionki, 20 kilometers beyond Radom, where they worked in a dynamite factory. They both managed to escape from there, along with three other men. Their escape route led through Klimontów. The next excerpt from a Sandomierz interview might be referring to Lejb Zylberberg: [203N, Winiary] “I remember one Jew.... He was a good
Sandomierz Religious Association, dated December 1945. His memoir indicates that as soon as the front passed, since the atmosphere in the town was becoming increasingly tense and many Poles were urging him to leave, he moved to Łódź. The reasons for his decision may be reconstructed on the basis of the story below. It begins the day after the liberation, in Goźlice.

We went into the house of Jan Barański, a farmer we knew. He stared at us. He advised us to leave the area because things were restless. We could be killed there. We go on...and enter the town. We're walking past the church, and residents of the town are coming out. I ask about my debtors...[and] go to the square. From a distance, I see Starosta [Hajnoch], with two other residents. He says, with affected joy.⁶⁸ “This is my tailor” He shakes hands with us, asks us where we [managed to] survive this time.... We also had an incident with a Pole, who went up to a Russian soldier and said that the Jews had supported the Germans.⁶⁹
tailor, I remember, he made clothes for us in our house during the occupation.... Once, I went for some beetroots and I got a shock, because there was this man standing there by the door,... 'No, Mietek, don’t be afraid, it’s me.’ Aha, fine. ‘Listen, I’ll go in the house and tell Father you’re here,’ Well, we had to give him something to eat, didn’t we? So Father came and took him into the house. He ate, drank, and I gave him a bit of pork fat, some bread, and onion.... Father said: ‘Listen, as long as you can, and you’re around here, drop by,...and you’ll get yourself a bite to eat.’ Well, it was a shame about him...because he was a good man. But he never came back.”

⁶⁸ Earlier in the memoir: “The starosta [Hajnoch] doesn’t even tell us to sit down.... We tell him we’ve escaped from a camp. He says that we did the wrong thing by escaping, because in the Sandomierz region, we won’t even survive for two weeks. But we answer, we’ve been free for two months now and we even just met an underground soldier who let us go. From his look, I realized that he wasn’t pleased about this. He advised us to go back to the camp. So I said to him: ‘Should I go make weapons for the thugs who killed my parents?’ He says: ‘That’s stupid. Three million Poles are working for the Germans.’ But I said I wouldn’t go back to the camp. He said that Fligelman is dead, Szuldman too, and also said that they were killed by Poles. He wanted to scare us with his words. He said that there was only one wise Jew. Meloch Wejsblat [Wajsblat], who is in the camp and [does not plan to] escape. Meloch Wejsblat was the Jew who gave him [his] shop in Klimontów. He asked us what we came for. I asked him to give him some money if we sent someone. To which he answered: ‘I don’t want anything to do with Jews.’ When I asked him why, he answered: ‘Because Jews are thieves.’”

⁶⁹ Such incidents sometimes ended tragically. See Witold Bereś and Krzysztof Burnetko, Marek Edelman. Życie. Po prostu (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2008), p. 209: “The National Armed Forces (NSZ) had my commander, ‘Witek,’ finished off by the Russians in January 1945. Shortly after the war, when he wanted to report to the Citizens’ Militia in Częstochowa, he was captured by people from the NSZ, who took him to the Russians
The next day, my brother and I went to see Public Prosecutor Wieczorek. The whole family was embarrassed. The prosecutor’s son came in and asked if we wanted dinner. I told them to give me back my jewelry and things I had left there. The prosecutor said that he had agreed with my father that he would give the things back after the war; the main reason was that he didn’t have the things at home and couldn’t give them back to me at the time. From the prosecutor’s house, I went to the Jewish cemetery. It was a terrible sight. The stone wall had been destroyed and stolen. Almost all the matzevot (gravestones) had been torn down, perhaps 20 percent remained. The earth was churned up. I went to the common graves, looking for the grave of the couple killed under arrest by members of the Home Army. A Pole, the beadle for the Jewish community, showed me their grave. He told me that the bastards had dug up and stolen the Torah scrolls. They had used the parchment for shoe linings. He also said that and said he was a fascist, and [the Russians] shot him...” See also, a similar incident described by Philip Bialowitz, Bunt w Sobibórze (Warsaw: Nasza Księgarnia, 2008), p. 226.

Earlier in the diary: “While I was with my host, I sent a letter to the prosecutor at the court in Radom, asking him to send me money or things. He had my mother’s jewellry and my clothes. But he didn’t send me anything. When I wrote to him asking him to send my navy blue suit, his sister wrote back to me saying that I’d already been once to take it. I sent someone five times like that, but he didn’t give me back a grosz. After the liberation, he was arrested for belonging to the Home Army.”

Zyliberberg, A Yid fun Klementov, p. 87. The author is inconsistent, writing, first, about members of the Home Army, and, later, about the NSZ: “At...the farmer’s, there was a married couple in hiding who had left their children in a bunker in the woods. The farmer had gotten a big fortune from them: a hundredweight of pepper, cotton, and other merchandise. To get hold of the assets and get rid of them, he set fire to the barn where the couple were. They had to flee. They were in such a terrible situation that they handed themselves in to the police on May 15, 1943, the very same day that the Sandomierz Ghetto was liquidated. That evening, members of the NSZ attacked the “dark blue” [Polish] police station where the couple were. They wanted to take away their weapons, but the police asked them not to do this because they had an order to kill some Jews. The NSZ men said they would deal with the Jews themselves. They went...into their cell and killed them. This was why the farmer...was afraid of having anything to do with Jews.”

See “Khurbn Klemontow”: “The Rabbi of Klimontów, Reb Simche Gelernter, buried the sacred books before the deportation. When we returned to Klimontów after the liberation, we could not find the Torah scrolls in the [designated] place. Local farmers, who knew about everything, had dug up the Torah scrolls and used them as lining for shoes.” See the account by Henryk Scharff, AŻIH, file no. 301/17: “Polish shops [in Sandomierz] packed goods in paper that came from the pages of prayer books and holy books.” The Sandomierz Pinkas — Eva Feldenkreis-Grinbal, ed., Eth Ezkera — Whenever I Remember: Memorial Book of the Jewish Community in Tzoyzmir (Sandomierz) (Tel Aviv: Association of Tzoyzmir Jews and Moreshet Publishing, 1993),
six months after the burial of 68 people shot dead on November 30, 1942, in the spring of 1943, thieves came, pulled out the bodies, searched for dollars, and pulled out their gold teeth. Czesław Nowakowski was among those who did this.73

When I was returning from the cemetery, an elderly Polish woman came up to me and showed me the small grave of a seven-year-old boy, Awner Diamant. Before the deportation, the child's family had been in hiding in a Pole's house. Thugs from the NSZ [Narodowe Siły Zbrojne — National Armed Forces, a clandestine military organization — translator's note] dragged the whole Jewish family out and shot them.... Once, Stefan Bigos, from a nearby village, came to us and advised us to leave Klimontów, because he knew for certain that NSZ people wanted to throw grenades through our window. When the front shifted on January 12, and there were fewer troops, we decided to leave the town because the atmosphere all around was increasingly tense. Many Poles were urging us to leave the town.

Toward the end of 1945, we arrived in Łódź. Chaim Penczyna and his pregnant wife were still in Klimontów. His father, Abraham Penczyna, who had been in hiding in Wiązownia with his wife, daughter, three sons and two daughters-in-law, was murdered before the liberation.74

pp. 543, 553, 565–566 — draws attention to the services of Father Adam Szymański, Dean of the Religious Seminary at Sandomierz, who stored Torah scrolls safely. He returned them to the Sandomierz Religious Association after the war, a fact noted in the minutes of its first meeting in 1945, APK, OS SS, file no. 224. The author is grateful to Professor Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska for granting her access to her translations of memorial books.

73 There were several similar incidents in the history of Klimontów, the last one in the 1960s, when the Jewish cemetery was being liquidated to make way for a school. The gangs responsible were called “miners.” See Radosław Januszewski, “Szkola tysiąclecia,” Rzeczpospolita, October 27, 2001. “Fr. Tomasz Zadęcki, then parish priest, noted in the parish chronicle: ‘After the Jews left, a group of people, known as ‘miners,’ formed. They went with pickaxes [and] iron bars...at night around the former Jewish houses and smashed walls, stoves, dug in cellars, and unearthed concealed Jewish treasures: money, textiles, skins, etc. Klimontów now started to drink and get drunk — since they could afford to — a plague of drunkenness beset the young people, who now became brazen and vulgar...’”

74 On this murder, see Zelman Baum’s account, AŻIH, file no. 301/2425. This suggests that Abraham Penczyna, the author’s uncle, aged 53, after escaping from the Sandomierz Ghetto with his wife, Sara, aged 45, probably stayed in the village of Smerdyna near Wiązownica, with Stefan Dywan, and, thereafter, in a settlement outside the village, with Fortuna, where they were betrayed and killed.
Two Jewish women were murdered: Róża Bojm, and her sister, the wife of Izrael Rozenberg (who is now in Argentina), in the same village, also before the liberation.

I also found out, on September 5, 1943, after I had left Ratkowski, in whose house I had been in hiding, that Joel Wajcman and Mosze Nisenbojm from Opatów, Jews he knew, went to him wanting to go into hiding. Awner [Wal] Ratkowski agreed to take them in. Then, Awner and Wajcman went to Klimontów to get their things from Józef Sztenszicki [or Sztęszycyki — the name may be distorted, see note 51]. When they left his house, Sztenszicki sent thugs after them to Wiązownica, to Ratkowski’s. They beat up Ratkowski and shot the three Jews in his yard. This was a group of 40 armed thugs, Edward Ratkowski, who buried the Jews in a shared grave near the cemetery, told me this. Mazur, in the same village, whom we had also stayed with, also got a visit from the NSZ after we left, and they demanded that he show them where the Jews were hidden. They went up to the hiding place where we had been concealed. They beat the farmer up and demanded that he tell them where we were. In the end, to scare him, they wound a birch branch around his neck and strung him up. Mazur himself told us that.75

On April 12, 1945, the last few Jews, scared of the NSZ gangs, left Klimontów. Only five Jews stayed behind: Abraham Złotnicki,76 the Szyja brother, Chil Lederman, and one couple, Chaim and Rywka Penczyna.

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75 In a letter from Wörth an der Donau dated March 30, 1948, Lejb Zylberberg corrects the details of the transcription of his account made by Klara Mirska: “Pp. 123/24 — also [came] to Mazur, with whom we were staying, in the same village, etc. The affair was like this: The thugs from the NSZ hauled the Jew Jankiel Penczyna, who had been born in the same village, over to Mazur’s [place] and demanded that he let on where we were hidden. The Jew took them to the hiding place and when they didn’t find us there, they beat Mazur up, demanding that he tell them where we were. Then they did terrible things to the Jew and strung him up half-dead on a birch tree in the yard,” AŽIH, file no. 301/4169, translated from the Yiddish by Sara Arm. For more about Jankiel Penczyna, see Zelman Baum, AŽIH, file no. 301/2425: “The news also reached us that Jankiel Penczyna had been murdered by the Home Army Summer Squad in Wiązownica.... They hung my uncle by his feet, drove nails into the soles of his shoes, and took him down and hung him up again, until blood spurted from his nose and mouth. They torment him so that he would betray the family in hiding. He died a martyr’s death, but he didn’t grass on us.”

76 The only mention of Abraham Zlotnicki is in Zylberberg’s account: “Some of us prepared to escape. Soon afterwards, the first to escape were Abraham Zlotnicki, Mietek Apelbojm, and Icze Wajsbrot,” Grynberg and Kotowska, Życie i zagłada Żydów, p. 201.
The NSZ gangs couldn't bear that. On Monday, in the night, April 16, 1945, they came and shot these Jews.

This is how the history of the Jews in Klimontów ended.

**Status of Jewish Ethnographic Sources**

Although the accounts by Jews from Klimontów have an undeniable documentary value, they are rather hard to verify. The research on which this article is based should be treated as an initial investigation. However, it does show that the last of the accounts cited here is the most useful, together with the supplement in the form of the letter sent to the Jewish Historical Institute from Wörth an der Donau (Bavaria), where Zylberberg stayed after leaving Poland. This proves that the author of this account had an excellent memory and confirms the details he gave as accurate. Zylberberg also corrects facts wrongly recorded by the transcriber. Thanks to this and several other corroborating memoirs from Pesla Penczyna, Zelman Baum, Sala Ungerman and Mordechaj Penczyna, among them, it is assumed that the Klimontów murder took place on the night of April 16/17, and a total of six people perished: Abraham Złotnicki, the brothers Szyja and Chil Lederman, and the married couple Chaim and Rywka Penczyna together with their unborn child. However, further research is needed — recovery of the Citizens’ Militia’s reports, as well as analysis of the files from the trial of the alleged murderers, above all.

77 Note from Jewish Press Agency Bulletin, April 16/17, 1945: “On April 18, this year, five Jews were murdered in Klimontów: one woman, the Lederman brothers Saul Joseph aged 35 and Chil aged 28, Penczyna aged 30 and his pregnant wife, and Złotnicki Abram aged 28. The remaining Jews in the town were forced to move to Sandomierz. After the war, seven Jews returned, five of whom were murdered.” The author is grateful to Dr. Alina Skibińska for this information. Another confirmation of this date is the report cited in note 7.

78 The following archival documents corroborating this event have been found in the Institute of National Remembrance: Józef Przybylski, file no. Zh. Ko 393/91. General correspondence on cases of investigative action of Nazi crimes and his role in the suspected murder of several Jews in Klimontów in 1945–1946; Kalita Władysław, IPN, file no. Kr 75/542. Files in the case of Kalita Władysław, son of Józef (ps. Wisła, res. Kolonia Pęcławka, Jurków borough, Sandomierz district), suspect under Article 4, section 1C of participation in the murder of Jews in Klimontów in April 1945; Adwent Stanisław, IPN, file no. Kr 75/530. Several files in the military prosecutor of Kielce’s...
A familiar paradox is associated with verification of survivors’ accounts: The victims would be the only fully credible witnesses to murders committed without other witnesses. When survivors start talking, their testimony does not address the situation as a whole, but only a minor part of it, yet, as representatives of the victims, they feel qualified to generalize. Generalizations, in turn, provoke criticism. Questions arise, such as:

How are we to know that this situation actually occurred? Is it a figment of the informer’s imagination? Either it...never occurred or it did occur, in which case, the testimony of the informer is false, since...he should have been killed...79

While the historian should always verify his or her sources, the ethnographer may also examine them for their autonomous value. In some cases, however, the sources themselves show the local state of “moral consciousness,” and can contribute to verifying survivors’ accounts. When informants said: [951W] “There were a lot who helped and took [people] in, but there were a lot of others who betrayed [Jews], even those who took property and then were capable of finishing the children off.... There were Poles who murdered Jews” — it is hard to question their memory. Wherever possible, the next thing to do is to attempt to place it in the historical context. The problem is that not all ethnographic sources can be anchored in this way, especially six decades after the war.

How does this work in practise? The above accounts of the murder in spring 1945 are based on second-hand information. They had to be. With the exception of Tobcia (Toba) Stecka, who was sleeping at a Christian home on the critical night, all the Jews remaining in Klimontów after Zylberberg and the Penczynas left were killed. Even Tobcia’s account was

indirect (incidentally, almost nothing is known of Tobcia herself). Four of the survivors probably refer to her (Zelman Baum, Sala Ungerman, Pesla Penczyna, and Lejb Zylberberg), while Mordechaj Penczyna actually gave her name. In this situation, ethnographic sources, passing on the memory of the murder of those Jews, have survived for six decades, even their names are of fundamental significance.

The Jewish accounts cited above share characteristic features with roots: on the one hand, in identification with a particular historical idiom (Pesla Penczyna: “I left when the reaction started and Jews were murdered”); and, on the other, in the limited knowledge of the witnesses, who were isolated to varying degrees because they were in hiding. This is apparent in the confusion between the Home Army and the National Armed Forces, already mentioned in note 71, for instance, and the incompleteness of information as to the consequences of events (one account states that Zelman Baum was killed, whereas it is known that, although he came under fire, he managed to escape from the ambush). In this case, too, the “local knowledge” of present-day residents of Klimontów, who remember who survived, who was killed, who they stole from and murdered, and who took Jews in, is also vital.

One fact worthy of note is the muted language of the Jewish accounts under discussion, which is different from the other testimonies in the Jewish Historical Institute Archive (see, for example, file nos. 301/1276, 4830, 537, and the end of 4229) and also from memorial books that came much later. This distance is sometimes due to the nature of the source recorded by the transcriber, and fades with the passage of time. The testimony’s rhetoric might provide grounds for a prosecutor’s investigation, in the future, and, on occasion, forced reticence that the oral personal story and ethnographic

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80 For information about Tobcia, who probably worked for an SS-man called Bulion, Commander of the Sandomierz camp during the war, see Pola Orensztajn’s account, AŻIH, file no. 301/3329; see also memoir of Celina Grünszpan, who spent the war in Mokoszyn, near Sandomierz, AŻIH, file no. 302/53. Mordechaj Penczyna’s account in “Khurbn Klemontov” suggests that Tobcia moved to Łódź. Research is hampered by the “cover” surname and her husband’s surname she adopted. Materials from Sokolniki (Sandomierz region) mentioned a Polish-Jewish couple from this area: [165N] “This [Tosia? Tobcia?] came around and married him. They had a good life — he did his thing, she did hers. They worked and brought up the children, but the children took after her, went in her direction — got an education, and they were very gifted.”

81 See also, for example, “Klimontów” in Pinkas Hakehillot. Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities, Poland (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, no publication date), vol. 7, pp. 505–508, www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_poland/pol7_00505.html.
interview lack. On several occasions, transcripts contain notes on how difficult survivors found it to preserve this reticence (e.g., Dawid Nassan’s account, AŻIH, no. 301/3262).

Three Versions of the Polish Story

The “Polish version” of the murder discussed above may also be supplemented with ethnographic sources. In the form most frequently cited, this version features in Eugeniusz Niebelski’s 1999 monograph on Klimontów. Below is an excerpt central to this version:

Some of them [i.e., the Jews returning to Klimontów after the front passed — J.T.-B.] immediately started collaborating with the NKVD and the new authorities, casting a shadow over all the others. Abram Złotnik, who had been taken into hiding for the duration of the war in Wola Konarska, started letting the Russians have names of people from the underground Home Army, and openly threatening that he had the whole list, waving a pistol around as he did so. Some activists and former underground soldiers fell into NKVD hands, and a few even got sent to Siberia. Abram ignored warnings from his Klimontów friends. In March 1945, he was liquidated on Sandomierska Street. Nevertheless, there were murders of Jews in the town that were not justifiable in any way. After these tragic events, the remaining Jews moved away from Klimontów to other places, including Łódź and Sandomierz.82

Radosław Januszewski, a journalist with the daily Rzeczpospolita who wrote a piece about the Klimontów murder83 in 2001, hypothesized that the list for which Abraham Złotnicki paid with his head might be the document in the Jewish Historical Institute Archive, Wykaz Żydów, którzy zostali zabici przez bandy lub przez tych, którzy ich przyjęli na ukrycie (A List of Jews Who Were Killed by Bands or by Those Who Were Hiding Them).84 In fact, this document, which contains scores of names of victims and perpetrators

83 Januszewski, “Szkoła tysiąclecia.”
84 This is one part of an anonymous account the author identified as AŻIH, file no. 301/379 [1789].
of murder, refers to a different Klimontów (near Proszowice). It does, however, throw some light on the nature of the alleged denunciations of which Jews were sometimes accused after the war. “Letting the Russians have names of people from the underground Home Army” falls into this category.

The question arises as to whether Polish citizens who had been victims of collaboration and were the rightful owners of plundered property should have approached the new authorities for restitution and punishment of the perpetrators, and whether such situations should be labeled as “collaboration with the NKVD.” The use of such terminology is often related to the stubborn refusal to come to terms with the fact that evil against Jews was sometimes committed by the Poles who “took them in.” In this context, it is also worth mentioning that in Wykaz ludności wyznania niekatolickiego, zamieszkałej na terenie powiatu sandomierskiego (List of Non-Catholic Population Residents in the Territory of the Sandomierz District), dated February 14, 1945, in the section, “Attitudes of Particular Faiths to State

The author is grateful to Magda Prokopowicz for verifying this document.

A similar attitude is apparent in the report of the Polish military couriers, on their return to London from Poland toward the end of August 1945: “Therefore, since the Jews benefitted from going into hiding on Poles’ property, which enabled over 50,000 of them to escape death, they should undoubtedly have shown...loyalty to the Poles. Yet, from the moment the Lublin authorities entered Polish territory, the Jews immediately set about denouncing those who had previously hidden them, claiming they were blackmailed by them, and money had been extorted from them. Home Army members were denounced and beatings and torture of Poles were carried out in camps run by Jews with Soviet consent.” Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, Archive ref. no. A9 III 2 c/64, report by military personnel from Poland, London, 2/10/1945, quoted from August Grabski, Działalność komunistów wśród Żydów w Polsce (1944–1949) (Warsaw: Trio/Żydowski Instytut Historyczny [ŻIH], 2004), p. 32; see Tokarska-Bakir, “The Unrighteous Righteous and Righteous Unrighteous.”

Six decades later, in a conversation with the soltys [head of the village council] of the village of Wielowieś in the Sandomierz district, the number of Jews saved was given as sixfold; see [297N]: “Thirty thousand Poles were shot by the Germans just for helping Jews, and, in Poland, 300,000 Jews were saved. In other words,...[by] saving them, 30,000 of ours died. You see the Germans shot every family that helped Jews. And, so that’s how they repay us.” See Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “Sprawiedliwi niesprawiedliwi, niesprawiedliwi swapiedliwi,” Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały, vol. 4, 2008, pp. 170–215.
Affairs,” only the populations of three localities — Klimontów, Połaniec, and Wiśniowa — were characterized as “not demonstrating loyalty” toward the new system.89

Radosław Januszewski’s interviewees in 2001 remembered both the post-war murders of the Jews and Abram Złotnik’s (Abraham Zlotnicki) murder differently from Eugeniusz Niebelski’s descriptions:

Ms. R. recalls her brother’s story about how the Jews were killed just after the war. “The Poles did it. They stood them against the wall here, ordering them to turn around,” she said, pointing to the abandoned synagogue wall, “and the rest, [were killed] behind my brother’s house...” She talked of Chaskiel,90 who was killed because he had a few dollars: “We ate from the same spoon, and you want to kill me?” he... said to his murderer, a childhood friend. Ms. R.’s brother, an old man, but still “getting around,” was bringing in coal. At first, he doesn’t want to say much. “I didn’t see them shoot, but I saw them lying there. The partisans killed them! They got this kind of partisan gang together.” Among the dead was Abram Złotnik. Eugeniusz Niebelski mentions him as an NKVD collaborator, who disclosed the names of Home Army

89 APK, OS SS, file no. 225.
90 Further on in Januszewski’s paper: W. knows about it all from his father. He was five years old at the time. Chaskiel was roaming about the area, an 18- or maybe 20-year-old lad. He’d been staying with some people, but they’d hounded him out because they were afraid. In the end, W.’s father took him in for a night. Then, the partisans came, took Chaskiel out, and shot him. “It’s those SOBs from P!” he shouts. W. says they killed Chaskiel in the barn.... I find Ms. Genowefa Bednarz, from the same village, in the field, she’s weeding. When she was a child, she saw Chaskiel’s body in the field. He’d been staying the night with her father, but some partisans came, shooting, demanding her father’s gun that he apparently had stashed away. Her father was afraid that it could get nasty if they found a Jew in his house, so he told him to go. Genowefa and I go to where the corpse lay. It still lies there. “Right here, in L.’s field,” she points to a high tuft of grass by the roadside. The words below, noted down in the Sandomierz research, refer to Chaskiel’s murder: [the speaker is Mr. G., former Deputy Chief Borough Councillor in Klimontów]: “It’s truly unpleasant to say, but that Jewboy who stayed around here, he was 18 years old, they buried him over in Byszówka somewhere — it was in the press, of course. Somewhere out in the country, in ’45, some Poles from the Home Army killed him. The Home Army was the first force that fought, but...” “Where was it?” “Here, in Klimontów.” “Why did they kill him?” “The Klimontów Jew was kept in hiding here throughout the occupation, the Poles hid him. He was 20-something years old, and in ’45 they came in the night and killed him.”
soldiers. Apparently, he said he would denounce them all, waving a pistol around. Other Jews were killed almost “as an aside.”

Ms. R.’s brother gave a different version:

“That Yabrom [Abram] ’ad too big a mouth. ’E was young, brazen, so they took ’im out and killed ’im in a ditch.... Them as did it are still alive. I know ’em, but I ain’t tellin’ now, they’d shoot me.”

Ms. R. was terrified. The interviewer told her that these are different times.

“I’ve got children, they live here, they would get revenge. He’d come here, set us on fire, send his thugs down!”

Ms. R.’s brother recalled another man who killed [people] and is still alive. The interviewees in the Sandomierz study also describe the situation in April 1945. Here is a statement from 2006.

[1218N, wife of a former deputy chief borough councillor] Later, I remember this scene. After they’d hounded those Jews...and taken them, well, and...the Germans went. Only Poles were left. The front moved on...and then these Jews appeared from somewhere, a few families, even [maybe] from Sandomierska Street, they appeared from somewhere. Well, they started to get all belligerent. Oh yes! That this was theirs! That now we’re going to show what we can do, yeah. I remember, that one Jewish woman was pregnant, and they killed her on the roof, too. On one guy’s roof.... Well, they needn’t have gone so extreme, and maybe they’d have survived. I think there were four or five families. Yes, they killed them...Poles. Poles.

“But after the war?”

“After the war. Because they [the Jews] started...that it was all theirs, you know! That now they would show us! They started to come back at us. Well, in any case, the devil only knows how it was. Maybe they had something against them. But, in any case, there were a few families left, hidden away somewhere, but they became all brazen once the Germans had gone, and they were killed.”

“So it was like this, if I understand it correctly: these five families had survived somewhere after the war...? After the occupation...?
They came back for what was theirs. But the Poles had already appropriated it, because they thought that by then...”

“Yes, right after the war. Yes, appropriated, [and] maybe not appropriated. Well,... of course they...knew whose it was, the Poles, those here.”

Did a lot of Jews come back? More or less how many — would you say five families, how many were there?

“Five families and about 10 people, maybe 11, something like that.”

But were they armed in any way, the Jews, or did they just come, peacefully, wanting...?

“Well, they thought that they were sure of...”

They’d come back to their own homes...

“...They came back to their own homes because the Germans had gone. Well, it was this kind of revenge. Revenge or I don’t know what.”

The term “revenge” returns here first in the context of presumed grievances of the Jews (“started to get all belligerent”; “This was theirs! That now we’re going to show what we can do.”), and then in the context of grievances against the Jews (“Maybe they had something against them?”). In the language of the Sandomierz interviewees, the Klimontów tragedy of spring 1945 could be described, in rather theatrical form, as a clash of two revenge discourses: the (real) Polish discourse, and the (presumed) Jewish one, but this would not be an objective description. As mentioned above, there are no revenge motifs in the Jewish accounts, already cited in this paper; their dominant discourse is of mistreatment, mourning, and withdrawal. Only the Polish perception of post-war reality is consistently organized around the word “revenge.” To a certain extent, this is related to the nature of the two types of sources mentioned above — unlike the Jewish accounts, which were recorded at a commission that threatened punishments for false testimony, the Polish stories, obtained by a journalist and anthropologists six decades after the war, gave license to express emotion.

The revenge motif is also clearly present in the interpretation proffered by Eugeniusz Niebelski, taken up unquestioningly in his informants’ statements. In this version, the murder of the Jews is explained, and subsequently...

justified, by the fact that one of them was allegedly an NKVD collaborator. This motif is echoed in the words of another Klimontów resident, cited by Radosław Januszewski, the author of the article “Szkoła tysiąclecia.” Yet, the material he gathered in the course of his journalistic investigation, as well as what arose in the ethnographic interviews carried out between 2005 and 2008, suggest that this angle may be a result of the complex connections attributed to the informant by other witnesses to these events.

A certain P., the one that the ironic phrase, “Hand over more eggs and give up more yard birds,” was used to refer to, lives in Klimontów too, and is the president of the local Home Army Veterans’ Club. After the Soviets came in, he went into hiding in the area — so he said. Before that, he was in the Klimontów Supply Corps. He was active in the Home Army. They were rooting out informers. “Some of the informers collaborated with ‘them,’” he said. “Them” means the NKVD. They shot one of them... Abram.... There was a pogrom, [P.] admits, but he and his men weren’t involved. He says they were in hiding in Lublin at the time. Then there were sentences...[and] the court. The NKVD and the UB [the Polish Office of Security and the Secret Police — J.T.-B.] were all in Jewish hands. He claims that the people who staged the pogrom weren’t Home Army people. “They were either people from the Peasant Battalions [another underground fighting force during the Second World War — J.T.-B.] or non-allied individuals. It was for looting. Don’t you listen to what people say. It was a group of looters. Perhaps

92 Although there is only mention of one Jew, the sentence is in the plural form: “Some of them [i.e., the Jews returning to Klimontów after the front passed — J.T.-B.] immediately started collaborating with the NKVD and the new authorities, casting a shadow over all the others,” Niebelski, W dobrach Ossolińskich, p. 66.

93 Expansion of the initials of the words “Home Army” in keeping with the original Polish “A Kury, A Kaczkii,” as in Januszewski, “Szkoła tysiąclecia.” “And the chickens? And the ducks?” laughs the young man who has just delivered the coal. That’s how they’re known here. The irony comes from the fact that all their underground guerrilla warfare [according to some peasants — editor’s note] boiled down to was stealing chickens from farmers.”

94 This information is confirmed in the investigation materials, quoted further on in the article. In Klimontów today, the same group (including J.P. and D.S.) murdered and robbed a female Home Army liaison officer (information from reports for 2008). The following is a quotation from one of the statements: “They not only murdered Jews, but also a female Home Army liaison officer...with a suitcase full of dollars.” Email information sent on October 24, 2008.
they’d asked for what they’d left with the farmers when they’d gone into hiding.” But he did have dealings with the court in the case of the murderer of the Jews. In 1961, he was a witness in the voivodeship court in Radom, about the killing of this Jew. They found the murderer, who got eight years. This guy G. from Klimontów.95 The court asked why he did it. Because his brother had been an officer in Lviv and the Jews had tortured him to death. Poured tar and hot water from a balcony as the army was marching underneath, after the capitulation. P. is convinced that’s gospel. The things the Jews are capable of! He claims that he didn’t see G. actually killing [the Jew]. He boasted about it afterward. He testified to having heard it. He was in prison himself at the time. He was arrested — so he says — for irregularities in the borough cooperative, but the prosecutor mostly asked him about that murder case. He got a mild sentence afterward.96

The discourse of revenge permeating the Polish memory of the post-war murders of Jews in Klimontów is reinforced here by the anecdotal thread of “Jews pouring tar and hot water [on the heads of Polish officers],” returning again and again to the concept of “Jewish Communism” (“żydokomuna”).

95 See IPN, file no. 896/228; the material from this investigation, such as that relating to J.P. himself, will be dealt with in another article.
96 Not everyone in Klimontów shares the same view of P.’s distinction. In June 2008, the Institute of National Remembrance and the Jewish Historical Institute received a letter that reads as follows: “I enclose, as a reminder, a photocopy of the article about the murder of the Jewish population in Klimontów. Editor Januszewski was right on the scent of the suspects who came into contact with those acts, in tackling the name of P. — J.P. to be precise. He was a member of the NSZ [National Armed Forces, a third underground armed force during the Second World War — J.T.-B.], and never dirtied his hands fighting the Germans, according to witnesses. In dark alleys, in deathly silence and fear, one can hear about the exploits of that ‘guerilla’ to this day. Although over 60 years have elapsed, there is some kind of strange fear of talking about this subject. Investigations into the matter by the law failed to bring appropriate outcomes. Both the P. brothers bought or built tenements — where did they get the money, I ask? They are people without trades or qualifications. J.P. appointed himself president of the Home Army. Passersby look at the plaque by the memorial bearing his name and rank of lieutenant, with disgust and contempt.... The parishioners go out of their minds at the sight of him entering the church with the standard.... The facts revealed in the article and heard from witnesses who are still alive and their descendents cry out for vengeance. God, where are you?” Anonymous letter, dated June 11, 2008, signed “Righteous Among the Nations,” sent to the addresses of the Institute of National Remembrance and the Jewish Historical Institute, copy in the author’s archives.
This concept, which is firmly rooted in the popular thought of the Polish provinces, was based on the assumption of a “natural” link between Communism and the Jews. This theory diverted the antipathy surrounding Communism toward Jews — which in some places in the Polish provinces could serve as a sort of declared standard, regardless of real behaviors and sympathies. The reasoning, in this case, took the form of the syllogism: We hate Communism, there are many Jews among the Communists, so we hate Jews. As the Communist terror intensified, so the above implication became radicalized. Jews coming out of hiding settled for safety in the vicinity of Citizens’ Militia (the Communist police force) stations, or maintained contacts with Red Army soldiers, militiamen and the security forces, for


98 This is often described in the categories of “over representation of Jews in the Ministry of Security systems.” It begs the question of whether this fixation on the variously interpreted “over representation” (see, for example, differences in approach between authors such as Olejnik, Polityka narodowościowa, p. 394 and note 221; and Adam Kopciowski, “Zajścia antyżydowskie na Lubelszczyźnie w pierwszych latach po drugiej wojnie światowej,” Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały, no. 3 (2007), p. 183). In effect, a consequence of the post-war “equal rights for Jews,” is not a symptom of the real disagreement with these equal rights, similar to that which came to the fore in the form of the pre-war calls for the numerus clausus [the restrictions on the number of Jews admitted to certain professions, universities, etc. — translator’s note]. See Slavoj Žižek, Lacan (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2007), p. 84: “While we are prepared to accept the Jew..., there is always some detail that annoys us.... This...makes them alien, irrespective of how much they attempt to behave in a similar way to us.” The involvement of some Jews in Communist state systems was an attempt to gain influence on the country’s politics after the Holocaust experience. In time, it transpired that, in the overall account, they would be judged for this far more harshly than ethnic Poles. See Grabski, Działalność komunistów, pp. 33–34 and notes 24–27.

99 See, for example, information from the Jewish committee in Opatów about the attack on the Jewish aid point there on August 10–11, 1945, prevented by “the deterrent of a Soviet soldier on patrol outside the elementary school building,” UWK II, 1242. This is followed by information about the murder of the Herckowiczes, a married couple, on September 9, 1945, in Opatów, and of Majer (?) Zylberberg on September 5, 1945. See also the report of the district Jewish committee in Radom, dated August 31, 1945, which includes information about attacks on: the “Praca” Labor Cooperative in Radom (August 11, 1945), a Jewish shelter there (during the night of August 28/29, 1945), the apartment of Lewental in Radom (August 29, 1945), and Jewish laborer Aron Łęga
similar reasons, and also joined the Citizens’ Militia and the army, which provided the easiest accessible symbolic representation of Communism.

The Fourth Version of the Polish Story

Finally, these versions of the events of April 1945 in Klimontów are compared with excerpts from the interrogation records of the murder suspects in the IPN archives. Although inconclusive, they provide insights into the social climate surrounding the murder, in effect, undermining Eugeniusz Niebelski’s heroic version of the killing. A special verification mechanism is used on the ethnographic source: The language of participants in the events, although distorted by the interrogation report, enables the scholar to discern their intentions and form an opinion about the circumstances of the murder far more rapidly than would be possible on the basis of the language in other documents.

The picture of the investigation that emerges from these testimonies is reminiscent of a decrescendo: As time goes on, the investigating authorities showed decreasing determination to find and prosecute the suspects,
who remained at large.\textsuperscript{100} As a result, none of them were convicted. Also, in the course of the proceedings, none of them pleaded guilty. They gradually retracted certain elements of their accounts, claiming they had been forced into it by beatings. The nature of their statements also changed, and they evidently consulted with one another. From the initial graphic descriptions, genre details are gradually removed until the testimonies ultimately become misleading laments on the prosecutors’ violence.\textsuperscript{101}

Below is an excerpt from the testimony of Stefan Wyrzykowski, known by the pseudonym Siła (power, strength or force), without any party affiliation stated, given at the regional military prosecutor’s office in Kielce, on July 4, 1950 (the style reflects the original):

A few days later, I went to Klimontów to the shoemaker and the pharmacy. After finishing my errands, I went to Batorski’s restaurant — I don’t know his first name — to eat dinner.... Batorski offered me vodka.... While in the square, I also saw Jan Markot, Szymański Stanisław, Białowąs Bolesław, and Kalita Władysław. When it was dark, Batorski joined me, gave me a machine gun with a sawn-off barrel and butt, and told me to stand on the street and keep watch.... After about an hour, Batorski came to me again, took the machine gun off me and told me to go home, and I left. Before, when he gave me the machine gun, I saw Jan Markot and Szymański Stanisław walking along the street, [but] did not see any weapons on them. One of them turned to the left side of the

\textsuperscript{100} IPN, file no. Pr II 390/50, IPN, file no. Ki 30/542, files on Władysław Kalita: arrest warrant September 29, 1950. “In March to April 1945, Kalita Władysław, together with others armed with unidentified firearms in Klimontów, Sandomierz district, murdered four Polish citizens of Jewish nationality,” in view of “the justified fear that the accused will go into hiding.” Kalita and Bolesław Białowas, both in hiding, were arrested together with other suspects, including Stefan Wyrzykowski, Stanisław Szymański, Jan Markot, and Stanisław Adwent. They were all released in January 1951. Among Adwent’s case documents is a motion from his wife requesting the release of her husband, dated January 17, 1951.

\textsuperscript{101} Testimony of Stanisław Adwent, ps. Śmieszny, November 8, 1950: “...I signed this record because I feared being beaten, as the man who questioned me shouted at me,” IPN, file no. Pr II 371/50; IPN, file no. Ki 30/529. IPN, “Official Note,” November 8, 1950, signed by Jerzy Lichacz and investigating officer Jerzy Jaskolski: “Jaskolski Jerzy declared that suspect Adwent Stanisław retracted his testimonies given on September 14, 1950, because...they were forced by beating. To my question as to whether he had been beaten at that time, for he was questioned in my presence, he stated that he had not been beaten, and had testified in accordance with the truth and the...facts.”
street, and the other to the right..., while I stood with that KBK machine gun on the street. At that time, I heard ten or more shots from the direction where Szymański and Jan Markot had gone, after which I left and went home. The next day, I found out from people, from whom I no longer remember, that some Jews had been killed in Klimontów, although how many, they did not say. I was not there at that murder, but Kalita Władysław, Batorski and around 10 people from Łownica went...”

**After the murder of the Jews, what was looted from them and where were those things taken?**

What was looted from those Jews after their murder, I don’t know. Walking home, I heard a cart going there, but whether it was [loaded] with things looted from those Jews or not, I don’t know. I myself received nothing from that attack. According to my understanding, Batorski was the commander and organizer of the entire operation. After that event, I did not see either Stanisław Szymański or Jan Markot at all, and where they went, I do not know...102

Testimony of Stanisław Szymański, pseudonym Gołąb, resident of Mała Wieś, Wiśniowa district, party affiliation as Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza — PZPR), given at the regional military prosecutor’s office in Kielce, on May 23, 1950:

In March 1945 (I don’t remember the exact date), when I was in Klimontów, in the Sandomierz district for one evening, I was in possession of a ‘seven’-system pistol, which I was given by Batorski, his first name I do not know, and where he lived I do not know, which I gave back to the same Batorski.

**With what aim and why did this Batorski give you a ‘seven’-system pistol?**

[He said that on the critical day, he went with a friend to Klimontów, to a restaurant owned by Szczęśniak or Sośniak, according to the sign]. While we were both sitting at the table, some individuals immediately started coming into our room, among whom I recognized Stefan Wyrzykowski, a resident in the village of Domaradzice, and I knew Adwent Stanislaw from the village of Mała Wieś, in the Wiśniowa district, and Kalita Władysław from the village of Pęsławice, and there were five of them I did not know at all. We all together drank vodka

102 IPN, file no. Pr II 312/50, IPN, file no. Ki 30/503.
there. [There is a description here of an accident with the gun, caused by Stanislaw Adwent, as a result of which someone sitting at the table dies. The people gathered there take the body to the cemetery, and the testifier was given the gun by Batorski; after which they returned by cart to Klimontów — J.T.-B.].... We went in the cart along one of the streets in Klimontów, the name of that street was I don’t know, and we stopped outside one house, where there were shots inside.... After a moment, they started throwing clothes, linen, shoes out of that apartment, which I, together with the others, packed into the cart. After taking those things, Batorski came up to me, ordered me to give him back the pistol, which I gave him, while he designated several of the others to take those things to an arranged place, but where they went with those things I do not know.... There, at that site, in that house, three Jews were shot dead.... But exactly how many Jews were killed I do not know, as for Stefan Wyrzykowski, Adwent Stanislaw, and Kalita Wladyslaw, what they did in connection with the murder I could not see, because it was a dark night.

**What was your aim and with whom did you go to Jan Szczęśniak’s restaurant a second time?**

The [second] time, I went to that restaurant in order to meet with the restaurateur, so that he would give me some of the things taken from the murdered Jews. But at the time, there were a lot of people and he didn’t want to talk to me.... Ultimately, I did not receive anything from the attack and did not go back to him again.

**What happened to those murdered Jews later?**

What happened to those murdered Jews later, I do not know. In any case, we left them as they were, shot, in the apartment.103

Testimony of Kalita Wladyslaw, born on June 1, 1912, member of the Peasant Battalions [Polish Second World War resistance movement and partisan organization — translator’s note], pseudonym Wisla (Vistula), resident of Kolonia Pęcławksa, given at the District Office of Public Security in Sandomierz, on September 30, 1950:

On arriving at the Soviet Union army site, I asked Witold [Commander of the Peasant Battalions unit — J.T.-B.] what to do now, and he answered that anyone who wanted to should start work in a [suitable]...

job.... I told Witold I was joining the Citizens’ Militia (CM) and he answered, that as long as you have the skills you can work in the CM.... I joined the CM and worked as station superintendent in Jurkowice for about four months. I was released at my own request.... As for the Jews, I shall explain how I did not know that, in fall 1943, the Jews were taken in carts by a group from the Peasant Battalions in Pęcławice Górne, and I did not take part.... I do not know who took them. I shall explain that, in the spring of 1945, I was not in Klimontów and I did not take part in the murder of the Jews.... I was in hiding because I heard from people I did not know, at the market in Klimontów, in the spring of that year, that the office of security and the militia were arresting all partisan soldiers... 104

In spite of proof that Kalita Władysław was in Klimontów on the critical day, the investigating officer from the regional military prosecutor’s office in Kielce decided to discontinue the investigation against him and not to question any more witnesses. 105 Similarly, the cases against the five other suspects — Stanisław Szymański, Stefán Wyrzykowski, Bolesław Białowąs, Stanisław Adwent, and Jan Markot — were also dismissed. 106

“The Excluded Economy”: A Picture of the Purge (or Cleansing)

The discourse of revenge, recodifying “antisemitism” as “anti-Communism,” provided justification for the violence experienced by the Jews returning to Klimontów after the occupation. It was an attempt to disguise something that is impossible to conceal: the gains that some residents in the Sandomierz provinces made from the “disappearance” of the Jews. This is clearly evident in this small town where 125 properties passed into “Polish hands,” along with all the mills in the area. The murder of Aron Kupferblum and

105 Decision dated January 25, 1951; see also “Official Note” by the investigating officer from the regional military prosecutor’s office in Kielce regarding the decision by the head of Section III of the district office of public security in Sandomierz not to question “witnesses with evidence in the case of Stanisław Szymański and others,” dated January 26, 1951, IPN, file no. Pr II 371/50, IPN Ki 30/529.
106 IPN, file no. Pr II 313/50 IPN, file no. Ki 30/530. The case of the investigation against J.P. (IPN, file no. Zh. Ko 393/91) and M.G. (IPN, file no. 896/228) will be discussed separately.
three members of the Penczyna family, Józef, Chaim, and Rywka, at Polish hands, and the subsequent rapid departure of their potential successors, effectively rendered the local mill industry *Judenrein*, once again. This time for good.

It would be expedient to consider whether this spontaneous “nation-alization” of one branch of local industry, which preceeded the official nationalization in 1953 and which, on the surface, looked like a chain of unrelated events did not constitute ethnic cleansing. While a series of individual occurrences apparently does not constitute a process of ethnic cleansing, it is often the end result of an explosion of deeply rooted resentments and tensions ignited under certain circumstances. Only the effects of this process — fear and flight — reveal its intentional nature. Events snow-ball so that the escalating violence and demonstrative bloodshed provoke panic among the persecuted group and push them to flee. Sometimes, a chain reaction is set in motion by the presence of “ethnic entrepreneurs” (a term coined by David Maybury-Lewis, i.e., provocateurs and beneficiaries of the process). Sometimes, actors on the sidelines unwittingly assume this role.

All the Jewish accounts cited above testify to the presence of fear, variations of which are the subject of Jan Tomasz Gross’s book. Lejb Zylberg, Sala Ungerman, Mordechaj Penczyna, and Zelman Baum saw the murders in the spring of 1945 as confirmation that their decision to leave was right. The murders took place at a point when Klimontów was already almost entirely “cleansed.” Nevertheless, in the context of the wider Kielce region, it may be seen as among the “triggers” of the process that reached its climax a year later in the Kielce Pogrom.

If this hypothesis is correct, the context of the above phenomenon should be broadened to include the following elements, derived from various systems of reference and correlated with the “disappearance” of Klimontów’s Jews:

1) The most important was the systematic extermination of the Jews by the occupying forces. This dramatically reduced the number of Jews in the Polish provinces, depriving them of the critical mass necessary for self-defense.

2) The wartime depravation\textsuperscript{108} of the rural areas around Sandomierz in connection with the removal of legal protection for the Jews, and, if they managed to go into hiding, with their dependence on their neighbors, was a key factor. As various accounts cited in this article show, this proved to be an extremely fragile guarantee of survival.\textsuperscript{109}

3) The Kielce region was the operating platform for the largest formation outside the Lublin region of the National Armed Forces (NSZ), so called District 5, which, on the pretext of “cleansing the territory of subversive and criminal gangs from hostile minority formations,” gave a higher priority to killing Jews, as well as Russians and Ukrainians, than to fighting the occupying forces.\textsuperscript{110} From the moment that the NSZ was incorporated into the Home Army, which put equal effort into eliminating Communist organizations and the Volksdeutsche,\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{108} In writing about “Wartime depravation,” the author is certainly not claiming that anomic behaviors of Christians, with respect to their Jewish neighbors, did not occur also before the war. This issue is discussed in detail, with regard to the dynamic relation between anti-Judaism and antisemitism, in this author’s book, \textit{Legendy o krwi} (p. 59\textsuperscript{ff}), and also in her paper “Sprawiedliwi niesprawiedliwi.”

\textsuperscript{109} See AZIH, file no. 301/2425, Zelman Baum on the reaction of the Jews to the German announcement of an “amnesty” for those who escaped from the Sandomierz Ghetto: “Seeing that the Poles were robbing and murdering them, [the Jews] returned to Sandomierz.... Over 10,000 Jews from surrounding villages gathered together.” See, for example, the account by Dora Soberman, who witnessed, as a child, the attacks by local farmers; and the accounts of Basia Goldsztajn, AZIH, file no. 301/2793, Chaja Szafran, AZIH, file no. 301/3084, and Henryk Scharff, AZIH, file no. 301/17; see also the statement by Lejb Zylberberg, who walked from Zwoleń [85 km to the north of Sandomierz — translator’s note] to Klimontów: “In the Sandomierz district our situation got worse. The farmers didn’t even want to give [us] a little water,” Zylberberg, \textit{A Yid fun Klementov}.


\textsuperscript{111} “Every worker, peasant, and intellectual who succumbs to Communist propaganda, collaborates with the Communists, becomes a traitor today, just like a Volksdeutscher...Poles must not be Communists, lest they cease to be Poles.” \textit{Biuletyn Informacyjny} [of the Home Army], no. 38 (193), November 23, 1943, quoted after Ryszard Nazarewicz, \textit{Drogi do wyzwolenia. Koncepcje walki z okupantem w Polsce i ich treści polityczne 1939–1945} (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1979), p. 361.
this tendency was certainly reinforced, especially among rank-and-file soldiers. This had a critical impact on the morality of the rural

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112 Marek Szapiro writes as follows about the union of the Home Army with the NSZ. See Marek Szapiro, *Nim słońce wzejdzie… Dziennik pisany w ukryciu 1943–1944*, Feliks Tych Introduction, Feliks Tych in collaboration with Magdalena Prokopowicz eds. (Warsaw: ZIH, 2007), p. 505: “To me it is incomprehensible how the NSZ could be incorporated into the Home Army. If one is to believe the organs of the Peasant Alliance, at least until March [1944], they were an instrument of tacit collaboration in the field of eliminating peasants, Jews, etc…” See also Krzysztof Urbański, *Zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie radomskim* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, 2004), pp. 231–232. See, in this context, Michał Basa, *Opowiadania par-tyzanta* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spódzielnia Wydawnicza, 1984), p. 128, 167. The history of “Pomsta,” a partisan soldier with the Home Army, and a “Żydek” [Yid], killed by the NSZ (the author has an account by Ryszard Maj, ps. “Ryś-1” [Lynx-1], a partisan soldier in the detachment under Marian Soltyśiak — “Barabasz,” dated May 9, 1957, which attributes this execution to his own Home Army detachment). On the differences in attitudes to Jews between rank-and-file underground soldiers and the Home Army leadership, see the account of Henryk Scharff from the Koprzywnica area, AŻIH, file no. 301/17: “The commanders of units subordinated to the Home Army, the Union for Armed Struggle [Związek Walki Zbrojnej], and the Peasant Battalions, in spite of the guidelines from the Polish underground authorities, carried out death sentences on Jews they caught.” See also Salomon Reis’s account, AŻIH, file no. 301/1791; the reaction of two Home Army partisan soldiers on meeting two Jewish fugitives in a wood near Pionki: “‘What, you Jews? We’ll finish you off before the day is out.’ They bound us up with cords and led us off. We were sure we were going to our deaths, and we tried to convince them that our death would be of no value to them, that we had gold hidden far away.... Two officers, a lieutenant and a second lieutenant, came up to us...‘Huragan’ (Hurricane) was the pseudonym of the lieutenant, commander of the detachment. They called us over, and the company commander... said: ‘The Polish government in England doesn’t pay us for Jews. So if you want to look after yourselves, you can stay, and we won’t do you any harm.’ After that, they received us well, gave us food, and work in the kitchen.... About 10km from Pionki, there was another group of partisans, Marion. They didn’t accept Jews, and explained to our commander that they shouldn’t be keeping us, that these [Jews] are people who should be annihilated. Their commander, Marian, said: ‘Give them to me, I’ll do them in.’ The doctor [who later turned out to be Dr. Julian Aleksandrowicz, and on parting from the author [Salomon Reis], asked him ‘not to tell anyone he’s a Jew, because they’d be sure to kill him’] stood up for us and cited higher authority.” See also Halina Zawadzka, *Ucieczka z getta* (Warsaw: Fundacja Karta, 2001), p. 121; Julian Aleksandrowicz, *Kartki z dziennika doktora Twardego* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001), e.g., pp. 61–70; Abraham Furman’s account, AŻIH, file no. 301/4716. On the role of the Peasant Battalions and the Air Company of the Home Army in the murder of Sandomierz Jews in hiding, see Zelman Baum’s account, AŻIH, file no. 301/2425; see also Aleksandra Bańkowska, “Partyzantka polska lat 1942–1944 w relacjach żydowskich,” *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały*, no. 1 (2005), pp. 148–164.
Sandomierz region, effectively providing “patriotic” licence and pretext to murder Jews.

4) Among the circumstances intensifying local antipathy toward Jews, it would not be out of place to mention that Charles de Prévôt’s paintings in Sandomierz Cathedral — legends of the Jewish desire for Christian blood (blood libel) — had a particularly strong effect. In the context of the Kielce Pogrom, Krystyna Kersten aptly called these factors “social dynamite.” The force of such dynamite was apparent with almost every pogrom in post-war Poland.

113 See the account of Rózia Unger (AŻIH, file no. 301/3699), who was taken in by peasant farmers near Sandomierz: “I was afraid to go back to the Jews; whenever I played with children I was always told that Jews murder children to make matzah [ unleavened bread].” Likewise, the account of nine-year-old Ludwik Jerzycki (AŻIH, file no. 301/2755), “I cried, I didn’t want to go to the Jews, because they’d told me that Jews kill children.”

114 Krystyna Kersten, “Wstęp” [Introduction] to: Bożena Szaynok, Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946 (Warsaw: Bellona, 1992), p. 21. Attempts, successful and unsuccessful, at inciting unrest on the basis of rumors of ritual murder: in Kraków (August 11, 1946), Kalisz (July 22–23, 1946), Lublin (September 18–19, 1946), Kolbuszowa (September 24, 1946), Mielec (October 25, 1946), and Szczecin (autumn 1946), see AŻIH, file no. 301/4567, testimony given by Ida Gerstman on July 11, 1946, after fleeing from Kielce in July 1946: “I reached Słowiki at five in the morning. At the station, I heard one of the women saying: ‘I’m going on my way, I’m taking my knife, if I catch a Jew or a Jewess I’ll cut slices of meat from them and salt them.’... On the train, I noticed them watching me. One woman pointed to me: ‘That’s a miserable Jewess, throw her under the train.’ Another said: ‘We’ll hand her over to the militia at the next station — let them shoot her.’ At the next station, the women grabbed me by the head and the legs and dragged me onto the track to throw me under the train. I asked them to spare me my life, to which they replied that I was a Jewess, so I must die. Children started throwing stones at me. I asked a railwayman to shoot me, because I couldn’t take the suffering, but he answered: ‘You want to die an easy death, no hurry, you’ll suffer a little more yet.’ Luckily, a militiaman was walking past. He ordered them to let me go, [and said] he would sort me out himself. They let me go, and the militiaman ordered me to give him money for beer. I gave him my last 500 złoty. He let me go free. I got on the train and again the women recognized me and handed me to the militia, screaming, ‘Murder the Jewess scum!’ The railway militiaman took me to the railway prison. That was in Jędrzejów. I was taken to a cell where another Jew had been brought, who had also been dragged off a train after they decided he was a Jew. In front of me, the militiaman kicked him, and a civilian in the office hit him in the face. A group of children threw stones at us through an open window... A young girl in a school overcoat shouted: ‘Get out from under that bed and we’ll stone you to death. Your good times are over. You’ll all have to die for our blood now. We’ll put up a golden monument to Hitler and ask God for a newborn Hitler.’” Rumors of children disappearing that did not provoke pogroms were also
5) In comparison with the factors mentioned above, this one seems marginal, but it too had its place in the chain of circumstances surrounding the purge. It is the memory of Polish-Jewish rivalry and the fight for trade in the 1930s, which was particularly intense in the central industrial Region, as well as the glaring reminder in the shape of the Jewish tenement houses.

It is unlikely that anyone in Klimontów planned a “final solution to the Jewish question”; the desire was merely to exploit a situation created by others — the Nazis, the partisan formations, and common thugs — to secure a beneficial outcome in the rivalry with the Jewish millers and tenement owners that had been simmering since pre-war times. In the feverish few months after the liberation, people simply failed to notice that, in the course of the war, the ground rules had shifted. Thus, the evident gains from economic victory were necessarily accompanied by other less tangible losses in the moral sphere. These were such that by taking advantage of the effects of thuggery and the decline in moral standards, the popular enfranchisement, through the availment of Jewish property, and the “Polonization” of Klimontów’s mill industry, became irrevocably implicated in the aftermath of the Holocaust in the Sandomierz region.

Toward a Macrohistorical Perspective

Klimontów is just one of many small towns and villages in central Poland where Jews were murdered after the Germans were expelled from the region. In his book, *Po Zagładzie. Stosunki polsko-żydowskie 1944–1947* (Warsaw: IPN, 2008), Marek J. Chodakiewicz writes that these murders were often closely linked to the cooperation of Jews with the Communist authorities.


In this article, the author has shown the benefits that may be accrued from leveling such charges, which, in effect, provide justification for the murders and looting. Similar situations are described in testimonies by witnesses from other regions in Poland. Take, for instance, this account from Wąchock:116

After the occupation, my cousin Binsztok Chaim and I, along with five friends, came out of the woods. We went to live in our hometown of Wąchock. There, three weeks later, a few Home Army soldiers came to our house: Kolczynski [Kolczyński, Kołczynski] Czesiek, Szafrański Witek, Kwieczyński [Kwieciński] (it was on 10th [month omitted — J.T.-B.] 1945).

They came in, armed with guns. Chaim Binsztok and Kornwaser fled when they noticed they had guns. Seven people were left in the room. They started talking to us. They asked how many of us there were. We answered that there were nine. They counted only seven, and asked where the others were. We made the excuse that they had gone out for water. I said that so I could go outside and see what was going on. I noticed that were lots of armed assailants, there might have been about eight, all around the house. I didn’t have the heart to escape, because some of them were still in the house. I went back to our assailants and talked to them again. Again, they asked where the others were, so I said I couldn’t find them. They demanded their return, because they wanted to murder all nine of us, so that there would be no trace of us left. I told them to come back tomorrow, and then they would find the other two as well. They said tomorrow would be too late. I went hot and cold when I heard their words. I winked at my men to go out one by one. They did. The thugs didn’t stop them. I stayed there alone with them. When there were none of my friends left, I made my escape too, and they took everything from the house. Lots of valuable things.

After that event, on March 12, 1945, I moved to Łódź and rented an apartment. Eight days later, on March 20, I went back to Wąchock for my friends. That same evening, we had a second break-in, by the same assailants. Two people, Josef Wajsblum and Mendel Brit, who had just returned from Auschwitz, were shot dead. Josef Wajsblum was 32 years old, a merchant before the war, lived in Wąchock, and all of his family had perished in Auschwitz. Mendel Brit, aged 23, lived with his parents

116 Testimony of Efraim Wajnsztajn, Łódź, April 4, 1945, ŻIH, file no. 301/215, b. in Wąchock, July 16, 1909.
before the war, studied in a yeshiva (talmudical academy), and also lost everyone during the occupation. After the murders, we left the town and moved to Łódź.

Chaim Binsztok still had to go back to Wąchock to take back the house, which belonged to both of us. While he was in Wierzbnik, eight kilometers from Wąchock [for] eight days, he referred his case to the court. The case was to be heard on Friday, May 30, 1945, in Wierzbnik. Chaim wanted me to come...[there]. I arrived in Wierzbnik on Tuesday, May 27, at five in the morning, and went to some Jews who lived...[there] and asked after my cousin Chaim Binsztok. They told me that he had gone to Wąchock on Tuesday at one...[pm], to collect files from the borough offices to present in court. On the same day, at five [pm]..., he wanted to get back to Wierzbnik, because he was afraid of staying in Wąchock. He went to the station to go to Wierzbnik. His murderers were already waiting for him, and they shot him dead at the station.... They also wounded a Christian, a railway worker, Polowiec [Polowiec]. After the first bullet, which wounded him, Chaim Binsztok tried to escape, but he couldn’t run far. The murderer went up to him and killed him on the spot.

The reception that Jews experienced on returning to their hometowns is also illustrated by the following excerpt from a memoir from post-war Izbica:

Shortly after we arrived, a few residents started walking behind us. They didn’t say anything, just followed us step by step, as if they wanted to test us. With every minute, the crowd grew denser and we were overtaken by increasing unease.... I went toward the cemetery. As I came close to the hill with the path leading to an open gate, I noticed one of my former schoolmates running toward me. He was holding a revolver in his right hand .... I started to run as fast as I could toward the police station, which was half a kilometer way.... I expected it would now be the Russian military authorities’ headquarters.... We told the Russian officer on duty that we had survived the war and now couldn’t walk around our town safely. The officer explained that he wasn’t in a position to help us.... “Go to a big city. It will be safer there. No one will recognize you there.” He gave us a few grenades and showed us how to use them. In the end he put us on a Russian truck and told the driver to...[take us to] Lublin.117

117 Białowitz, *Bunt w Sobibórze*, p. 228. A similar attitude to returning Jews is also described by the author of the Zamość memoir.
Conclusion

Asked today why the Jews left their town shortly after they returned to it, the former deputy chief councillor replied:

[On the one hand,] what [did they have to stay] for? They didn't have family. But, on the other hand, the thing was that some Poles just didn't accept the Jews after the war.

To understand what this really means, one needs to go back to 1943. In his notes from the occupation years, Marek Szapiro cites an article from the underground press: “Rodzi się nowe oblicze Polski” (The New Face of Poland Is Emerging). This article gives some insight into the hope that the “disappearance” of the Jews would provide the solution to the “switched-off economy” problem:

The decline in the number of Jews will fundamentally change the mood in our commerce, crafts, and small industry. Many people who previously jostled for small scraps of land will now find new areas of work after relatively short periods of vocational training.118

Szapiro, *Nim słońce wejdzie*, pp. 576–577. Szapiro’s comment: “If it was not so sad, by all measures, it ought to be displayed in a camera obscura. What a comical contrast, ‘Jews’ on the one side, and ‘people’ on the other. The most convenient [explanation]... for the overcrowding [in various commercial areas]...is that the existence of Jews [is to blame].... The fact that the vocational structure of the Jews might have been spread out by allowing them access to other trades and professions is deliberately forgotten. The fact that, out of the more than 10,000 young Jews who graduated from high school every year, barely 100 were accepted for [studies in] medicine, the polytechnics, or pharmacy is deliberately forgotten. The fact that a lack of one’s own skills cannot be recompensed by exterminating others [who are] more skillful is forgotten; it is better to cooperate with them and learn from them — you can learn anything with practise. Competitive establishments run cheaply — at the cost of [eliminating] the Jews — do not necessarily mean permanent success. Certain right-wing groups in Poland are claiming triumph too early. On the quiet, they are pleased that the Germans have ‘freed’ them from the Jews — whether or not this was with various kinds of cooperation will be assessed after the war. They are fooling themselves that, in turn, the Allies will free them from the Germans. But these things aren’t so simple. Liberation from the Germans does not mean liberation from one’s own faults. These gentlemen are claiming triumph too early altogether! The social order is not a straightforward, simple matter, it cannot be expressed in empty language, however well it is grammatically construed. This macabre alienation of the Jews ex post, instead of dreams of
As early as 1942, the Polish underground authorities began to predict that there would be problems if the Jews returned en masse to their abandoned establishments. Ethnic Poles felt relief at their “disappearance,” as deserved compensation for the suffering associated with the Jews “outstaying their welcome.” Great ingenuity was invested in making the return of the Jews impossible. In Żywiec, for instance, at the turn of 1945/1946, the town’s former de non tolerandis judaeis (no Jew is permitted to reside or stay over) law was evoked. Sometimes there were attempts to designate specific places where Jews could settle. The measures designed to prevent this indicate a great deal about the provincial authorities’ mentality: In Sanok, the Population Statistics Department of the District Citizens’ Militia Headquarters issued Jews with temporary identification cards bearing the letter “Ż” (Żyd is “Jew” in Polish), modeled on the German Kennkarte (basic identity document during the Third Reich period) marked with the letter “J.” The municipal national council in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski ordered the Jewish committee to send Jews to work in the mine. Likewise, a delegate from Białobrzegi to the Conference of Jewish Committees, held on May 14, 1945, reported that seven Jews had been drafted to work in the mine there. At the same conference, “Ostrowiec [municipal] officials said that German coexistence with their remnants..., who have been persecuted for being of a different ancestry, does not even deserve the veil of ‘objectivity.’ Not to mention how brutal the martyrdom of the Jews...looks...”

Across the country there is a situation, quite separate from any critical points, whereby the return of Jews to their establishments and workshops is quite out of the question, even in significantly reduced numbers. The non-Jewish population has taken the place of Jews in big and small towns, and, for the most part, this fundamental change is absolutely final. The en masse return of Jews would be considered by the population not as a restitution, but as an invasion, against which they would defend themselves, even physically,” Roman Knoll, Uwagi o naszej polityce zagranicznej nr 1, AAN, file no. 202/XIV–9, 135, quoted after: Michael C. Steinlauf, Pamięć nieprzyswojona. Polska pamięć Zagłady (Warsaw: Cyklady, 2001), p. 46. Roman Knoll (1888–1946) was a high-ranking diplomat before the war, and a high-ranking official in the government delegation for Poland during the occupation (see his life story in Polski Słownik Biograficzny, vol. XIII).

AAN, MAP, file no. 218, Report on the Congress of District starostowie from the Kraków Voivodeship, held January 17, 1946, quoted after: Olejnik, Polityka narodowościowa, p. 382.


Olejnik, Polityka narodowościowa, p. 382; see also Penkalla, “Władze o obecności Żydow,” p. 563. The information in the next two sentences is from the same source.
regulations were binding in relation to Jews.” The nature of attitudes in the provinces may be deduced from the advice given to Lublin Jews — not to talk loudly in Yiddish, not to go around the town in groups, and not to rush to return to their own names (Otwock).  

Anti-Jewish outbreaks were common across the country, like those in Lublin, Zamość, Ostrowiec, Jedlińsk, and Radom, where Jews were immediately banned from leaving the town boundaries. The campaign terrorizing Jews on trains increasingly spread to different parts of the country.

There were many explanations as to why property plundered from the Jews should be returned, from the formalistic (the property rights imposed by the Germans) to the ochlocratic, such as the following excerpt taken from a report by the mayor of Częstochowa, in July 1945:

Polish society is unable to understand the Jewish minority’s attempts to increase material possessions, and, in this regard, tends not to take account of the facts since 1939. This minority only stresses its own suffering during the war years. Conversely, they...often fail to have a feeling

123 Kopciowski, “Zajścia antyżydowskie na Lubelszczyźnie,” p. 179. See the end of Dora Soberman’s account, AŻIH, file no. 301/3743: “We told everyone we were going to get christened, because that is what daddy advised us...although the Russians were here, daddy didn’t trust our farmers. So a year passed. We were about to get christened, but then our aunt came...and took us to Kraków, to a children’s home.”

124 See Gross, Fear, p. 72; Skibińska, Powroty ocalalych, p. 515. See also [361W]: “The war had only just ended, so that the Poles did not know exactly whether to be afraid, or not to be afraid, of having hidden Jews, because it had not been announced yet...”

125 Penkalla, Władze o obecności Żydów,” p. 570. See also the letter of January 21, 1946, from the district Jewish committee in Radom to the district starosta’s offices in Radom (signed by Dr. Seweryn Kahane, inter alia, who perished six months later in the Kielce Pogrom) reiterating that representatives of the committee had twice attempted to contact the addressee of the letter on matters connected with the safety of local Jews, following the publication in Radom of anti-Jewish leaflets: “After a wait of two hours, the delegation was informed that time was up and told to come back the next day.... Despite...requesting to be seen, the next day they were told by the secretariat that the starosta had gone away and there could be no question of being seen,” APR, file no. 20.

126 See AŻIH, file no. 301/1357, the account given by Mordko Berger, Dawid Grinbaum, and Sara Grinbaum to the Historical Commission in Kraków, concerning an attack on a train carrying repatriates from Lviv. The attack took place in Tarnów; there was a robbery and the Jewish conductor was thrown off the train. There is mention of the defense mounted by the Citizens’ Militia in Bochnia and the indifference at Płaszów station. The attitudes of Polish passengers were varied. See also Kopciowski, “Zajścia antyżydowskie na Lubelszczyźnie,” pp. 195–197ff.
for the psychological changes wrought by the occupation years in Polish society...127

Analysis of documents collected by scholars, such as Adam Penkalla and Alina Skibińska, demonstrate that post-war Poland was built on an alliance between the Communists and “the people,” who gained from the Holocaust. In the Sandomierz region, there is one explanation reflecting the attitude in the provinces to the Communists, who in some smaller towns and villages were prepared to accept yesterday’s murderers and burglars into their ranks, in return for turning a blind eye to appropriation of Jewish properties.128 Taking account of the new environment, the post-war looting and killing of Jews was justified as ridding society of its “masters.”

When those people suddenly disappeared [the Jews who had come back to Klimontów after the war and who were killed], an explanation had to be found for it, didn’t it? How was it explained? It was explained by the fact that the system had changed.... Russia came for the second time [with] the Soviet Army, socialism, and the Soviet system.... and quite simply, all the masters were removed...when they murdered them.... Because, you see, they came from the world of gentry. In any case, to be honest...the Jews were gentry, because they were all rich.129

There were supposed to be no more Jews, so as soon as they came back, all the stereotypes were set in motion, from the most incomprehensible to

128 See Kopciowski, “Zajścia antyżydowskie na Lubelszyźnie,” p. 204; Skibińska, Powroty ocalanych, p. 573; see also Samuel Goldberg’s account, AZIH, file no. 301/1251 about how a farmer from Korycin, who was unwilling to return a house, hired some militiamen to get rid of the Jewish owner, [paying them with] two liters of vodka; and about the murderers of Jews working “in [the office of] security in Kraków,” AZIH, file no. 391/1908; likewise AZIH, file nos. 301/379 [1789]; 301/3054; 301/1945, 301/2425, and 301/1908.
129 See http://glosrydzyka.blox.pl/2008/05/Czy-w-pana-zylach-plynie-zydowska-krew.html. May 26, 2008, interview of Jerzy Robert Nowak. Kumor by Andrzej Kumor, the Editor-in-Chief of the minor Canadian antisemitic periodical, Glos: “Some Jewish circles look upon Poland as the Jews’ European anchor, a jumping-off place should the situation in Israel come under intense threat; Poland is the one country to which the Jews could return, settle, reclaim their lands..., in the role of ‘gentry,’ [since they] have connections and capital.”
the empirically entrenched, which were harder to correct. The blood libel legends, which justified hatred of the Jews with their murderous tendencies, were among the former. “Jewish Communism” — blaming the Jews for Communism in Poland — was among the latter. Both deflected Polish attention from what was more difficult to accept: how much certain people in the Polish provinces had enriched themselves with Jewish property. Although these crimes were committed in the name of patriotism, divisions arose in the political preferences of Poles, many of whom saw in Communism, with all its ambivalence and upheaval, the chance of a lifetime.
Gratitude And Oblivion: The Attitude of Poles and Jews toward the Righteous from 1944/45 to 2007

EWA KOŻMIŃSKA-FREJLAK

I have heard the following sentence: “War brings out the best and the worst in people. In a great fire everything is purified.” Assistance to Jews and zoological antisemitism, stony hearts and the utmost readiness for self-sacrifice for the starving.

Emanuel Ringelblum

The assistance provided by Poles to Jews during the Second World War has been the subject of numerous studies, both scholarly and those addressed to the general public. Among the more important titles, one should mention pioneering works by Filip (Philip) Friedman, publications by Tatiana Berenstein and Adam Rutkowski, Szymon Datner, Marek Arczyński and Wiesław Balcerak, Teresa Prekerowa, and Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki. The subject

3 Among the books and articles by Polish authors, the most important are the following, particularly those devoted to “Żegota” (code name for the Polish Council for Aid to Jews): Teresa Prekerowa, Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie 1942–1945 (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982); Marek Arczyński and Wiesław Balcerak, Kryptonim “Żegota.” Z dziejów Pomocy Żydom w Polsce 1939–1945 (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1979); Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, Kto ratuje jedno życie... Polacy i Żydzi 1939–1945 (London: Księgarnia Polska Orbis, 1968); Szymon Datner, Las Sprawiedliwych (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1968); Tatiana Berenstein and Adam Rutkowski, "O ratownictwie w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej," BŻIH, no. 3 (1960), pp. 3–46; Filip
of organized and individual help has become a permanent part of Polish historical literature, thanks to a series of testimonies by Jewish survivors, which were originally published in *Tygodnik Powszechny* from 1963 to 1964 under the collective title “Polacy z pomocą Żydom” (Poles Come to the Rescue of Jews), and, later, had several book editions. With time, there has been a clear shift of interest in Polish writing in this area, which previously focused predominantly on organized efforts to save Jews during the war. An initiative to collect testimonies from people involved in providing assistance to victims of the Holocaust has been launched, and important publications on Irena Sendler and Henryk Sławik were published. However, in practise, Polish researchers have not moved beyond descriptions of the facts about this subject, which also features in world literature. The authors of Western studies about people involved in assisting Jews have begun asking questions about their psychological and social characteristics.


This novel approach is evident in works by such authors as Nechama Tec,9 Eva Fogelman,10 Martin Gilbert,11 and Samuel and Pearl Oliner.12 The survivors and their attitudes to those who saved their lives have not yet been comprehensively studied. Sarah Moskovitz has addressed limited aspects of this question.13

Articles on the assistance provided by Poles to Jews began to be published soon after the war. In the immediate post-war period, the efforts aimed at saving the Jewish population were documented in both the Jewish press and across the entire spectrum of the Polish press. On the one hand,


13 Moskovitz carried out surveys among children of the Holocaust. Her conclusions about the influence of the memory of hiding on the expression of gratitude toward the rescuers were based on responses to 30 questionnaires. They indicate that the attitude of the respondents to people who provided them with shelter depends on the number of places where the child had to hide (the more places, the less opportunity the survivor had to create a stable relationship with a particular savior); the emotional tone of the relationship; the quality of the relationship between the child and the rescuer; and the latter’s willingness to listen to the child’s experiences. Sarah Moskovitz, “Barriers to Gratitude,” in Bauer, *Remembering for the Future*.
periodicals sceptical toward the new political order emphasized organized efforts of the Polish underground state, i.e., the Underground Council for Aid to Jews and the participation of Polish Catholics in rescue actions.\footnote{A typical example is the following passage by Jan Kalski: “This is why the struggle of organized social Catholicism during the occupation had its own particular style.... This particular style of resistance led to the emergence among the fighting Polish society of public opinion that openly dared to demand not just blowing up bridges, robbing banks and well-stocked German military warehouses, but, above all, to saving political prisoners, to providing assistance to Jews whose lives were threatened, punishing blackmailers, and giving bread to the hungry...I have not been authorized to name all the numerous eminent Catholic activists (both laymen and clergy) who cooperated and persevered in assisting Jews, saving the starving political prisoners....” Idem, “Z czasów walki,” Tygodnik Powszechny, no. 33 (1945); see also “Żywy pomnik kultury polskiej zanika. Dom ks. Boduena w nielasce,” Gazeta Ludowa, no. 34 (1945); F. Kohn, “Memoirs on Assistance to Jews,” Tygodnik Powszechny, no. 10 (1947).} On the other hand, the authors of articles in the Soviet Union’s Polish-language press underscored the social diversity of those involved in saving Jews.\footnote{An example is the following by Jerzy Pański: “Polish military units supported the fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; but even before the liquidation of the ghetto, bread, sugar, and clothes were thrown into the ghetto from the Polish side. This was not done by the fighters, it was done by the people of Warsaw. Ten thousand or so Jews managed to get out of the ghetto, obtain Aryan documents, and live in hiding on the Polish side. Many of them were tracked down by SS men and killed, but about 10,000 remained alive, and those who did, owe their survival to Polish help. How else could they have obtained false passports, accommodation, and, often, jobs? This was not done by the fighters or particularly dedicated individuals; it was done by the people of Warsaw. There were houses where the residents hid Jews in cellars, attics, [and] especially bricked-up rooms. The exposure of such hideouts could mean [punishment] by death, but what did not mean death during the occupation?” J[erzy] Pański, “Po czasach pogardy,” Nowe Widnokręgi, no. 18 (1944). The anonymous author (P.) of a text in Wolna Polska wrote in a similar vein: “However, the huge mass of our society, peasants, workers, and intelligentsia, proved resistant to the Nazi poison. They turned away with horror from the terrifying crime being perpetrated by the invaders in Poland. Poles who risked their lives hiding Jews, supplying arms to the ghetto fighters or smuggling food for Jewish children across the ghetto walls proved that the anti-Jewish pogrom atmosphere, whipped up for years by domestic reactionary forces, had not brought the desired results to the Nazis...” [J.] P.[ański], “Zamach na honor Polski,” Wolna Polska, no. 14 (1945).} Between 1945 and 1948/49, Polish assistance also featured in articles in the Jewish press of various ideological persuasions. Most of them were testimonies by those who owed their survival to Poles. Also, the Jewish activists of “Żegota,” the Council for Aid to Jews, published memoirs.\footnote{For instance, Basia Bermanowa, “O ostatnim roku życia Stefanii Sempołowskiej,” Przelom, no. 1–2 (1947); idem, “Pierwsza Irena. Wspomnienie o Irenie Sawickiej,” Przelom, no. 10 (1947).} On
the fifth anniversary of its establishment, Przelom published an abridged version of the first report of the council’s activities, with the following editorial comment:

The Jewish community in Poland will never forget this significant and magnificent humanitarian action during the most difficult period in the history of the Jewish people....17

The Polish and Jewish press drew on the newly written individual testimonies from the recent past. Testimonies collected by the Central Jewish Historical Commission and its local branches found their way into newspapers. They were written by people directly involved in providing assistance,18 or the recipients. Undoubtedly, such reports, published soon after the events described, have considerably shaped the model for presenting wartime connections between Poles and Jews. Significantly, in the “Polish” perspective, the theme of assistance was usually the leitmotif of these accounts. The authors frequently placed their recollections in the context of Polish-Jewish relations (before and during the war), the behavior of Jews, doomed to extermination, and the policy of the invader. In published testimonies of Jewish survivors (especially those who hid “under the surface”), in most cases the scope of description is considerably narrower as a result of the existential situation of people in hiding: cut off from the outside world, totally dependent on their rescuers. The testimonies published in the Polish press and those in the Jewish press also had different aims. Readers of the Jewish press were aware of the absolute uniqueness of each story. In the case of the Polish press, the rhetoric of the account usually left no doubt that the given case was only an example of numerous similar events. Polish titles often referred to variously defined Polish communities, whose noble actions were highlighted by the testimonies presented. The issue of assistance provided to Jews during the war was exploited for propaganda purposes in People’s Poland, becoming

17 “Z ruchu podziemnego, 5-cio lecie Rady Pomocy Żydom,” Przelom, no. 16 (1948).
an important element of a deliberately implemented historical policy after 1989, which is further discussed later in this article.

Jan Błoński, the author of the essay “Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto” (The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto),\(^\text{19}\) which marked a turning point in the analysis of Polish-Jewish wartime relations, illustrated his argument with a schematic dialog, which he considered as fairly typical of Polish-Jewish discussions on Polish antisemitism. According to Błoński, a significant part of this highly emotional dispute concerns their mutual relations during the German occupation, including assistance provided — or not provided — by Poles to the victims of the Holocaust.

You treated them [the Jews] as second-class citizens. During the war you saved too few — the Jewish voice was supposed to say in a hypothetical dialog.

There is in Israel a place commemorating people who saved Jews during the war. Thirty percent of the names on that list are Polish names — answered the hypothetical Pole, and the argument intensified.

But the percentage of Jews who survived the war in Poland is low, the lowest in Europe in relation to the total population.

In 1942, there were four Jews for every eight Poles in Warsaw. Now, how is it possible for the eight to hide the four?

Indeed, the Poles would identify Jews and pass them on to the Germans and to the police which was, let us not forget, Polish.

In every society, there is a handful of people without conscience. You have no idea what the German occupation in Poland was like. To hide one Jew meant risking the life of one’s whole family, children included.

Yes, that’s true, but there were equally brutal punishments for the underground activities, yet a great number of people were involved in them...\(^\text{20}\)

Despite the fact that over 20 years have passed since the first publication of this text\(^\text{21}\) and there have been several heated public debates over Polish-


\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 38.

\(^{21}\) Błoński’s text opened the first major discussion on Polish-Jewish relations during
Jewish wartime relations, subsequent statements continue to use the same arguments as the interlocutors in Błoński’s article. The Polish side points out that Poles are the most numerous group among those honored with the “Righteous Among the Nations of the World” medal, awarded by Israel's Yad Vashem Institute for assistance to Jews. Moreover, Poles claim that, considering the criteria for awarding the title, these data are a poor reflection of the actual involvement of Poles in saving Jews. They emphasize that the death penalty, which hung over all those who provided help to Jews, was frequently carried out, and that wartime terror was directed against Polish society as a whole. These arguments suggest that, considering the circumstances in which such activities were carried out, the contribution of Poles to the cause of saving their Jewish co-citizens was surprisingly great and deserves the highest respect. On the one hand, the recurrent claim about Jewish ingratitude, which is not brought up in Błoński’s essay, plays an important role in these debates. On the other hand, their opponents emphasize that the greatest danger for people sheltering Jews and their charges came from Poles. Therefore, discussion of rescue efforts should not pass over the denunciations. They also point out that the proportion of Polish Jews saved from the Holocaust, relative to the size of the Jewish community in pre-war Poland, was the lowest in Europe.

The arguments used by both sides are characterized by repetitiveness. This exchange follows an almost invariable scenario, as in some mysterious ritual. Analysis of these recurrent themes offers insights into the patterns of thinking about Polish assistance to Jews. At the same time, it helps to organize the description of Polish and Jewish attitudes to those engaged in providing assistance, and individual and collective efforts, undertaken on a small scale by individuals as well as institutionalized ones, representing the war. It was published again in a separate collection of essays devoted to various Jewish topics; see Jan Błoński, Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1994). A collection of the same articles, supplemented with the author’s comments, Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie), came out in 2008.

The debate over the massacre at Jedwabne was among these. Another debate that undoubtedly contributed to shaping the picture of the Holocaust in Polish consciousness centered around the crosses in the gravel pit at Auschwitz.


See the accounts published in Leo Cooper, In the Shadow of the Polish Eagle: The Poles, the Holocaust and Beyond (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 165.
policies of private or public organizations. The close connection between the attitudes of the rescuers and the rescued often makes it impossible to write about one group without considering the ways of thinking, behavior, and motives of the other. Examining this connection enables understanding of the functions of the above-mentioned ritual in both Jewish and Polish social consciousness. The analysis presented in this article refers to memoirs and testimonies written down by survivors and people involved in assisting Jews, who were sentenced to extermination by the Nazis. The author analyzes articles written during and after the war. The Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego — AŻIH), especially the Welfare Department of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce — CKŻP),25 the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee’s (the Joint),26 Department of Individual Aid, and the Department of Yad Vashem Decorations27 are important sources of documents. Equally significant have been the author’s conversations with those promoting the interests of the Polish Righteous.28 In this article, the term “the Righteous” refers to people who

25 AŻIH, CKŻP, Wydział Opieki Społecznej, file no. 303/VIII, files containing applications for material assistance to Poles who saved Jews during the occupation. They include documents from between 1946 and 1948. Most applications were submitted by Poles, although there were also many by Jews asking for aid for their Polish rescuers. From the point of view of this article, examining the applicants’ claims is particularly interesting.

26 AŻIH, AJDC, 350, the Joint’s Department of Individual Aid contains personal files; correspondence on assistance to Poles involved in saving Jews during the war and with the Commission for Aid to Poles; and the commission’s reports. These files include documents from 1946 to 1949.

27 AŻIH, Dział Odznaczeń Yad Vashem, 359; files kept in this department include documents pertaining to people for whom the procedure of awarding the Righteous Among the Nations medal has been initiated. The files include documents from 1979 to 2004, as well as earlier ones, making it possible to reconstruct the complete course of their efforts to save Jews, supporting their eligibility for the award. The documents contain information on those who submitted applications for the title of the “Righteous” — the rescued or the rescuers (their families) — and whether the survivors maintained contact with their savior after the war, and, if not, when and why they were broken. Most of the applications were submitted more than 30 years after the war, i.e., at least a quarter of a century after the medal was founded. The applicants — both Poles and Jews — frequently explain why they took up the matter so many years after the war.

28 Bożenna Rotman from the Yad Vashem Institute; Ewa Rudnik from the Israeli Embassy in Poland; Anna Drabik, Chairwoman of the “Children of the Holocaust” Association in Poland; Anna Stupnicka-Bando, Chairwoman of the Polish Society of the Righteous Among the Nations of the World; Halina Grubowska, a former staff
offered assistance to Jews during the war, and is not limited to those awarded medals for their activities by the Yad Vashem Institute.

Definition and Estimated Number of Righteous

Attempts to establish the number of Poles who helped Jews during the war encounter considerable difficulties. It is impossible to determine how many Jews or Poles of Jewish origin survived the German occupation in Poland. As a rule, Jews who sought shelter on the Aryan side were people who had had pre-war contacts among Poles — people who spoke fluent Polish, were culturally assimilated and educated, and the most likely to ask for such help and survive until liberation. After the war, some of them did not return to their Jewish identities and are not recorded in any registers. The Jews in hiding were frequently obliged to rely on the assistance of several people in succession; since most Jews were assisted by more than one Pole, it is difficult to establish their number. It is not known what proportion of Jews who received such assistance did not survive until liberation — this group must have also included many unassimilated Jews. It is also impossible to establish the exact number of Poles who assisted Jews and died before the war ended.

Moreover, for various reasons, discussed later in the article, not all Poles wished to reveal their involvement in rescuing Jews. Finally, it is also necessary to specify the kinds of activities that should be treated as acts of assistance. Those Poles who spontaneously and impulsively helped persecuted Jews on a single occasion were certainly a great deal more numerous than those who offered them assistance on a regular basis. Yet, under the circumstances at the time, the ultimate survival of Jews in hiding often also depended on such one-time gestures.

30 As Katarzyna Meloch recalls: “Of course, Basia Wardzianka did not get the Righteous Among the Nations medal. She did not save anyone, but she did save people. She also took me across the city on a tram after a Jewish nurse led me out of the ghetto. It was Basia who took me by the hand at the appointed gate and rode with me to the other...
After founding the medal and honorary title of the Righteous Among the Nations of the World, awarded to people who saved Jews during the war, the Yad Vashem Institute, established in 1953, had to formulate criteria to define activities worthy of this distinction. It may only be awarded to non-Jews who provided assistance for humanitarian reasons, risking their own lives but without deriving any material or other gains. The title is awarded on the basis of the testimony given by the saved person. With time, the interpretation of the formal requirements was modified. The rules, strictly applied at first, proved too restrictive when confronted with the realities of the occupation and the passage of time, with the consequent dwindling numbers of rescuers and the people they saved. First of all, it became clear that, in many cases, payment was a simple necessity: Few households could afford to feed additional dependents for long time periods. However, those who sheltered Jews simply as a source of income or some other material gratification, are not eligible for the medal. Finally, as Nechama Tec

end of the city. She could have been caught at any moment. She could have been killed with me....” See “Dlaczego nie znamy naszych bohaterów? Dyskutują: Elżbieta Isakiewicz, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir i Paweł Machcewicz oraz Jacek Borkowicz i Zbigniew Nosowski,” Więź, no. 4 (2005), p. 56.


32 As Ringelblum observed: “Every Jew snatched from the bloodthirsty claws of the Nazi beast had to have such an idealist — a guardian angel watching over his daily life. The majority of those people received remuneration for their work, but is there a sum of money that could reward their dedication? Those who kept Jews for money alone, and did not have strong moral motives for doing so, would sooner or later get rid of the dangerous burden, ousting the Jews from their homes. Those who continued to shelter Jews at their places did not do so just for the sake of Jewish money.” Idem, Artur Eisenbach, ed., Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1988), pp. 175–176. For more information on the “aid industry,” see Jan Grabowski, “Ratowanie Żydów za pieniądze: przemysł pomocy,” Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały, vol. 4 (2008), pp. 81–109. Grabowski emphasized that shelter providers treated “charges for their assistance as a natural practice, devoid of any stigma of betrayal or extreme exploitation. As long as the recipient respected the informal contract...,” ibid., p. 108.

33 The cases of people who became involved with Jews whom they saved are worth noting. Biographical notes on 5,333 Poles awarded the medal of the Righteous indicate that, in 90 cases, contact between the shelter providers and their charges led to their marriage (according to the author’s own research). Yisrael Gutman, ed., The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust (Jerusalem: Yad
points out, German sanctions applied equally to those who received remuneration for their assistance and to rescuers who did not expect payment for their help.\textsuperscript{34} Whether the award should be preceded by a comprehensive evaluation of the rescuers, or if the motives of their actions should be judged, are still open questions. Only after long discussions was the award given to Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, a writer and “Żegota” activist, who had expressed antisemitic views before the war (and also in her well-known appeal for assisting the Jewish community during the war, as Błoński clearly demonstrated).\textsuperscript{35} There is an ongoing debate around Andrey Sheptytsky, the Metropolitan Archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Yad Vashem has declined to honor him with the medal more than ten times, claiming that, although he did save Jews, he did not protest publicly against the Holocaust. The case is more complex and many pro and con arguments were voiced in the deliberation. The main issue was Sheptytsky’s initial support of the Germans and his endorsement of Ukrainians joining auxiliary forces.

From 1963 to 1967, the Israeli Embassy in Poland was responsible for dealing with the issue of decorations for the Polish Righteous. Following the severance of diplomatic relations with Israel, there were no intermediary institutions in Poland in applying for such awards until 1979, when the Jewish Historical Institute’s (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny — ŻIH) Department of Yad Vashem Decorations was established. Applications were sent there until 2004, when the cases were handed back to the Israeli Embassy again.

The exact number of Poles who made efforts to save Jews will never be known. For the present discussion, it is far more important to analyze the current notions about Polish involvement in assisting Jews in various sections of Polish society and among Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust,

\textsuperscript{34} Tec, \textit{Reflections on Rescuers}, p. 656. As Ringelblum wrote: “The existence of impeccable families, for instance, is based on the money paid every day by Jews to their ‘Aryan’ host. But is there a sum that would compensate for constant fear of getting caught, fear of the neighbors, the caretaker, the administrator, etc?” Idem, \textit{Stosunki polsko-żydowskie}, p. 157.

as well as their descendants, especially Israelis. Hence, the following estimates, provided by Teresa Prekerowa, should only be treated as a point of reference. Referring to registration cards from the Central Jewish Historical Commission and drawing on evaluations by other historians, she assumed that the number of Jews who had survived thanks to Polish assistance only, i.e., on the Aryan side, is between 40,000 and 60,000. Assuming that only 50 percent of the Jews in hiding survived the war, and that saving one Jew required the assistance of two to three Poles, the number of Poles involved in the process might have reached 160,000–360,000.36

The Attitude of Poles toward the Rescuers

The self-censorship in the testimonies of Poles who provided assistance to Jews is striking. As Feliks Tych observes:

> In light of the diaries analyzed for the purpose of the present study, silence is generally the most comprehensive category of attitudes by non-Jewish witnesses toward the Holocaust, and it reflects very diverse sentiments. Sometimes, it is the fear that the texts might be discovered by Germans, sometimes an expression of helplessness, sometimes a sign of indifference, or else self-defense against the realization of the magnitude of the crime perpetrated against Jews.37

Lack of emotional background is not particularly surprising in the accounts provided by people applying for the title of the Righteous. These post-war testimonies are structured according to the requirements that candidates had to meet. Hence, sometimes departing from the facts, the accounts place

36 Teresa Prekerowa, “‘Sprawiedliwi’ i ‘bierni’,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, vol. 13 (1987). As Jerzy Halbersztadt observed: “Teresa Prekerowa and Gunnar Paulsson, the only scholars so far to have made an attempt to establish the number of Poles who intentionally and directly assisted Jews, give figures from 160,000 to 360,000. These are not calculations, they cannot even be called estimates, but rather are dictated by the researchers’ intuition.” Jerzy Halbersztadt, “Program Polscy Sprawiedliwi – Przywracanie pamięci w Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich,” in *Polacy ratujący Żydów w czasie Zagłady Przywracanie pamięci* (Warsaw: Kancelaria Prezydenta RP, Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich, 2008), pp. 19–20.

particular stress on the selflessness of the assistance they provided.\footnote{Jacek Leociak drew an interesting comparison between Marian Berland’s wartime notes and post-war memoirs for testimony he prepared years later for Yad Vashem in order to obtain medals for the people who helped him during the war. Jacek Leociak, “Nie chcę ludziom na śmiech się pokazać, że Żydów u siebie chowalem...Sprawa Zdzisława i Haliny Krzyczkowskich,” \textit{Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały}, vol. 4 (2008), pp. 324–366.} Even more surprising is the fact that the authors of post-war memoirs or the accounts written down “then and there” do not write about their feelings either. Fear and anxiety about loved ones are practically the only negative emotions in such published testimonies, but also in the unpublished ones the author has analyzed.\footnote{This includes not only those memoirs described in the material attached to the files of people applying for the Righteous Among the Nations medal, which, for obvious reasons, emphasize a positive attitude toward the sheltered Jews, at least according to their authors’ intention (Department of Yad Vashem Decorations, AZIH). The same applies to the rescuers’ accounts, collected in various forms immediately after the war; Władysław Smółski, \textit{Materiały ze spuścizny Władysława Smółskiego, Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego}, catalog no. 2231.} However, for some authors, confronting even these emotions involved feelings of considerable discomfort: “I was overwhelmed by the burning feeling of shame at my own helplessness and fear,” recalled Antonina Żabińska.\footnote{Antonina Żabińska, \textit{Ludzie i zwierzęta (1939–1945)}, quoted in Tych, \textit{Długi cień Zagłady}, p. 22.} Were there really no times when the rescuers had doubts whether their endeavors made sense, despite the immense efforts they made and the thousands of unimaginable difficulties they had to overcome daily? Did they not want to talk about the subject because they were embarrassed, ashamed of their feelings, or afraid to reveal them? What hindered them? Were they afraid of accusations or condemnations? Or was giving assistance, perhaps, only possible by narrowing the temporal perspective to the “here and now”?\footnote{Irena Sendler recalled: “It was as if I were devoid of any feelings. Something drove me to this work, and these efforts. It was stronger than fear. I knew I had to do just this, to live like this and not some other way. I had moments of weakness, anxieties, fear — like everyone — but did I have any other choice?” \textit{Matka dzieci Holocaustu}, p. 277.} But if that were the case, why are these dilemmas not reflected in the reports written after the war either?

In this respect, an entry in Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz’s diary, dated “April 1943,” is an exception.\footnote{According to Agnieszka and Robert Papieski, authors of commentaries on the diary, Iwaszkiewicz coded the date. In fact, the events described took place in autumn} He refers to Mr. and Mrs. Muszkat, who were being hounded by blackmailers, and his attempts to find them another shel-
ter, with the assistance of his wife Anna. The Muszkats were both elderly people and were not fully aware of their situation. Transported by cab to a safe place, they endeavored to avoid suspicion by talking loudly in French throughout the journey.... Iwaszkiewicz concludes his colorful account with the following significant words:

We wandered around with Hania [Iwaszkiewicz's wife — translator's note] today: so much effort, so much exertion to save the lives of two half-conscious old people. Meanwhile, artists such as Roman Kramsztyk, such close old friends as Olek Landau, parents of friends, such as Pawelek Hertz, and Józik Rajnfeld, are dying over there — and we cannot do anything about it. We watch helplessly as dark smoke rises from their homes, from their bodies. It is very difficult to understand and to go through. We do not even try to understand it, but we have to go through it.43

Władysław Bartoszewski’s statement, made over half a century later, was equally unique:

I have spoken in general about the state of terror, about dangers. But there is a third factor: the sense of hopelessness, a drop in the ocean. When someone printed an underground newspaper, it was distributed. When someone kept a gun and shot at a Gestapo man, whether he was killed or not, at least something happened. But when you had been saving a man for a number of months, and that man sooner or later fell into German hands, you had a feeling of months spent doing a job that was all for nothing. It was a drop in the ocean and constant hopelessness: moving people from one place to another, rescuing, providing documents with authentic certificates, which were fabricated by various priests, etc., etc. These situations were very difficult for everyone.44

Both Iwaszkiewicz and Bartoszewski made considerable contributions in

43 Ibid., pp. 220–221. The author would like to thank Barbara Engelking-Boni for drawing her attention to this aspect of Iwaszkiewicz’s text.
saving Jews during the war. They were both honored with Righteous Among the Nations medals; Bartoszewski was among the first recipients. Today, one cannot be sure why these two rescuers did not hesitate to admit their nagging doubts and expose their own weaknesses. Was this determined by personality traits or some special social conditioning? Departure from the established convention of talking about wartime assistance certainly required courage. All the more so, as sources demonstrate, even the very announcement of having participated in rescuing Jews would frequently provoke unfriendly, hostile, or even violent reactions in the Polish environment. This is why many Polish Righteous concealed this aspect of their wartime activities. Michał Borwicz, former Head of the Kraków branch of the Jewish Historical Commission, wrote about this phenomenon in the following passage:

Among other things [the commission] collected testimonies concerning numerous Poles who provided Jews with assistance during the occupation, very often at the risk of their own lives. Fairly soon, we began to print them in our publications in the context of witnesses’ wartime experiences. An interesting thing is that several of those people, mentioned by name as benefactors, came to our office and reproached us because revealing their names got them into trouble and in some cases put them in danger of revenge. (In subsequent publications, at the explicit request on the part of the former protectors, we were obliged to omit a number of names or to settle for initials.)

45 At the news that the front was coming near, Stanisław Sobczak, who sheltered Jews during the war, told them to leave the hiding place. When the escaping Jews encountered partisans, the latter, as Sobczak recalls, “killed some of them and robbed them of everything. Later, the partisans found out that I had sheltered them. Then, about a score of AK partisans raided my place and announced that I must be punished for the offence of having sheltered the Jews. They told me to lie down and they beat me up so badly that I was bedridden for a whole fortnight, unable to move my hands or legs. A daughter of the local dentist witnessed all this. The partisans took my horse and wagon, pigs, and everything they could carry”; see Stanisław Sobczak, “Jak uratowałem dwunastu Żydów,” translated by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, in Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, Adam Kopciowski, and Andrzej Trzciński, eds., Tam był kiedyś mój dom...Księgi pamięci gmin żydowskich (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2009), pp. 439–441. For the Yiddish original, see David Shtokfish, ed. Sefer Frampol (Tel Aviv: Vaad ha-Sefer, 1966), pp. 304–307. The author thanks Professor Adamczyk-Garbowska for allowing her access to this collection before publication.

Anticipating potential consequences, the rescued also did not reveal personal data about their rescuers. In 1945, Regina Almowa testified before the Voivodeship Historical Commission in Przemyśl:

I shall always retain a fond memory of that lady. I do not mention her by name, because I know I would expose her to contempt among her compatriots. Over and over again, I find out that people who saved Jews do not want their countrymen to know about it.47

Even now, more than 60 years after the war, there are still many Righteous who are afraid to make public their efforts to save Jews. In autumn 2005, before a ceremony in Biała Podlaska, two of the five families who had been awarded medals of the Righteous called the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw to inform them that they “did not want any journalists to be present.” A year earlier, at the families’ request, an award ceremony was called off in Białystok, and the certificates of distinction were sent by mail.48 The reticence of the Righteous can often be explained by the anticipation of unfavorable reactions from their own families to the revelation of previously concealed facts about their involvement in saving Jews.49

Hostility, resentment, and mistrust are certainly not the only attitudes of Poles toward their compatriots who saved Jews condemned to extermination during the war. Nevertheless, judging by the reactions of the surviving Righteous, such reactions can still be observed and are fairly common, especially in the provinces. Their source lies in certain stereotypes, deeply rooted in social consciousness, and, above all, in attitudes to Jews, in general. This is clearly demonstrated by the documents in the AŻIH’s Department of Yad Vashem Decorations in Warsaw50 and CKŻP files with

47 AŻIH, file no. 301/681.
49 Such cases have been pointed out to the author by Ewa Rudnik, who works at the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw, and has been acting as an intermediary in the application process for the Righteous Among the Nations medal for several years.
50 They pertain to over 2,500 applications for the Righteous Among the Nations medal (in most cases) — of both applicants and those who have already received the award. Not all applications were accepted by the Yad Vashem Institute: Some were rejected for formal reasons, while there is no information how the others were resolved. It is often impossible to follow the medal award procedure because the files are incomplete. In some cases, the files only have a statement, by subject, in which he or she presents the account, but does not appear to apply for the title of the “Righteous.” The Department
applications for material assistance to Poles who helped Jews during the war.51 In most cases, documented at the Department of Decorations, the rescuers or their descendants initiated efforts to obtain the medal. Most of the applications for aid submitted to the CKŻP were from Poles. In both cases, the applications were supported by descriptions of activities, sometimes going into detail about the various tasks they or their relatives carried out for the benefit of the persecuted Jews. Authors of most testimonies report on the duration of assistance and the frequency of contact with the rescued; in rare cases, they also describe the intensity of mutual attachment. A separate, equally interesting part of the applications are accounts of post-war contact between the rescuers and the people they saved. Obviously, the wartime relationships between the two groups — described by the applicants as “good,” “friendly,” “cordial” or “close” — were crucial to their subsequent contact. More frequently, they ignore this question, implying that these relationships were “correct,” or, more likely, that these experiences did not really matter, considering the stakes involved. The moment of parting immediately after liberation, although also important for mutual relations, is not usually described (unless it concerns children who were kept in hiding). Much more frequently, the narrative concentrates on whether — and for how long — contact was maintained with the rescued, for example, by writing letters or sending parcels. Finally, when, how and why did the rescuer and the rescued lose touch? The memories recorded in the applications leave no doubt that, in most cases, the rescuers and the people they rescued
remained strangers, and that the unavoidable overstepping of boundaries, which normally protects privacy and is usually reserved only for close relatives, did not actually bring the rescuers and their charges closer together. In many cases, the relations between the rescued and the rescuers were resumed long after the war — mostly to submit applications for this title — and are usually devoid of any emotional depth. The applicants’ testimonies suggest that the Polish and Jewish sides share equal responsibility for the lack of previous contact — for one reason or other, maintaining them must have been difficult, impossible, or, simply, not sufficiently important. In other cases, the contact breaks off at some point for certain reasons, which are sometimes explained, but, more often are not specified. Hanna Malewska, who saved the Friedberg family during the war, recalls:

At first, until 1950, I corresponded with Zuzanna Maria Friedberg-Stefańska, but in subsequent years maintaining correspondence abroad became inadvisable for me on account of unfavorable political circumstances. In the last letter that I sent to Zuzia, I asked her not to write to me [anymore].

The authors of applications usually openly state their expectations, as in this example, addressed to the head of the Joint, in July 1946:

[ Bernard Fogelewicz, sheltered by the applicant] asked for accommodation for three days, but stayed for seven months. My husband obtained papers for him at the Arbeitsamt, presenting him as a cousin. We treated him very cordially. He said he would repay us like a brother for having saved his life; unfortunately, except for small gifts, we have received nothing (no material aid), which would be very welcome today, when we are living in difficult conditions: totally ruined by the war and with a seriously ill daughter (after two operations on her legs)...53

Another applicant wrote to the Jewish community’s executive committee in Warsaw, in October 1945:

During the German occupation, after the ghetto was set up, I kept assisting Jews by supplying them with food and even arms, at the risk of...

52 AŻIH, file no. 349/209, p. 12.
my own life and, in fact, a few of my partners paid with their lives....

Now, I have returned from a camp, my property has been burnt down,
and I have nowhere to live. Therefore, I request from you, dear gentle-
men, for some kind of aid or clothing for me and my family, or mon-
ey — I deserve it, after all.54

In several cases, the phrasing of the applications reveals their authors’ dis-
tance from the rescued. In February 1991, Barbara Sawicka wrote to the
Jewish Historical Institute:

I apply for assistance, in the form of a monetary equivalent, for having
saved a Jewish life during the Nazi occupation.... Such an equivalent
was paid to my mother, Aleksandra Krupińska. After her death, I am
applying for it myself...55

In February 1947, Jan Pasternak wrote:

I request financial remuneration for having maintained a Jewish child
for two years during the German occupation. I have to provide for five
people. I have two hectares of land. I am in a critical position.56

The requests frequently went beyond financial assistance or the title of the
“Righteous.” Often, the addressees are Jewish institutions, as such, or the
“Jewish people,” as representatives of the survivors, who are supposed to
recognize and reward the wartime efforts of the Righteous. In particular,
many applicants seem convinced of the Jews’ unlimited power, wide influ-
ence, and wealth. In December 1988, the institute received another letter
from Edward Piotrowski (who allegedly sheltered Aron Rakowski for four
years, and whose file includes letters from Rakowski to the Piotrowskis):

I would very much like to be accepted as a member of the zbowid and I
know that you have your men at the central office of zbowid in Warsaw,

54 AŻIH, file no. 303/VIII/236, p. 30.
55 AŻIH, file no. 349/1000, p. 8 (the case of Aleksandra Krupińska); “monetary compen-
sation for having sheltered people of Jewish origin during the war” was also sought,
among others, by Boleslaw Idzikowski’s proxy, AŻIH, file no. 349/258, p. 4 (the case of
Boleslaw Idzikowski).
56 AŻIH, KŻP, file no. 303/VIII/235, p. 5 (there was a handwritten note, “10,000 zł by
post,” on the application, which meant that this amount of money should be sent).
where they certainly would not object, if you made such a request, and, for me, this would be a great help as it would give me discounts on practically everything. I will not list them here, but you know very well which discounts I mean. I have one more favor to ask: Would it be possible to apply, through your institute, for a state decoration, which would give me some financial benefit. I would be most obliged to you. What I described before and now is not fabricated... [original transcription — E.K.-F.].

The ŻIH was treated as an intermediary by those who had unsuccessfully endeavored, for many years, to obtain membership in the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację — ZBOWiD).

In 1993, the institute received a letter from Halina Kowalska, who, along with her husband, sheltered three Jewish women during the war:

I encounter numerous manifestations of anti-Polonism, and I know how many Poles have paid with their lives for rescuing Jews. I wish there was one more person to contradict the statement — Ben-Gurion’s, I think — that a Pole imbibes antisemitism with his mother’s milk. And, to make things clear: Poles were the next in line for extermination, and

57 AŻIH, file no. 349/657, p. 25 (the case of Edward Piotrowski). Interestingly, Maria and Stanisław Piotrowski and Marianna Czeczowicz — most probably Edward’s sister and brother with his wife — also applied for the medal for saving Rakowski. The files of their case indicate that the latter declined to give the required statement to Yad Vashem, AŻIH, file no. 349/1805, p. 12.

58 Such is the case of Władysław Smykała, who wrote to the ŻIH in April 1983: “I take this opportunity to ask whether, in your opinion, providing assistance to Jews during the occupation was an act equivalent to the activities of the resistance movement? In the context of my efforts to obtain ZBOWiD membership, I heard many unpleasant comments about this, as if such assistance had not been an act of courage or resistance against the Germans,” AŻIH, file no. 349/311, p. 2. Henryk Gortat wrote to the ŻIH in February 1978: “Preventing the death and saving the life of a man of Jewish origin and sheltering him throughout the occupation is a sporadic and rare case — the only such case in the vicinity of my town. As I have already mentioned, others who did much less during the occupation receive ZBOWiD war pensions. And as for myself..., I feel deeply hurt and gravely wronged, I feel unjustly passed over and ungratefully forgotten. I have never before asked for any help as I thought that I only fulfilled my duty as a human being — because I was healthy and could earn my living,” AŻIH, file no. 349/10, p. 2 (the case of Henryk Gortat).
it is common knowledge that Germans did not introduce such great terror as in Poland in other conquered countries...59

In April 1988, Krystyna Lewandowska, who was awarded the medal of the Righteous, along with her family, in 1985, wrote to the Institute:

In our correspondence there is a misunderstanding. I would like you to help me to obtain ZBOWiD membership or secure assistance (a pension) from Israel for having saved the lives of five Jews, at my own risk.... From the TV, I heard that while Jewish survivors will get damages from Germans, we, whose lives were in great danger, have only received a certificate and a medal, which do not give us any rights. I think there are few such people in Poland, and it is worth considering whether they should not be granted some aid from Israel...60

The line of argument invoked by the applicants and, in particular, the way they define their services to the rescued is also noteworthy.61 For example, Aleksy Pieryszcz’s letter to the Jewish committee in January 1947:

I kindly request the committee’s Presidium to grant me and my family — consisting of my wife, daughter, and grandson — an allocation of winter clothing. I work on the railways as an engine driver and my wages are too meager to buy something for myself and the family. I take the liberty to ask for the above-mentioned allocation, because I know that it is the committee’s task to come to the rescue of all those in dire need. My attitude to the affairs of the Jewish people has always been truly Christian and loyal, to which the well-known democrat Dr. Kaplan and many other Jewish citizens can attest...62

While presenting a whole range of statements by people demanding recognition of their assistance to persecuted Jews during the war and afterward, for various reasons and invoking various arguments, one must not forget

59 AŻIH, file no. 349/1963, p. 8 (the case of Halina and Władysław Kowalski).
60 AŻIH, file no. 349/564, p. 6 (the case of Krystyna Lewandowska, Maria Wójcik, Stanisława Pociecha, Władysława Piekart, and Tadeusz Wójcik).
61 The author discusses this subject in greater detail in a study she is currently working on.
62 AŻIH, CKŻP, file no. 303/VIII/235, p. 50 (a note on this application mentions that a parcel was sent to the applicant).
about the opposite attitude. As early as the late 1960s, Bartoszewski, who was preparing testimonies about assistance for publication, wrote:

The rescuers are quite naturally reluctant to proclaim their own merits. For this reason, relatively often, testimonies are presented by someone else informing us about someone who provided assistance, and, in many cases, they ask for their own names and those of the other people mentioned not to be revealed.63

Some of the rescuers thought that they were “only doing their duty” and, therefore, did not merit any special reward. Frank Morgens recalls:

For 20 years, Wala Żak [a woman who saved the lives of the author and five other people — E.K.-F.] refused the Righteous Among the Nations medal, awarded by the Yad Vashem Institute to those who saved Jews during the war. She did not want a tree to be planted in her honor in the Avenue of the Righteous at Yad Vashem. She insisted that it was not for the sake of rewards that she had helped us survive. She considered it her duty as a human being to save another human being threatened by the Nazis. Eventually, she yielded to persuasion, which cost us a great deal of effort.64

It is impossible to determine how many Righteous actually identified with this position. It is even more difficult to estimate how many decided to remain unsung heroes forever. As Konstanty Gebert wrote about such people:

In this attitude, I sense something more than mere naivety: in their determination to save a life, the Righteous certainly could not be naive. What I sense is rather an obstinate belief that human decency is the rule rather than the exception. If the Righteous are considered an exception, it would contradict this belief. This is why they preferred to sacrifice recognition rather than hope.65

63 Bartoszewski, Lewinówna, “Przedmowa wydawców,” in Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej, p. 76.
Organized (Institutionalized) Polish Initiatives for the Rescuers

People’s Poland used the issue of the Righteous for their own propaganda purposes. Out of over 500 Polish titles (mostly press articles) dealing with the question of assistance to Jews in occupied Poland, published between 1945 and 1982, the vast majority appeared in the late 1960s, especially between 1966/67 and 1969.66 These publications were strongly connected to the intensifying antisemitic campaign in Poland and, in most cases, were meant to serve it.67 Since the end of the 1960s, Polish rescuers of Jews were a permanent feature of the officially promoted picture of Polish society under the occupation; however, during the entire 1944/45–1989 period, their activities were not given formal recognition.68 For many years, the ZBOWiD refused to accept the Righteous as members.

In March 1985, in a trial at the central administrative court, in which Maria Bochenkowa (rescuer of nine Jews) appealed against the ZBOWiD decision, the judges employed characteristic arguments:

To my fairly insistent claims that my wartime activities bear all the hallmarks of resistance since the saving of people who were doomed to extermination was also punishable by death, and so I did not stand by and watch Nazi excesses indifferently, the chief judge responded with a single argument: “If you had at least saved some underground leader or commander, but you only saved Jews, after all.”

Another judge, evidently losing patience, practically crushed me with

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67 For more information on the antisemitic campaign of March 1968, see Feliks Tych’s article, “The ‘March ’68’ Antisemitic Campaign: Onset, Development, and Consequences,” in this volume.
68 The files of Maria Krystyna Dłutowska’s case, archived in the Department of Yad Vashem Decorations, suggest that, on account of her wartime involvement in rescuing Jews, she may have received financial aid from the Ministry of Culture and Art after March 1968. In her letter to the ZIH in May 1981, Dłutowska writes: “I live alone as an invalid-pensioner. I was assisted for some time by the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland. When the association was dissolved in 1967, the role of my ‘sponsor’ was taken over by the Ministry of Culture and Art, which sent me a so-called ‘benefit’ every month to supplement my meager pension.” AŻIH, Dział Odznaczeń Yad Vashem, file no. 349/99, p. 3. The author has not been able to establish what kind of benefit Dłutowska meant.
his argument: “What do you think, considering the millions of Jews who
died, that saving nine Jews could have weakened Hitler in any way?”

I quote both responses verbatim as I wrote them down immediately
on leaving the courtroom.69

It was only on the strength of the parliamentary act of January 24, 1991,
“On War Veterans and Some Victims of Persecution during the War and
the Post-War Period,” that the holders of medals for the “Righteous” were
accorded the status of war veterans, which involves a number of privileges.
Since 1992, the highest Polish state decoration was awarded to three people
recognized as Righteous Among the Nations: Władysław Bartoszewski, Jan
Karski, and Irena Sendler, the latter exclusively in recognition of her con-
tribution to saving Jewish children.70 In 2006, she was nominated for the
Nobel Peace Prize. The President of Poland Lech Kaczyński, co-initiator of
this initiative, justified his proposal in his nomination letter to the Nobel
Prize committee in Oslo, as follows:

The Nobel Peace Prize, for which I apply, would not only be a tribute
to Irena Sendler’s exceptionally heroic biography. In her person, the
committee would honor all the Righteous of the Second World War,
as well as the Righteous of today: Tutsis who saved Hutus, Serbs who
saved Muslims, people bearing the hope for peace in the world on their
frail shoulders.71

On March 14, 2007, Sendler and the Council for Aid to Jews, “Żegota,” were

69 Bochenkowa’s letter to Janusz Reykowski, March 21, 1985, AŻIH, file no. 349/325, p. 20.
In September 1984, in response to ZBOWiD’s refusal to accept her as a member, Bochen-
kowa appealed to Henryk Jabłoński, Chairman of ZBOWiD at the time: “The justification
for the refusal refers to the statute, [which] clearly...[means] the resistance movement.
However, I believe that this term comprehends the activities of ‘providing assistance to
the persecuted’ (quoted from the refusal) since those activities expressed neither ap-
proval nor even mere indifference to Nazism, but constituted the purest manifestation of
resistance to Nazism resistance, involving the highest risk, since any assistance provided
to Jews was punishable by death only in occupied Poland.” Ibid., p. 17.
70 Paweł Szapiro rightly pointed out this fact in his synopsis of an article on the social sta-
tus of the Polish Righteous, presented for discussion as part of the project “Długofalowe
skutki Holokaustu” (Long-term Consequences of the Holocaust), which led to the pub-
lication of this book. The author draws on some of his findings.
71 Quoted by Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka in her Polacy ratujący Żydów w czasie Zagłady,
pp. 5–6.
honored by special resolution of the Polish Republic’s Senate. Every year, since October 10, 2007, the president decorates a different group of Righteous, “...underappreciated, forgotten Poles, who came to the rescue of their Jewish friends, neighbors, and co-citizens, risking their own lives and those of their loved ones.”72 In 2007, the President accepted the honorary patronage of the “The Polish Righteous — Recalling Forgotten History” program, conducted by the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The program’s objective is to document and disseminate information on the Righteous, and to carry out educational activities.73 “I am convinced that all these activities will contribute to immortalizing their names and actions, as an example of human partnership in the collective memory of both our peoples: Poles and Jews, as well as in the consciousness of Europe and the world,” Lech Kaczyński said.74

Only in recent years have the Polish state authorities begun active support for initiatives to commemorate the Righteous. So far, in Warsaw, a memorial site to the “Żegota” (a stone with a plaque in Zamenhofa Street) has been set up, and commemorative plaques to the rescuers’ activities have also been placed at four other sites.75 The first Polish monument in honor of Poles who saved Jews was unveiled in August 2009 to mark the anniversary of the Łódź Ghetto’s liquidation. Until recently, schools and streets were not named after the Righteous. For instance, the first was a school named after Irena Sendler in 2008.

Grassroots initiatives undertaken in recent years in order to commemorate the Righteous and to popularize their stories tread the border between individual and organized activities. One of the more important undertakings of this kind is the one-year project, “Lights in the Dark — the Righteous among the Nations of the World,” initiated in September 2007 by the Grodzka Gate Center–NN Theater in Lublin and the associated Civic Academy (Akademia Obywatelska).76

72 Lech Kaczyński in Przywracanie Pamięci, p. 5.
74 President Kaczyński’s speech delivered on October 10, 2007, in Przywracanie Pamięci, p. 5.
75 Paweł Szapiro provided the information that the plaques are at St. Augustine’s Church on Nowolipki Street, All Saints’ Church in Grzybowski Square, on Bonifractów Street, and on the house on Żurawia Street where the “Żegota” headquarters was located.
76 The project involved recording testimonies of the Righteous and their families from the
The Senate bill to establish the Day for Remembrance of Poles Who Saved Jews represents a somewhat different group of activities to commemorate the achievements of the Righteous. The new memorial day “would be a symbolic day when we would remember that thanks to decent, upstanding Poles a great number of Jews were saved,” explained Paweł Klimowicz, the bill’s proponent from Platforma Obywatelska (a liberal-conservative political party, translator’s note). Characteristic of such initiatives is a shift of focus from those who saved Jews to those who were murdered because of their assistance to them. March 24 was chosen for this day because, as the Senate’s statement explains, “a family of eight, who sheltered Jews and eight members of Jewish Szall and Goldman families were shot in the village of Markowa near Łańcut.” According to the Podkarpackie Voivodeship Council resolution, a museum dedicated to Poles who saved Jewish lives in the Podkarpacie region will be established in Markowa.

The INDEX Program, dedicated to the “memory of Poles murdered and persecuted by the Nazis for assisting Jews,” initiated in 2006, aims at complete documentation of crimes committed against Poles for their involvement in assisting Jews. What is striking about the project is that it does not refer to Poles who succeeded in their rescue missions, but only to the rescuers who were murdered for their assistance to Jews. The project, initiated by the Institute of Strategic Studies (Instytut Studiów Strategicznych), Lublin region, as well as testimonies of the survivors, Światła w cienności. Sprawiedliwi wśród Narodów Świata. Relacje (Lublin: Ośrodek Brama Grodzka Teatr NN, 2008). See also Marzena Baum, “Projekt ‘Światła w cienności — Sprawiedliwi wśród Narodów Świata,’” Midrasz, no. 9 (2008), pp. 34–39.

77 “Uczcić ratujących życie, potępić szmalcowników,” Gazeta Wyborcza, October 6, 2008. Ultimately, on April 2, 2009, the Senate passed a resolution to honor the memory of Poles who saved Jews during the Second World War, “to memorialize the sixty-fifth anniversary of the death of Józef and Wiktoria Ulm from the village of Markowa in the Podkarpacie region.”

78 Ibid.

79 One of the titles published as part of the project was a book by Jacek A. Młynarczyk and Sebastian Piątkowski, Cena poświęcenia. Zbrodnie na Polakach za pomoc udzielaną Żydom w rejonie Ciepielowa (Krakow: Instytut Studiów Strategicznych, 2007). An excerpt from the preface is as follows: “Dear readers, we offer you the present book, convinced that each project, publication, and initiative that broadens knowledge about the fate of the Polish Righteous Among the Nations of the World contributes to our understanding of both recent history and human actions and attitudes — the cruelest and the noblest. It is our duty to those heroes, most of whom are already gone.” Ibid., pp. 8–9.
which is an NGO, has received disproportionate public funding relative to
the potential results of the large-scale research activities involved.80

The cost to Polish society for saving Jews during the occupation is a
leading issue in many initiatives launched by the publicly funded Institute
of National Remembrance.81 Coordination and implementation of these
initiatives is among the objectives of a joint project of the institute and the
National Center for Culture. The project, known as either “Life for Life”
or “The Social and Educational Action,” has been actively developed since
2007.82 According to the initiators, one of its fundamental aims is “to dis-
seminate information about Poles who risked their lives in saving Jews
during the Second World War.” This objective will be achieved by preparing
publications, creating billboards, posters and a package of educational ma-
terials for teachers,83 producing and distributing documentaries and public
service announcements about those who died while assisting the Jewish
community, and “commemorating these frequently forgotten heroes.”84

80 Feliks Tych, “Głosy w sprawie ‘INDEXU’,” Midrasz, no. 1 (2007); Jan Woleński also ex-
pressed his opinion of this program. The editors of Midrasz approached several other
people for their comments on the program, but they preferred to keep their usually
critical remarks private.
81 See, for example, Ewa Rogalewska, the exhibition “‘He Who Saves One Life, Saves the
World Entire...’ Pomoc ludności żydowskiej pod okupacją niemiecką w województw
wie białostockim.” The institute, in cooperation with the Committee for Commemo-
rating Polish Rescuers of Jews, has been preparing a book intended as a response to
Strach (Fear) by Jan Tomasz Gross. The book will be coming out under the title
Dobre sąsiedztwo (Good Neighborhood). Parts of the introduction were published in
the supplement, Dodatek Historyczny IPN to Nasz Dziennik, no. 9 (2008).
82 A website offering basic information on the project (www.zyciezazycie.pl) was launched
in December 2008. As part of a publicity campaign, the institute, in cooperation with
the National Center for Culture and the Rzeczpospolita daily, prepared a supplement
for the newspaper, Życie za życie (Life for Life), which came out on September 17,
2008.
83 Polacy ratujący Żydów w latach II wojny światowej. Teki edukacyjne IPN (Warsaw:
Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2008). For a review of the package, see Ewa Koźmińska-
Frejlak, “Edukacja czy dialog z cieniami... Kilka uwag na marginesie Tek Eduka-
cyjnych ‘Polacy Ratujący Żydów w latach II wojny światowej’,” Zaglada Żydów. Studia
84 “Pamięci Polaków, którzy narażali życie, by ratować Żydów,” Rzeczpospolita, the sup-
plement Życie za życie. As part of the activities to commemorate Poles who saved Jews
during the war, the project endorsed the initiative to erect a monument to Polish rescu-
ers of Jews, proposed by the Committee for Commemorating Polish Rescuers of Jews.
Originally, in accordance with the committee’s suggestion, the monument would be
in Grzybowski Square in Warsaw, but the municipal authorities did not accept this
The Attitude of Jews toward the Rescuers

Until now, the attitudes of rescued Jews toward those they owe their lives to have been discussed in Poland only in the context of debates over the attitude of Polish society toward the Holocaust. On such occasions, defenders of “Polish honor” usually invoke the “Jewish ingratitude” clinching argument. They claim that as well as accusations of indifference toward Jewish suffering and insufficient involvement in assisting the persecuted Jews by Polish society, the so-called phenomenon of “Jewish ingratitude” toward the rescuers after the war should also be examined.\(^{85}\) Thus, as part of the 1967/1968 antisemitic campaign, the press, particularly articles in the *Prawo i Życie*, *Żołnierz Wolności*,\(^{87}\) and *Trybuna Ludu*\(^{88}\) newspapers, accused the ŻIH staff of ignoring the assistance provided by Poles to Jews during the war in their research. The rescue of Jews during the war is closely connected to Polish society’s self-image and history.\(^{89}\) The force of this connection cannot be explained by the location. The heated emotions in the discussion at the city council meeting split its members into two camps: The Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) councillors supported the idea of the Institute of National Remembrance, while those from the ruling coalition Platforma Obywatelska-Lewica (Civic Platform–The Left) opposed it. Jan Fusięcki, “PiS naucza i demaskuje,” *Gazeta Wyborcza* (the *Gazeta Stołeczna* supplement), November 28, 2008.

A characteristic example of such rhetoric is the book by Barbara Stanisławczyk, a collection of testimonies from those involved in assistance activities during the war. The leitmotif of their accounts is Jewish ingratitude, the manifestations of which are scrupulously cataloged by the author. Idem, *Czterdzieści twardych*.\(^{86}\)


For instance, in the introduction to a two-volume collection of testimonies on rescuing Jews during the war, Fr. Tadeusz Rydzyk wrote: “Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Radio Maryja family, I thank you for showing what Poles were and still are like: People who saved the lives of those threatened by totalitarian ideologies, the inferno of the twentieth century. They saved the lives not only of their friends and neighbors, but also of strangers.

“They were often heroic witnesses — ‘Ye shall be witnesses unto me’ (Ac. 1:8) (King James Bible — translator’s note) — for they truly accepted and followed Christ, ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son....’” (J 3:16).

“That is what Poles were and are like — that is what we are like! ‘Ye are the salt of the...
exploitation of this theme for propaganda purposes in People’s Poland. War-time assistance to Jews was also not a neutral issue in Jewish historiography. Emerging after the war, the State of Israel showed little immediate interest in the survivors’ voices. As Szoszana Raczyńska recalled:

The survivors of death camps were unable and did not want to speak. They shut out that period of their lives; they did not even pass on the truth to their children. Why? This was because their testimonies were bad, unwillingly received.90

Awareness of the nature of the relationship between the rescued and the rescuers is crucial for understanding later attitudes. What is striking about Jewish testimonies written “there and then,” as Krzysztof Szwajca put it, “...[is the] stuffy, claustrophobic atmosphere that develops between the rescuer and the concealed person: extreme dependence, when one person owes his or her existence to another.”91 Entirely dependent on their rescuers, Jews in hiding were utterly helpless. Maria Orwid recalled, “The price that I paid for my survival was a sense of humiliation. Of course, its source was not Miss Fila [Teofila Kic, who saved Maria Orwid — E.F.-K.], but the existential fact that my life depended on whether someone helped me or not, on whether someone was a good or wicked person, was the highest degree of dependence...”92 The tangle of contradictory feelings — boundless

earth.... Ye are the light of the world....’ (Mt 5: 13–14/13, 14), and thanks to the witnesses who still love and follow Christ, may the future generations of Poles, worthy sons of our Homeland, be like that, too.” Rev. Tadeusz Rydzyk, Introduction, Godni synowie naszej Ojczyzny. Świadectwa nadsyłane na apel Radia Maryja (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sióstr Loretanek, 2002).

90 Isakiewicz, Ustna harmonijka, p. 89.
91 Krzysztof Szwajca, “Kłopotliwa ‘świętość’,” Midrasz, no. 1 (2007), pp. 16–19. Ringelblum made the following observations on Jews in hiding: “A Jew is a little child who cannot make a step on [his or her] own. A Jew cannot walk in the street. The Aryan friend must visit him [or her] frequently and take care of dozens of errands for him [or her]. The most important errand is to mobilize capital to pay the very high costs of maintenance. Then he [or she] must collect money from the customers or sell the Jew’s movables, or valuables, etc. There are constant and never-ending matters and requests, which must be taken care of by the Christian friend.... Maintaining contact with particular family members is another task of the Aryan friend. Jewish apartments constantly turn ‘hot’.... That is where the Sisyphean labor of the Aryan friend starts over again....” Ringelblum, Stosunki polsko-żydowskie, p. 157.
gratitude mixed with grudges and grievances — that seemed to be part of every, even the best, long-term relationship between the rescued and the rescuer, was aptly described by Marek Szapiro in his wartime notes (The emotional intensity, typical of Polish Jews saved on the Aryan side, is characteristic, according to Mordechai Paldiel, Head of the Department of the Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem at the time).\textsuperscript{93}

In relations with the hosts, one must distinguish between high and low tones. The high tone was the fact that they saved our lives at the risk of their own and with great personal effort for one-and-a-half years. It is the principal tone, and everything else is disproportionate here. Nevertheless, I think I do have the moral right to also raise the other tone: that low, prosaic one — and I do not refer to the benefits that our stay undeniably brought to the hosts. It is our duty to return this favor in every possible way, and there is no argument over that. However, there is something else worth noting. Without going into details, I wish to make two points: a) Everybody has grown excessively accustomed to our slave-like situation, which often seriously harmed our human needs and personal ambition.... b) Without dwelling on the material aspect either, I will only say that there is no exploitation or buying oneself out, as happens elsewhere. However, the financial aspect of our gratitude is “officially” underappreciated. Finally, whenever we find ourselves in material difficulties..., the hosts are unwilling to meet us half-way...\textsuperscript{94}

Is it possible to transcend this peculiar relationship built in wartime conditions, to overcome accumulated misunderstandings and rankling resentments, and to heal unspoken injuries? How is it possible to pay the debt of gratitude or simply to express one’s gratitude to someone who rescued


\textsuperscript{94} Marek Szapiro, \textit{Nim słońce wzejdzie... Dziennik pisany w ukryciu 1943–1944}, Feliks Tych Introduction, Feliks Tych in collaboration with Magdalena Prokopowicz eds. (Warsaw: ZIH, 2007), p. 641. The author is grateful to Professor Tych for suggesting that Szapiro’s diaries should be used as a source for descriptions of the relationship between the rescuers and the rescued.
one’s life, constantly risking his or her own and the lives of his nearest and dearest? It certainly required a mutual willingness to open up to the other side’s experience of this difficult relationship. Szapiro was pessimistic about this possibility:

It is also important to note that we will never be understood by those whom we care about the most. For example, if we survive and present our point of view to our present hosts, they would answer: “What, we’ve been saving your lives, knocking ourselves out for you for such a long time, and you’re nit-picking? That’s your gratitude?” They would never understand us — since it requires great imagination indeed to realize how dreadful it is to live within those four walls.\(^95\)

Feliks Scharf’s observations, although more focused on Polish experiences, are equally pessimistic:

In their understandable protest against the disasters that befell them, Jews were often insufficiently sensitive to the situation of Poles and did not realize the desperate choices faced by their neighbors. The fate of the Polish nation seems benign only in comparison with the ultimate tragedy of the Jews. By all other standards, their sacrifices, ordeals, and losses suffered during the war set Poles apart as the nation most severely tried by its history — and geography.\(^96\)

Is it at all possible, then, to develop new rules to organize the mutual relations between the rescued and the rescuers? In the conclusion to the above-mentioned article, Szwajca provides the following answer:

It seems that the nature of the relationship between the rescuers and the rescued was so exceptional that one could either remain eternally faithful to it or break it off permanently — as in a family with an overprotective, worrying mother who has great expectations of her child.\(^97\)

\(^{95}\) Ibid., p. 634.

\(^{96}\) R.F. Scharf, Poland, What Have I To Do With Thee... Essays Without Prejudice. Co mnie i Tobie Polsko. Eseje bez uprzedzeń (Krakow: Centrum Kultury Żydowskiej Fundacja Judaica, 1999), p. 311.

\(^{97}\) Szwajca, “Kłopotliwa ‘świętość’.” The strength and durability of these relations on both sides is evidenced, in particular, by testimonies of the rescued who survived the war as children. Piotr Zettinger’s recollection about Irena Sendler is typical: “One day,
The awareness that, despite the end of war, their existence was still a source of danger to those to whom they owed their lives must have been painful for Jewish survivors. In concealing their wartime involvement in assisting Jews from those around them, the rescuers not only confirmed the authenticity of the danger, they also validated it indirectly through their behavior. Many years later, Tec recalled that, soon after liberation, those who had provided her family with shelter asked the people they had rescued to leave Kielce “as Poles,” without revealing their Jewish identity: “We were stunned... the Homars’ request may have been too much even for a strong man like him [Nechama Tec’s father — E.K.-F.].” Further, the conclusion states:

Perhaps they were not actually sorry or ashamed about having saved us, but they undoubtedly felt that their friends and neighbors would not approve of what they had done. We had no reason to doubt that they were right. After all, they had to continue living among these people, and to worry about their own safety. All this was logical and reasonable enough. Why, then, were we so upset?

We were upset because they themselves failed to reassure us that they were glad we were alive and felt gratified by the part they played in our rescue.98

In personal testimonies, there are many similar accounts. Marcel Reich-Ranicki recalls:

We were about to leave when Bolek spoke: “I have some vodka, let’s have a shot.” I felt that he would still like to tell us something. He spoke seriously and slowly: “Please don’t tell anyone that you stayed with us. I know these people. They would never forgive us for having saved two Jews.” Genia [Bolek’s wife — E.K.-F.] kept silent. For a long time I could

when that entire antisemitic hullabaloo [the events of March 1968 — E.K.-F.] reached its peak, Mrs. Irena calls and asks me to come to her place at once. She closes the door behind me and says: ‘Piotruś [diminutive of Piotr — translator’s note], don’t you worry about a thing, and tell your family not to worry, either. I’ve already talked to my liaisons — that is what she called her wartime female associates [in the underground movement — translator’s note]. If the situation gets any worse, we have prepared a plan for all of you; I know how to help you, how to hide you.” Piotr Zettinger, “W marcu ’68 chciała pomóc,” Gazeta Wyborcza, May 13, 2008.

not make up my mind if I should quote those terrifying words. We, Tosia [the author’s wife — E.K.-F.] and I, have never forgotten them. But neither have we forgotten that we owe our lives to two Poles: Bolek and Genia.99

Contrary to popular opinion, Reich-Ranicki’s attitude was no exception. Many rescued Jews maintained contacts with the people who saved them throughout their lives. Their efforts to repay the Righteous for the hard work and the accompanying fear, despair, and uncertainty took various forms. The most obvious and, to some extent, most expected was material remuneration. Zuzanna Friedberg-Stefańska wrote the following in 1950:

At Citizen Malewska and her mother’s place, we kept several of our valuable belongings, some of which she managed to save for us. I would like to stress that Citizen Malewska, whom we had known for some years before the war, was a simple office worker before and during the occupation. Therefore, her assistance to us was quite disinterested: It was just an act of an honest human being and a good citizen. Aware of Citizen Malewska’s great contribution, during the war, to the survival of all of us, and especially of my father,...when he began to earn money, my father set up a small shop for Citizen Malewska, since her material position was very difficult at the time, as a humble token of gratitude and form of compensation...100

The rescued who emigrated from Poland after the war sent citrus fruit and clothes. They also enclosed small sums of money, and sometimes they arranged to pay various benefits. According to Stefania Smesch’s testimony:

After the war, Citizens Goldberg lived in Kraków until the end of June 1956.... At present, they live in Israel.... Out of gratitude, the Citizens Goldberg sent me three parcels of citrus fruit, 20kg in total, and 12 dollars (in words: twelve dollars) from Israel.101

100 AŻIH, file no. 349/209, p. 12 (the case of Hanna Malewska). “Malewska, who considered her assistance as disinterested and not entitling her to any remuneration, declined to accept this gift for many weeks. Only the lack of resources for medical treatment for her mother, whose health was constantly deteriorating, made her agree,” Friedberg-Stefańska recalled further on in her testimony; ibid.
101 AŻIH, file no. 349/644, p. 6 (the case of Stefania Smesch).
It was fairly common for Jewish survivors to prepare statements, confirmed by official seals, which were usually limited to a few sentences that included the names and addresses of the rescuers. Undoubtedly, especially in the immediate post-war period (until about the mid-1950s), they treated such documents, usually not addressed to any specific institution, as a kind of a bill of exchange, a provision — not only material — for the future of the Righteous.\textsuperscript{102} The survivors who testified to the Central Jewish Historical Commission had other motives. Undoubtedly, for some of them, recording their testimonies was a way of commemorating those who came to their aid during the war. As Klara Mirska recalled:

Jews saved by Poles came to me not only at work, but even at home. I did not have to ask them to testify. It was their own wish to record their experiences in documents for the Historical Commission. I readily fulfilled their wishes and desires. Some of them came along with the Poles who had sheltered them.\textsuperscript{103}

It is impossible to fully estimate the gratitude owed by the rescued to the people who saved them. “Is there...any way to compensate them appropriately for the risk which they both took to save our lives? After all, it was not for money that they did what they did. Their motives were different, and I can only describe them with words that have long become trite: compassion, goodness, humanity,” wrote Reich-Ranicki.\textsuperscript{104} To some of the rescued, the confrontation with that essentially unpayable debt proved paralyzing. Mirska gave a characteristic testimony of an elderly Jewish woman:

“I survived the occupation in a village near Lublin. The whole village knew about me. The whole village saved me. Everybody wanted me to survive. And when the Germans had been driven out, I left the village,

\textsuperscript{102} For example, the statement by Szerman (who used the name Edward Janiszewski during the occupation), recorded at the Firlej district office in May 1949: “This is to testify that from 1942 to 1943, for the long period of time [during] the German occupation, as a person of Israeli origin, I was sheltered at Władysław Lemieszek’s place, with the knowledge of his son-in-law Jan Rola. While sheltering me, Citizens Władysław Lemieszek and Jan Rola did not do me any harm but helped me disinterestedly until I survived the occupation, thereby risking their own lives and property,” AZIH, file no. 349/641, p. 3 (the case of Jan and Leokadia Rola).


\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
and will never go back there.” “Why did you do this? Why don’t you want to see the people who saved you again?” I asked. “Because I would have to repay the whole village. That’s why I left, and that’s why I’m not going back.”

Often many years later, the descendants of the rescued, free from self-imposed limitations and prejudices resulting from wartime experiences, re-established contact, broken after the war, with the Righteous, their children, and sometimes grandchildren.

Organized Institutionalized Jewish Initiatives for the Rescuers

Immediately after the war, Jewish institutions commenced activities in support of those who assisted Jews during the occupation. From the viewpoint of this article, it is particularly important to identify the criteria used by these institutions to determine whether a particular person deserves to be recognized as a rescuer. Owing to the nature of Jewish experiences in the Holocaust, only a small group of Jewish activists were aware of the scale of assistance provided by Poles. Utterly dependent on other people’s help, their debts of gratitude were impossible to repay there and then. Bound by underground rules, they could not even honor their benefactors symbolically. As Basia Bermanowa put it:

On several occasions, talking to people in charge of the left-wing underground press, we raised the possibility of publishing memoirs about Mrs. Sempołowska. We wanted to write about her personally. However, to protect the family’s safety, it was impossible to publish anything at the time. We swore to make it up after liberation...
Since efforts were made in the immediate post-war period to find an institutional solution for the feeling of gratitude to the rescuers of Jews in the Holocaust, it was apparently regarded not only as a duty of those who were saved, but of the Jewish people as a whole. Before solutions to this problem were found, the local Jewish committees would sometimes provide letters of recommendation to people who had distinguished themselves in saving Jews. For example, the following document was issued by the Jewish committee in Legnica, on August 12, 1946:

**To all Jewish Communities**
The holder of the present letter, Citizen Jan Pysk, born April 14, 1909, in Drohobycz, made a great contribution to saving Jews and Jewish children from certain death during the Nazi occupation in Poland between 1939 and 1944.
He did so at the risk of his own life and the lives of his family, hiding about 50 Jews in his cellar, whom he provided with everything [they needed] free of charge, thanks to which they survived. Therefore, please provide him, if necessary, with any possible assistance.
The Executive Committee of the Religious Association in Legnica.108

The CKŻP’s Commission for Aid to Poles (which took care of Jews during the occupation) commenced activities on November 15, 1946.109 Even luminous figures in Polish society, a fighter for human and civil rights, a tireless champion of progress and democracy, an outstanding cultural and educational activist, and mother of political prisoners. Despite her grave, hopeless illness, she continued her life’s work until her last days. Bedridden, she took care of several Jews who survived the bloodshed...
The Jewish Workers’ Union pays homage to the memory of this great Polish woman.

We put forward a proposal to the National State Council’s Presidium to honor Stefania Sempołowska’s memory by:

- Publishing articles on the life and struggle of the departed in all newspapers of the National State Council and member parties.
- Publishing a booklet devoted to her memory.
- Organizing commemorative celebrations and lectures on her life and work in all youth groups and organizations.”


108 AZIH, file no. 303/VIII 236, p. 44.
before the commission was formed, rescued Jews, among others, requested that the CKŻP provide assistance to those who had saved them.¹¹⁰ William Bein, Head of the Joint in Poland, who claimed credit for this initiative¹¹¹ and participated in the talks to establish the commission, is indirectly confirmed in the minutes of the CKŻP executive committee meeting on September 25, 1946.¹¹² The commission consisted of five members — four from the CKŻP and one from the Joint.¹¹³ Its activities were financed by the Joint,¹¹⁴ suggesting that it did not operate beyond 1950, when the Joint’s branch offices were closed by order of the Polish authorities. The last document of the commission, the author was able to discover, is dated 1949.¹¹⁵ It contains repeated requests to increase the subsidy from the Joint.

The commission distributed food, clothing, and financial assistance, and intended to decorate people who distinguished themselves in rescuing Jews.¹¹⁶ Among the plans not realized, proposed by Hersz Wasser at the CKŻP executive committee meeting, was that certificates of distinction

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¹¹⁰ For example, a letter written in Sweden in March 1946: “Having heard rumors here in Sweden of the allocation of financial aid by the Central Committee to those who assisted or sheltered Jews on the Aryan side in Warsaw after the ghetto was burned down, I kindly request the committee to give such aid to Maria Przybylska and Stanislaw Zabłocki...,” AŻIH, file no. 303/VIII/236, p. 13. An excerpt from the reply reads, “Our meager resources prevent us from complying with the request to come to the aid of Mrs. Przybylska and Mr. Zabłocki,” ibid., p. 16.

¹¹¹ AŻIH, file no. 350/1265, p. 6.

¹¹² From the minutes of the CKŻP executive committee meeting on September 25, 1946: “Sack: he suggests the establishment of a commission for Poles who helped Jews during the occupation. Support from Director Bein is assured.” AŻIH, Protokoły Prezydium CKŻP, Protokół 77 z 25 IX 1946, file no. 303/1/3.

¹¹³ In the first commission, Adolf Berman, Salo Fiszgrund, Josef Sack, and Helena Merenholc represented the Central Committee, ibid.

¹¹⁴ “The Financial Report for the Period from November 27, 1946 to August 31, 1947” indicates that the commission’s funds at that time amounted to 2,200,000 złoty, 1,200,000 of which came from the Joint and the rest from the CKŻP. AŻIH, AJDC, file no. 350/1266, p. 34.

¹¹⁵ This is a letter to the Joint requesting an additional subsidy of 500,000 złoty, dated March 22, 1949, signed by Merenholc and Zameczkowski. AŻIH, AJDC, file no. 350/1266, p. 108.

¹¹⁶ “At their first meeting, the following plan for activities was adopted: I. Providing financial, clothing, and food assistance. II. Christmas greetings and gifts. III. Decorations for people who distinguished themselves in giving assistance to Jews. IV. Studies on the question of Polish assistance to Jews during the occupation. In the period covered by the report, the commission implemented the first two points of the plan....” AŻIH, AJDC, file no. 350/1266, p. 1.
should be given to people of merit, and “a roll of honor” compiled of these rescuers. In granting individual assistance, the commission was guided by the following criteria:

First of all, the highest benefits were allocated to people who had been active in the underground providing general assistance to Jews. In cases of those who rescued Jews individually, the commission granted, above all, requests from those who had sheltered children or had taken care of strangers encountered by coincidence. In considering cases of individual assistance, the commission assumed that, irrespective of whether they were motivated by the desire to save people or to make profit, such assistance created obligations for the rescued and their relatives. However, in special cases, such applications were examined and accepted so as to demonstrate the CKŻP’s attitude to this issue.

A letter sent in response to a complaint from people who demanded 261,000 złoty from the commission for having taken care of a Jewish child during the war explains:

The Commission for Aid to Poles who took care of Jews is limited in competence: It primarily provides assistance to people who protected Jews in a disinterested manner; it does not settle any obligations due to people requiring payment for their services.

I have not discovered any materials that would make it possible to determine whether and how the information about the commission’s activities was circulated. As a matter of fact, the commission was concerned about

117 Responding to Wasser’s suggestion, Sack firmly stated: “The names of the people of merit should not be announced. ‘The roll of honor’ is justified, but is the responsibility of a different department.” AŻIH, Protokoły Prezydium CKŻP, Protokół 6 z [7 1] 1947. Whether as a result of Wasser’s initiative or independently, the CKŻP made efforts to reach people rescued by Poles and to collect their testimonies. Mirska recalls: “One day, Blumental summoned me and said with his customary gentleness: ‘Mrs. Mirska, would it suit you to collect testimonies on one specific issue. Would you like to get in touch with people who have been saved by Poles?’” Mirska, W cieniu wiecznego strachu, p. 457.

118 AZIH, AJDC, file no. 350/1266, p. 2.

119 A letter of explanation, dated July 21, 1947, from the Joint’s head office, is signed by Helena Merenholc and Józef Sack; a copy of the letter was sent to the intervening party, Aleksandra and Eugeniusz Nowakowski, ibid., p. 42.
“how to prevent the initiative from becoming excessively popular.”\textsuperscript{120} Bein wrote about this in a letter:

This entire matter [of assistance to those who helped Jews during the war — E.K.-F.] is rather delicate and complex, and, if not properly handled, could have some very unfavorable results.\textsuperscript{121}

The materials held in the AŻIH indicate that the existence of the commission was certainly known in Jewish circles, also abroad, perhaps thanks to the local branches of the Joint.\textsuperscript{122} Nevertheless, most applications considered by the commission were submitted by Poles.\textsuperscript{123} Originally, some of them were addressed to the CKŻP and the Joint. However, others were submitted directly to the Commission.

In the immediate post-war period, the Commission for Aid to Poles was not the only channel through which the aid from Jewish organizations reached Poles involved in rescuing Jews during the war. According to documents of the Society for the Protection of Jewish Health in Poland (Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia Ludności Żydowskiej w Polsce — TOZ), such people could use their medical facilities, which were better equipped and more efficient than their Polish counterparts. The author could not find material describing the mechanism of this form of assistance; however, it must have ended in 1950, when the TOZ was dissolved and its branches nationalized. This issue was the source of controversy among TOZ activists, as evidenced by a significant discussion, which took place at the TOZ central council meeting on October 31, 1947:

After Dr. Bayer’s speech, Dr. Mirowski (Kraków) takes the floor.... He raises the question of assistance to non-Jews who contributed to saving Jews during the occupation. The issue is becoming more complicated because of pressure from the committees. An appropriate resolution should be adopted. He wonders if Jews are under any obligation to

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, p. 1.  
\textsuperscript{121} Bein’s letter to Rudziński, AŻIH, AJDC, file no. 350/1265, p. 6.  
\textsuperscript{122} For example, a letter sent from Germany in September 1947: “Having learned that the Central Committee of Jews in Poland provides aid to Poles who helped Jews during the war, I have the honor of informing you that during the German occupation my young daughter stayed with Mrs. Bronisława Kaczorowska,” AŻIH, file no. 349/2544, p. 1.  
\textsuperscript{123} AŻIH, AJDC, file no. 350/1266, p. 1.
reward normal human reactions which, in his opinion, are nothing but a duty of all human beings....

Herszenhorn:...Assistance to non-Jews should be continued.
Dr. Krumholc:...As to the medical treatment of non-Jews, the Upper-Silesian branches provide assistance, and they turn for financial support to the Welfare Department at the Jewish committee.  

AŻIH documents indicate that assistance to the Righteous was also continued after the liquidation of the CKZP and other Jewish organizations. They show that in the 1960s the Polish Righteous were supported by the Social and Cultural Association of Jews, on the basis of the Institute’s recommendations. For instance, Maria Sawicka’s file in the Department of Yad Vashem Decorations includes a document attesting to her wartime activities, signed by Bernard Mark, Head of the institute at the time. It is important to note that the document emphasizes Sawicka’s selflessness and dedication, which are of crucial importance in applying for the title of the Righteous.

During the German occupation [Sawicka] was an active, dedicated, and entirely selfless participant in the action of assisting Jews; she was one of the principal liaisons between the Jewish Combat Organization and the Polish resistance movement; she took care of rescuing people, delivered illegal literature and weapons, and all other matters related to underground activities. Both in Poland and abroad, a large group of people owe their lives to Citizen Maria Sawicka. Among the wartime underground movement records, and especially in efforts to rescue Jews, Maria Sawicka is among the most dedicated idealists.

The document bears a handwritten note: “Recommended for assistance from the Social and Cultural Association of Jews.” In a letter of May 1964, Mark also refers Stefan Konopka for assistance from the society’s Central Welfare Commission:

We thank you very much for the extensive and valuable memoirs of the occupation period you sent us. At the same time, we recommend that you write about your difficult situation to the Central Welfare

125 AŻIH, file no. 349/178, p. 2. Sawicka was awarded the medal in 1964.
Commission in Warsaw at 5 Nowogrodzka Street, addressing the letter to the Chairman S. Fiszgrund and referring to the ŻIH.  

Based on the statements of the rescued, the Central Jewish Welfare Commission granted a benefit to Stefania Smesch, quoted earlier in the text:

I received...a monthly benefit of 300 złoty (in words: three hundred złoty) from January 20, 1967 until December 9, 1967. This assistance was discontinued because of the liquidation of the Central Jewish Welfare Commission's office...  

This is the only case the author found in which the benefits offered by the Social and Cultural Association of Jews to people recommended by the ŻIH or those rescued are described so specifically. However, the payment scale, whether the benefits were of fixed value, and finally, whether they were the only form of assistance provided by the commission to the Righteous remain unclear and require further research. The association had very little funds once the Joint's operations were once more suspended; however, despite this, it can almost certainly be assumed that this area of the association's activities was entirely liquidated or at least suspended as a consequence of the repression directed by the state authorities against the association after March 1968, which the statement quoted above also confirms.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Poles who had been involved in wartime assistance to Jews were supported, among others, by the Central Jewish Charity Commission, established in 1982. Files archived at the Department of Yad Vashem Decorations also describe the commission's assistance to the Righteous. Below is an excerpt from a letter, dated July 1992, attached to one of the files:

The Central Jewish Charity Commission will only be able to provide assistance until the end of the year; after that you should apply to the society of the “Righteous....” In order to obtain a positive decision, the applicant should produce documents demonstrating that he took care of Jews.  

126 AŻIH, file no. 349/98, p. 26. Konopka was awarded the medal in 1982.
127 AŻIH, file no. 349/644, p. 6 (the case of Stefania Smesch).
128 AŻIH, file no. 349/1850, p. 1 (the case of Józef and Zofia Kurek, Stanisław and Tadeusz Kurek, and Helena Budzińska).
However, as the author was informed by the Warsaw Jewish community, it was not organized assistance, and the commission acted only as an intermediary for distributing funds from the Joint (the mode of assistance is not clear). Unfortunately, the author’s attempts to obtain access to Jewish community documents proved fruitless. Since 1986, the Righteous have also been receiving financial support from the American Jewish Foundation for Christian Rescuers, currently operating as the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous. The Righteous, especially those suffering from chronic diseases, can also count on receiving medication from the Swiss Anne Frank Foundation.¹²⁹

In 1997, the Commission for Assistance to the Righteous Among the Nations of the World was formed by the “Children of the Holocaust” Association in Poland. The commission organizes the distribution of financial assistance, sponsors the purchase of medication and rehabilitation equipment for the Righteous, helps elderly people take care of difficult matters, acts as an intermediary in their efforts to obtain war-veteran rights, finances holidays for groups of Righteous twice a year, and sends them parcels for Christmas. The association allocates 20 percent of the membership fees, 15 percent of grants, and part of the funds received from the Jewish community in Warsaw to the commission’s activities.¹³⁰ For example, according to the association’s documents, 32,000 złoty went to the Righteous in 2005.¹³¹ To the association members, no less important is personal contact with those who saved Jews during the war: “We give thanks to the Righteous, and now, when they are helpless, we do our best to help them. It is our duty,” stressed Anna Drabik, who was head of the association at that time, in a press statement.¹³² There is no doubt that these mutual relations also have symbolic significance for many of the Righteous.

Originally, the author assumed that changes in the attitude of Polish Jews, survivors of the Holocaust, toward those to whom they owe their lives would be reflected in the number of medals awarded to Poles in successive years. Although realizing that applications for the medal had frequently been submitted by the rescuers themselves, the author would also have expected these statistics to be a reliable index of changes in the attitude of the

¹²⁹ Information from the “Children of the Holocaust” Association in Poland.
¹³¹ Documents of the “Children of the Holocaust” Association in Poland.
¹³² “Dzieci Holokaustu się wykruszają.”
rescuers and their families to the issue of assistance to Jews.\textsuperscript{133} The number of medals awarded in successive years appears to reflect the changes in the interpretation of guiding principles of the Yad Vashem Commission for Commemorating the Righteous. It was, however, the development of appropriate rules by the institute that had the most substantial effect on the number of medals awarded.

The number of requests and recognitions depend on several factors, including: the general attitude to the Holocaust and Holocaust remembrance; the growing importance of children and grandchildren submitting requests; and the increasing importance and reputation of the title in various countries. The same rules apply for all countries; therefore, if it is the rules that caused the changes in recognition numbers, how can one explain the sharp differences between countries?

The reason for the considerable delay in honoring the achievements of Henryk Sławik was simply an incorrect transcription of his family name: “In the early 1960s, Yad Vashem received applications concerning Sławik, but their authors did not know that Sławik was dead, and, besides, his name was misspelt as ‘Słowik,’ and the case got bogged down for several years” — Elżbieta Isakowicz relayed in a discussion at the Więź monthly's editorial office.\textsuperscript{134} The statistics the author compiled clearly demonstrate that a vast majority of decisions to award the title were issued in the 1980s and 1990s.\textsuperscript{135} It is difficult not to ask about the reasons for such a long delay, and the sometimes belated recognition of the merits of the Righteous from

\textsuperscript{133} In the immediate post-war period, involvement in rescue action was often carefully concealed. As a Jew, who survived unaided, wrote in Gazeta Lubelska 1944: “Hiding a Jew was punishable by death. However, there were Poles who decided to take this risk. Some of them acted for profit but much more frequently they were driven by the noblest, purest idealism.... Unfortunately, today, these people are frequently afraid to reveal their sacrifices. Instead of admiration and respect, they are often met with hatred and contempt. Those who sheltered Jews, those who do credit and honor to the Polish nation are considered as traitors by certain sectors of society. This is the most depressing picture of the ravages wreaked by the disease of hatred.” “Drażliwa sprawa. Głosy czytelników,” R.K., Gazeta Lubelska, November 1, 1944. Feliks Tych discovered and discussed this article. Idem, “Ocaleni z Zagłady i ich ocena postawy społeczeństwa polskiego w okresie okupacji Zapomnianie świadectwo z roku 1944,” in Długi cień Zagłady, pp. 55–67.

\textsuperscript{134} “Dlaczego nie znamy naszych bohaterów,” p. 61. Rotman pointed out that it was only in the mid-1990s that a specially appointed person was delegated to examine the applications for medals for the Polish Righteous.

\textsuperscript{135} See the appendix to this article.
the rescuers’ point of view. Of course, it is impossible to know how the statistics of the Polish Righteous would have been affected in the 1970s if diplomatic relations between Poland and Israel had not broken off in 1967. A fundamental change in the number of approved applications took place only in 1981, after a slight thaw in Polish-Israeli relations. Thus, the attitude of the rescued to the rescuers was influenced by the passage of time. The age of the rescued made them increasingly likely to come to terms with their past; even the memories of the most traumatic events lost their vividness. It is difficult to point out the precise psychological, social, ideological, or political factors that shaped these diverse attitudes. How is it possible to explain that, while some who were rescued maintained unbroken contact with the rescuers or made attempts to honor them for their assistance during the war, others permanently or temporarily cut themselves off from — or forgot — their wartime experiences?

Conclusion

The attitude of both Poles and Jews toward the Polish Righteous is highly ambivalent. Admiration and gratitude, as expressed by the attitudes and acts described above, are combined with embarrassed silence about their merits, resentment, fear, and sometimes even hostility. The need to honor

136 A letter dated February 25, 1971, from the Department for the Documentation of the Righteous Among the Nations reads: “Additionally, we wish to explain that the intervening developments in the international arena have halted the processing of such cases with respect to all citizens of Poland.

We also report that according to the existing procedure for dealing with the cases in question, the honorary decorations of the ‘Righteous Among the Nations’ medal for saving Jews during the Second World War are awarded to those noble people with an appropriate ceremony and only through our embassy in the given country.

As is known, the operation of our embassy in Poland has been suspended, and hence it has become temporarily impossible to perform the above-mentioned decoration acts.” AZIH, file no. 349/53, p. 10 (the case of Józef Lutz).

137 In 1977, the Polish authorities invited representatives of Israeli institutions, including Yad Vashem, to participate in designing the Jewish Pavilion at the Auschwitz Museum. In 1979, the Department of Yad Vashem Decorations was established at the ŻIH. It should be noted that since the founding of Yad Vashem, certain sections of the applications for medals were submitted directly to the institute, without the involvement of Polish institutions. For this reason, in the 1970s, despite the severance of diplomatic relations with Israel, medals continued to be awarded to the Polish Righteous for their wartime activities.
the noble conduct of people involved in assisting Jews during the German occupation was discussed by underground Jewish activists even before the war ended. Organized initiatives in support of the rescuers were launched by the survivors of the Holocaust almost immediately after the cessation of military operations. In the initial period, assistance was directed primarily at members of the Polish underground movement, which had been actively involved in Jewish affairs. The progressively reduced autonomy of Jewish organizations in the late 1940s, culminating in the liquidation of most of them, led to the discontinuation of most of the assistance previously provided to the Polish Righteous. However, as sources indicate, despite all the obstacles, the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland still managed to allocate very limited funds to support some of them. Only the antisemitic March 1968 events, which put an end to the manifestations of Jewish life in Poland, precluded the implementation of any collective Jewish projects, including those supporting the Righteous. Such initiatives were only resumed in the late 1980s, along with attempts to rebuild Jewish life in Poland by the few remaining Jewish community members.

Organized Polish initiatives for the Righteous only began at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. The turbulent course of the Communist authorities’ internal policy, and especially their exploitation of Jewish issues, contributed considerably to this situation. The “atmosphere of the times” related to this policy by no means encouraged openness, but the part that politics played should not be overestimated. The unworked-through trauma of the Holocaust and its later consequences was also important, as well as the fact that Jews have always been and remained

138 Feliks Tych discussed this subject in “Co jesteśmy winni Sprawiedliwym? What Do We Owe to the Righteous?” in Polacy ratujący Żydów w czasie Zagłady, Poles Who Rescued Jews during the Holocaust: Recalling Forgotten History (Lódz: Kancelaria Prezydenta RP, MHŻP, 2009), pp. 17–23. There is no doubt that the Righteous are an important subject of the politics of historical memory (Pol. polityka historyczna) after 1989. One can observe how the matter has been instrumentally treated by studying the debates concerning Polish-Jewish attitudes during the war, especially those held after publishing Jan Tomasz Gross’s books. See Dariusz Libionka’s article, “The Debate around the Jedwabne Massacre,” in this volume.

139 Barbara Engelking-Boni pointed this out in a conversation with Dominika Wielowieyska. “Only then [after 1989], did people who rescued Jews stop hiding it. In the social consciousness, they were suddenly made into heroes rather than apostates.” “Nikt się nie chwalił, że ukrywał Żyda,” Gazeta Wyborcza, May 14, 2008.

140 Koźmińska-Frejlak, “Świadkowie zagłady — Holokaust jako zbiorowe doświadczenie Polaków.”
strangers in popular Polish consciousness. Hence, immediate post-war accounts of the participation of Poles in rescue actions, especially those in the press that were critical of the new authorities, are characterized by a noticeable blurring of the distinction between individual and collective experiences. Perceived from the Jewish perspective, both the Holocaust and rescue always have a unique and individual character, whereas most Polish accounts of these cases make them into something more common, but, at the same time, also undefined and impersonal.141 The Jew as a stranger still remains an important point of reference for Polish society’s self-image, and this is why the problem of Polish attitudes towards the Holocaust always has a place in the historical policies of diverse ideological groups.

Post-war relations of the rescued with the people they owed their lives to are a different issue. They were also shaped by political circumstances, at least to a certain degree. Widespread antisemitism in post-war Poland, as well as the generally unfavorable atmosphere toward Jews or people of Jewish origin, discouraged some survivors from contacting their wartime rescuers. As Katarzyna Meloch put it:

During the occupation, being a Jew meant being inferior. The Germans effectively managed to impose this way of thinking.... If we continued hiding our origin, we could not talk about our rescuers either!142

Wartime experiences, different in each individual case, were certainly of crucial importance in the course of mutual relations. No less important were the mutual expectations of the rescuers and the rescued. The burden of everyday life also played a fundamental role: Both the rescued and the Righteous were preoccupied with rebuilding their old lives or constructing new ones.143 There was hardly any room for the past. They could only return to it years later, liberated from family and professional obligations. As a survivor of the Holocaust wrote in a letter in 1955:

141 In a discussion organized by the Więź monthly, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir observed: “I think that, until now, we have not talked about the Polish Righteous on the scale of our national ‘we,’ because those who could remember them did not live ‘in us.’ This part of ‘us’ was sort of dead.” “Dlaczego nie znamy naszych bohaterów,” p. 65.
142 “Dlaczego nie znamy naszych bohaterów,” p. 61.
143 “Misaddressed letters and losing telephone numbers and addresses by both sides expressed unconscious fears and ambivalence about the reunion and confrontation with the past.” See Fogelman, Conscience and Courage, p. 277.
For I know full well and remember very well what you did for me. I appreciate it a lot. You, good people, supported me in my struggle between life and death. Can [I] repay all that with oranges? No! I want to live [just] to repay [you] for all the good I got from you. I would like one more thing: to be with you once more and to see every cottage, every hill, and all of you, and to thank you from the bottom of my heart....

Now, why did I not write all that time? That is simple. Immediately after the war, when I became free again, a new war started in my land. At first, I thought and hoped that some of my relatives would still be alive. But unfortunately my dream came to nothing.... I lost four brothers, one sister, and my father and mother. Then I survived another war, the 1948 Israeli-Arab War of Independence, in which I took part. One thing I can write honestly, with all my heart, is that not a single day has passed when I have not thought and talked about you...
Appendix

The Number of Poles Awarded the “Righteous Among the Nations of the World” Medal by Yad Vashem, 1953–2007

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<td>1979</td>
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<td>2006/07</td>
<td>62</td>
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* The number of the Righteous decorated in the given year, based on The Encyclopedia of the Righteous, published by Yad Vashem, in italics; and the institute’s official data, provided by Bożenna Rotman, in bold.

** The number of awards in 1958 is based on the data from The Encyclopedia of the Righteous, and, as Rotman verified, there is a mistake there, and four of them were actually given in 1968.

*** The number of awards in 1962 is based on incorrect data from The Encyclopedia of the Righteous.
How Ordinary Poles See the Jews: Review and Interpretation of 1967 to 2008 Survey Results

ANTONI SUŁEK

Introduction to Methodology

Sociological interest in issues relating to the nation and nationality in Poland dates back over a century. Indeed, as social science developed, the “national question” was a major issue, alongside the “social question.” There is also a considerable tradition of “modern” research into opinions and attitudes in society, stretching back some 50 years. More or less systematic studies of the Poles’ attitudes toward other nations have been carried out since the second half of the 1960s. However, during the period of Communist rule, attitudes toward Jews, like Polish-Jewish relations per se, were not studied. Ethnic differences and prejudices, like other social conflicts, had no place in the “lyrical model of socialism,” in which harmony was supposed to prevail, and the authorities were more interested in “reinforcing friendship among nations” than in probing sentiments associated with ethnicity. Moreover, until the “first Solidarity” period 1980–1981, public opinion polls altogether avoided politically and socially sensitive issues. At the time, sociologists did not study attitudes toward Jews, just as relations with the Soviet Union,


Russians, and Ukrainians were passed over. Thus, research devoted specifically to attitudes toward Jews did not begin until 1989, with the collapse of Communism.

This article presents an overview of the attitudes of Poles (citizens of Poland) toward Jews, based on sociological surveys and public opinion polls. Sometimes, the term “Jews” designates the Jewish nation or people from the Jewish nation living all over the world, and sometimes, the Jews living in Poland — Jewish Poles, Polish Jews, and Polish citizens with Jewish national identity. The convenient term “attitude” is used here as a kind of *pars pro toto*, referring to knowledge, sentiments, prejudices, stereotypes, cognitive schemas, sense of identity, and other subjective phenomena. The survey is a natural method for researching attitudes on a large scale.

In surveys, people may be asked about matters outside their everyday experience, unfamiliar in their own lives. Respondents have often never thought about such matters before, or might have considered them but not established a firm stance, which they can easily call to mind and express to the interviewer. On the whole, people merely have inclinations that surveys expose and couch in a crystallized, computable form results or scientific data. Many respondents’ answers are obtained by activating stereotypes of the phenomena under study, a deduction from general dispositions, and an induction from detailed opinions. Answers formed in this way are certainly not random, though they are sensitive to the influence of the circumstances at the time and the survey content. Hence, survey results may vary and differ from one another to a certain extent, even where the phenomena investigated are stable.4

The mental states, particularly the more complex ones, researched in surveys are expressed in many ways and should be probed using several questions that reflect each aspect in order to improve the assessment quality. The dependence of the answer to a question on its form, wording, and context is an important aspect of surveys. The issues of interest to the researcher are translated into the questions, but words have a life and impact of their own, and even slight differences in the wording of the questions may lead to significant differences in the answers.5 Hence, comparing the

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results of different surveys is difficult and requires caution — it is preferable to compare results within a single survey or series of surveys.

The surveys analyzed in this article are temporally spread over a long period: The first was conducted in 1967, and the last one at the end of 2008. They include both simple public opinion surveys, with the Poles’ relations with Jews addressed in only a few questions, and more thorough academic surveys. This article concentrates, above all, on basic parameters and tendencies and, therefore, only takes account of research conducted on nationwide representative samples of the adult population.\(^6\) Surveys of particular population sectors, even significant ones, such as young people, are not studied here; neither are differences among social groups analyzed. The results used come directly from original publications, reports, and archives of research organizations, in particular, the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS — Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej) and the Center for Public Opinion Research (OBOP — Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej), known as the TNS OBOP since 2003.\(^7\) Earlier summaries of survey results concerning Poles’ attitudes toward Jews and people of other nations, particularly the important papers by Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania, Ireneusz Krzemiński, and Ewa Nowicka, sociologists at the University of Warsaw, quoted below, are also used.

Some data is sourced from multinational public opinion surveys conducted in Poland and other countries for the American Jewish Committee (AJC). These results facilitate the comparison of Poland with other countries and reveal the similarities and differences with other societies. However, it is important to bear in mind the limitations of inter-country comparison, since the meanings of answers depend on their cultural contexts.\(^8\) In addition, survey results of ethnic attitudes are biased, the answers tending to conform to social norms. Nowadays, respondents are less eager to express antipathy toward other nations directly, and people in Western societies are more cautious in voicing their prejudices than in Poland. Wherever possible, data on the Poles’ attitudes toward nations other than Jews, and even social groups defined by criteria other than nationality, are also cited. These

\(^{6}\) N=1000–1500; maximum statistical error in surveys with samples of this size is ±3 percent, at a confidence level of 0.95.

\(^{7}\) Reports on CBOS studies are available from CBOS and, since 1998, also in electronic form at www.cbos.pl. OBOP reports are available in electronic form at www.obop.com.pl/archive. The author wrote the OBOP reports from 1998 to 2008 used in the article.

comparisons allow the degree to which attitudes toward Jews differ from those toward other nations and social categories to be assessed.

No attempt is made in this article to compare contemporary attitudes to the stance toward Jews between the two World Wars and prior to the Holocaust. Any such comparison between two such different periods would be of limited value and, in any case, Polish sociologists before the Second World War did not conduct representative studies that can be compared with today’s opinion polls. In historical sources, testimonies to extreme attitudes and behavior (demonstrations that are either antisemitic or defend the Jews) are more readily preserved than the views of the “silent majority,” i.e. the majority whose voice is heard today in surveys. Consequently, comparisons of present-day attitudes to those from the 1930s would be very difficult.

This article does not take account of all the surveys on Poles’ relations toward Jews conducted in the past 40 years. However, the author believes that those studies deliberately excluded — or those of which he is unaware — would not significantly alter the picture.

The aim of this article is to present and generalize the survey results rather than to offer a theoretical analysis. Nevertheless, the most basic categories of description are theoretical, sourced from cognitive social psychology. This study was also inspired by Emile Durkheim’s sociological ideas, particularly his concepts of “social fact” and “collective representations.”

This article deals with the following subjects: Poles’ knowledge about the Jews in Poland, and specifically their conceptions of the size of this community; their feelings — sympathy, antipathy, and sense of closeness with, or distance from, the Jews; Polish stereotypes of Jews; the cognitive schema of “Jewish influences”; and the picture the surveys give of the Polish stance in disputes regarding memory — in particular their attitudes toward the Holocaust. This study concludes by mentioning what the surveys do not reveal.


How Many Jews Are There in Poland?

The Jews now living in Poland comprise an extremely small community. In public discourse, there is no consensus on the number of Jews in Poland, and estimates vary wildly. Depending on the criteria used, they range from a few thousand to nearly 20,000, though figures both lower and higher than this are given occasionally. Only, in very rare circumstances, do figures exceed one-thousandth of the country’s total population given.11 Polish Jews are a “remnant,” a vestigial community, all that remains of Poland’s pre-war Jewish society, which numbered almost 3.5 million, and was largely exterminated in the Holocaust.

A few surveys investigated the number of Jews in Poland. This question concerns a matter removed from everyday experience, so many respondents were unable to answer or gave replies that depended closely on the way the question was formulated. The responses may differ quite markedly from one another. Moreover, many people have a poor grasp of figures relating to matters about which they know very little, such as the ethnic composition of society. Questions about numbers of Jews may be asked in terms of percentages, thousands, millions, or qualitatively (“a lot,” “a few,” etc.).

In a 1991 AJC/Demoskop survey, only 20 percent of respondents selected “less than one percent” from the available answers regarding the percentage of Jews in Polish society; however, in a study carried out in 1994/1995, only 24 percent chose the lowest category, “less than two percent.” A total of 14 percent of respondents in the former survey and 20 percent in the latter, opted for ten percent and upward.12 These results were biased by the scales used, which swayed interviewees toward selecting higher categories, but even after adjusting for the impact of this, in the 1995 survey, only 42 percent of respondents selected categories below two percent, while 33 percent chose categories above two percent.13

11 According to American Wikipedia, the Moses Schorr Center in Warsaw “estimates that there are approximately 100,000 [!] Jews in Poland, of which 30,000–40,000 have some sort of direct connection to the Jewish community, either religiously or culturally.” (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_Poland) (accessed, May 17, 2008).
A 1996 CBOS study included the pre-categorized question: “How many Jews live in our country today?” In answer to this, 21 percent of participants selected the “fairly realistic” category of up to 50,000, while 13 percent chose the “exaggerated” figure of “up to 100,000.” However, the remaining answers, as the report expressed it, “border[ed] on the fantastic” — ten percent of respondents gave “a quarter of a million,” eight percent “half a million,” and 14 percent “a million or more.”

In the studies conducted by Ireneusz Krzemiński’s team in 1992 and 2002, the first representative studies in Poland dedicated to attitudes toward Jews posed the question: “Are there many Jews living in Poland, or few?” Totals of 23 percent and 28 percent of respondents, respectively, claimed there were “a large number” or “a very large number” of Jews living in Poland, and 46 percent and 51 percent responded that there were “few” or “very few.” In 1992, when asked to state how many, answers ranging from “1,000–2,000” to “tens of thousands” were given by 33 percent of respondents, while 17 percent cited entirely unrealistic figures: “several hundred thousand” or “several million.” In 2002, the answers were more realistic: 47 percent and 12 percent in these categories, respectively. As the primary, yet undervalued outcome, these studies reveal that a large proportion of Poles do not even have an approximate idea of how many Jews live in Poland: 50 percent and 41 percent of respondents in 1992 and 2002 respectively, stated that this did not interest them or that they did not know! Equally significant is the finding that only around 25 percent of Poles believed there were “large” or “very large” numbers of Jews in Poland, while 50 percent thought there were “few” or “very few.” On the whole, respondents did not know the figures or percentages, but rather expressed their vague knowledge in quantitative language by large or small absolute figures and percentages that corresponded with their beliefs.

“Many” may also mean a large number in relation to other ethnic minorities. In CBOS studies conducted in the 1990s, around 50 percent of respondents considered the Jews — one of the least numerous national minorities

14 CBOS research report, Żydzi i Polacy w opiniaach społeczeństwa, 1997.
15 Ireneusz Krzemiński, ed., Czy Polacy są antysemitami? Wyniki badania ankietowego (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 1996); Ireneusz Krzemiński, ed., Antysemityzm w Polsce i na Ukrainie. Raport z badań (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2004), pp. 95–96. The authors of the book on the first survey are: Ireneusz Krzemiński, Helena Datner-Spiewak, Alina Cała, Ewa Koźmińska-Frejla, Staszek Szwab, and Andrzej Zbikowski; and on the second survey, Ireneusz Krzemiński and Marcin Jóźko. Some of the figures cited here have never been previously published and are given here with Professor Krzemiński’s kind permission.
in Poland — to be among the most numerous: In 1994, they were thought to be the third-largest, after the German and Ukrainian minorities; and, in 1997, the second-largest, after the Germans. “Many” may also mean “too many,” which may be related to negative attitudes regarding the Jews.

The tendency to overestimate the number of Jews in Poland is in direct contrast to the widespread lack of any kind of contact with Jews. While in a few surveys, where 18–30 percent of respondents claimed to know or at least to have met “someone who is Jewish,” there can be no doubt that this figure is grossly exaggerated, and includes the few respondents who can only have remembered Jews from their childhood.

The wildly untrue, exaggerated estimates of the number of Jews now living in Poland may be interpreted in many different ways. The widespread lack of knowledge about the number of Jews in Poland may be an indication that, for ordinary people, this is not a matter of significance. However, the problem is false knowledge rather than a lack of it. As survey correlations indicate, extreme inflation of the number of Jews may be linked to perceiving them as a threat, and the conviction that “there are Jews everywhere” is part of the antisemitic worldview. Conceptions of the number of Jews in Poland may also be a function of Jewish-related subjects in public discourse — people are under the impression that there are many Jews, because a lot is written and said about Jews. Each of these factors explains part of the phenomenon, but irrespective of the reasons, the striking exaggeration by some Poles of the Jewish community’s size indicates that this social group is mythologized.

Overestimation of the number of Jews in society is not unique to Poland. In Austria, where there was a very small Jewish presence of 1.5 percent in 1991, only 14 percent of those asked by AJC responded “up to one percent,” while 26 percent indicated “up to five percent,” 16 percent stated “up to ten percent,” and 22 percent pointed to categories over ten percent in answer to the question, “What percentage of Austria’s population would you say is Jewish?” The Jews are undoubtedly like a phantom limb, as in other Central and Eastern European countries, and thus remain in the social consciousness despite their almost total absence.

16 CBOS research reports, Stosunek Polaków do przedstawicieli mniejszości narodowych mieszkających w Polsce, 1994; Stosunek do mniejszości narodowych, 1999.
17 Sułek, “Ilu Żydów jest w Polsce?,” p. 184; Krzemiński, Czy Polacy są antysemitami?, p. 66.
Feelings of Sympathy, Antipathy, Closeness, and Distance

Feelings, in particular sympathy and antipathy, are the simplest and most easily grasped elements of relationships with others. Individual feelings toward outsiders are rarely formed through direct contact, and, even more rarely, through contact free of the influence of previous judgments. The assessments on which these feelings are based are construed and transmitted by society, which individuals accept or reject as they mature in society; and, in this sense, even feelings are socially learned.¹⁹ These general truths are extremely applicable to the feelings of the Poles with regard to ethnic groups. Ethnically, today’s Poland is a highly homogeneous country and few Poles have ever had the opportunity of personally meeting individuals belonging to ethnic minorities. Their conceptions and judgments of others are accepted and created on the basis of the opinions and accounts of others, or narratives circulating in the communicative space and the media; and yet, Poland has a long history of multi-ethnicity that might have an impact on these opinions, accounts, and narratives.

Research into feelings, initially sporadic and later increasingly regular, toward Jews began in the 1960s. In Jerzy Szacki’s pioneering survey conducted in early 1967 by the OBOP on a sample of residents of urban areas, in answer to the open-ended question as to the “least liked” nations, relatively few respondents, only four percent, spontaneously mentioned the Jews (fewer than for the Germans — 67 percent — Czechs, Slovaks, Chinese, Russians, Americans, English, and Ukrainians). As for the “most liked” nations, the Jews were possibly among the 5.5 percent of “other nations” not listed individually in the report.²⁰ This study was conducted in the period when Jewish topics were virtually absent from official discourse, and hence, in the common consciousness, Jews were rather vaguely defined figures, and attitudes toward them were of peripheral significance. Soon afterward, the notorious “anti-Zionist” campaign of 1968 brought these subjects to the fore, extending the web of negative associations against Jews.

There are two series of surveys describing feelings toward Jews: OBOP data for the 1975–1992 period, the last decade-and-a-half of Communist rule;²¹ and CBOS data since 1993, covering a similar period of democratic

²¹ This research was initiated by Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania; see OBOP research report,
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government. The questions did not refer to Polish Jews or the Jewish minority in Poland, but to Jews as a nation among other nations. The facility in comparing attitudes to Jews with attitudes to other nations makes these studies particularly valuable.

Table 1. Attitudes to Jews in OBOP Surveys from 1975 to 1992*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you feel towards various nations [Jews]?</th>
<th>'75</th>
<th>'77</th>
<th>'81</th>
<th>'82</th>
<th>'83</th>
<th>'84</th>
<th>'85</th>
<th>'86</th>
<th>'87</th>
<th>'88</th>
<th>'89</th>
<th>'90</th>
<th>'91</th>
<th>'92</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antipathy</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The results are given in percentages, excluding the “Hard to say” answers.

Throughout the period covered by the OBOP research, indifference toward Jews, neither sympathy nor antipathy (54–73 percent), was the dominant sentiment. More Poles were indifferent to the Jewish nation than to their own neighbors or to other nations with strong links to Poland (the Russians, Americans, Germans, and French). Among those Poles who did take a stance on the Jews, for a long time, those expressing antipathy were more numerous than those expressing sympathy, initially by several-fold; and, to some extent, this might have been the legacy of the March 1968 events. However, sympathy grew steadily, from 4 percent to 13 percent over the entire study period, and antipathy fell from 41 percent to 22 percent. In part, this reflected a broader trend of diminishing antipathy toward foreigners, which was more favorable to Jews than to various other nations. In the 1970s, the Jews were the least liked nation of those covered by the study, and only the Germans were more disliked. By the early 1990s, the position


22 CBOS research reports, Czy Polacy lubią inne narody?, 2003; Stosunek Polaków do innych narodów, 2008; until 2001, the term “Israelis (Jews)” was used, and the change to “Jews” did not affect the answers.

of the Jews had improved slightly: They became more liked than the Roma, Arabs, Turks, Chinese, and Ukrainians, and less often disliked than the Germans, Roma, Arabs, Russians, Romanians, and Ukrainians.

In 1992, OBOP discontinued these studies, but repeated them in incidental surveys nearly a decade-and-a-half later, at the turn of 2004/2005, and again at the beginning of 2008. In the first of these surveys, 33 percent of respondents declared sympathy toward the Jews and five percent antipathy, while, in the second, the figures were 23 percent and nine percent, respectively. These results suggest that the slight increase in sympathy and decline in antipathy toward the Jews, which was already apparent during the first decade of democracy, continued. This is confirmed by the CBOS data series.

Table 2. Attitudes to Jews in CBOS Surveys from 1993 to 2008*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you name your attitude towards nations other than Polish [Jews]?</th>
<th>'93</th>
<th>'94</th>
<th>'95</th>
<th>'96</th>
<th>'97</th>
<th>'98</th>
<th>'99</th>
<th>'01</th>
<th>'02</th>
<th>'03</th>
<th>'04</th>
<th>'05</th>
<th>'06</th>
<th>'07</th>
<th>'08</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sympathy</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antipathy</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The results are given in percentages, including the “Hard to say” answers, which are from five to nine percent.

These studies, initiated in 1993, use a seven-point scale: +3 indicates the greatest sympathy, 0 = indifference, and -3 — the greatest antipathy. The change in form of the scale in itself brought about sharp decreases in indices of indifference and an increase in antipathy, as compared to the OBOP series. This hampers comparisons over time and thus, the 1993–2008 period became the focus. Directly after the fall of Communism in Poland, there was an increase in positive feelings toward the Jews. In the late 1990s, this tendency declined by a couple of points, remaining at the new level


25 In 1992, between these two series of studies, nothing occurred in Poland that could have increased antipathy toward the Jews so markedly and permanently.
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for a few years. Recently, however, the positive tendency reappeared: In 2008, sympathy (34 percent) dominated over antipathy (32 percent), for the first time since surveys on the attitudes toward Jews were undertaken! Throughout the entire period, there was also an improvement of attitudes toward other less “liked” nations — Ukrainians, Russians, Romanians, and the Roma. It is also important to compare Poland with other countries. The most recent comparison was in the AJC/TNS multinational 2004/2005 survey, dealing with memory of the Holocaust.26

Table 3. Sympathetic and Unsympathetic Feelings toward Jews in Poland and Other Countries in the 2005 AJC/TNS Survey*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Very sympathetic</th>
<th>Somewhat sympathetic</th>
<th>Somewhat unsympathetic</th>
<th>Very unsympathetic</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Hard to say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The results are given in percentages.

Indifference is the dominant sentiment in this study in Poland — as in all the other countries of Europe, apart from the United Kingdom. Among those who were not indifferent toward the Jews, sympathy is much more common than antipathy. Since people today have become more restrained in expressing antipathy toward foreigners and being well disposed toward them is “the done thing,” these results should be treated with caution, but the large differences between countries nevertheless remain significant. Sympathy toward the Jews is far more common in Poland than in Austria or Germany, but less common than in other countries, particularly the UK and the USA (see note 27). The degree of sympathy distinguishes the Poles from those who are the

26 AJC, Thinking about the Holocaust 60 Years Later.
most well disposed toward Jews: Extreme sympathy toward the Jews is the exception in Poland. Poles are also set apart from those most favorably disposed toward the Jews by the scale of their indifference.

The Poles’ attitudes to Jews living in Poland, listed as one of the country’s ethnic minorities, should be distinguished from their attitudes to the Jews as a dispersed nation living all over the world. It is worth noting that, in Polish surveys, respondents do not always know if they are being asked about Jews in Poland or Jews overall, and, likewise, the researchers may not know who their interviewees are talking about. There are two CBOS studies on this issue, dating from the 1990s, which include the question “Do Polish citizens of foreign descent arouse any feelings in you?” A total of 18 percent and 16 percent of Poles in 1994 and 1999, respectively, claimed to have sympathy toward Jews living in Poland. Practically the same percentages, 17 percent and 19 percent, respectively, had sympathy with Jews in general. However, far fewer claimed antipathy toward “their own” Jews than toward all Jews (37 percent and 35 percent, as compared to 47 percent and 49 percent, respectively, with the remainder stating they were indifferent).

Of the nine ethnic minorities assessed (Belarusians, Roma, Czechs, Lithuanians, Germans, Russians, Slovaks, Ukrainians, and Jews), the Jews were among the least liked minorities: third from last and penultimate place, in 1994 and 1999, respectively. Thus, antipathy toward Jews, in general, significantly outweighed sympathy, and the same is true toward Jews in Poland, although the margin between these attitudes is smaller.

These attitudes are echoed in the results relating to distance from Jews and other minorities, which have been measured in Poland many times by standard questions on acceptance of mixed inter-ethnic marriages.

In 1967, Szacki asked: “What would be your stance if your daughter fell in love with and wanted to marry an Israeli?” A total of 52 percent of respondents would have been “absolutely against” such a marriage; a higher percentage of 57 percent would have been against a marriage to either a Japanese or a German from the FRG (West Germany), with 59 percent against a “black African,” and 64 percent against a Chinese man; while fewer were opposed to a marriage to a German from the GDR, a Russian, an American or a Frenchman — 44 percent, 25 percent, 14 percent and 11 percent, respectively. This study was carried out on a sample living in urban areas, so

27 CBOS research reports, Stosunek Polaków do przedstawicieli mniejszości narodowych mieszkających w Polsce, 1994; and Stosunek do mniejszości narodowych, 1999.
higher percentages would be expected for the total population.\textsuperscript{28} In spite of differences in the questions asked, subsequent studies indicate that acceptance of marriage to a Jew has risen slightly. (The question given by Szacki referred specifically to marriage to “an Israeli,” not to “a Jew,” but in 1967, this difference most probably did not significantly affect the answers.)

A 1994 CBOS survey, in the context of national minorities in Poland, asked whether interviewees would be opposed to someone in their families marrying a person of foreign descent. Another CBOS survey question enquired whether respondents would be against a Pole from one of Poland’s ethnic minorities becoming prime minister.\textsuperscript{29} The first question examines the private sphere, and the second, public life.

Table 4. Acceptance of Someone from an Ethnic Minority Group for Marriage to a Family Member or as Prime Minister in the 1994 CBOS Survey*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Would you have anything against someone in your family marrying someone from an ethnic minority?</th>
<th>Would you have anything against a Polish citizen who was from an ethnic minority becoming the prime minister of Poland?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I would be against it</td>
<td>I would not be against it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarusian</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jew</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The results are given in percentages.

\textsuperscript{28} Szacki, \textit{Polacy o sobie i innych narodach}, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{29} CBOS research reports, \textit{Stosunek Polaków do przedstawicieli mniejszości narodowych mieszkających w Polsce}, 1994.
In 1994, 43 percent of Poles (a lower percentage than in the 1960s) would not have accepted, as opposed to 49 percent who would have accepted, a Pole of Jewish descent as a new family member. Jews were one of the least accepted minorities, as opposed to up to 70 percent expressing readiness to accept members of other ethnic minorities into the family. Thus, for various reasons, many Poles would prefer to see “their own type” in the family. In 2007, another CBOS study, by Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania and Sławomir Łodziński, gave similar results: Marriage between a Jew and “someone from the family” would be accepted by 50 percent, and not accepted by 38 percent of the Poles interviewed; a Vietnamese, a new ethnic minority in Poland, would be accepted by a similar percentage (48 percent); a Roma less so (42 percent); and a Ukrainian more willingly (60 percent).30

Similar change is clearly apparent in a study that was carried out by an OBOP team under Ewa Nowicka in 1988, and repeated in 1998.31 A total of 40 percent, in 1988, and only 33 percent, ten years later, would have advised “a close friend” who was not a family member, against marrying a Jew; and 44 percent would not have advised against such a marriage, in 1988, and 59 percent, ten years later, would not have dissuaded a friend.

The reduction in the Poles’ distance from Jews is also apparent in their greater readiness to accept them as neighbors. In a 1994/1995 AJC/Demoskop poll, 60 percent of respondents claimed that it “would not matter” if there were “Jews living in the neighborhood,” while three percent stated that they would like to have Jewish neighbors, but 30 percent would not. This distance from Jews was similar to the distance toward Germans (61 percent, 11 percent, and 26 percent, respectively), but less (and much less in some cases) than the distance from the other ethnic groups covered, e.g., Russians (50 percent, 4 percent, and 43 percent, respectively) and Roma (30 percent, 2 percent, and 65 percent, respectively).32 In 1999, in the Polish version of the European Values Study, 25 percent of respondents would not have liked to “have Jews as neighbors,” while only 16 percent still thought this way by 2007.33

31 OBOP research report, Polacy wobec ludzi innych narodów: dynamika bliskości i dystansu, 1988–1998, 1998. The authors of this study were Ewa Nowicka and Sławomir Łodziński; and, in addition, Jan Nawrocki in 1988.
32 Golub and Cohen, Knowledge and Remembrance of the Holocaust in Poland, p. 39.
33 Jasińska-Kania and Łodziński, “Wykluczani z narodu.”
These results indicate that distance from Jews incorporates a strong component of general mistrust of anyone who is ethnically different, which is even more marked in the public sphere. Around 50 percent of Poles would not like to have a Polish prime minister from one of the country’s ethnic minorities, and whether Jewish or not seems to be of little significance. Similar findings were reported in the 2002 Krzemiński study: 34 59 percent of respondents would not vote for a presidential candidate of Jewish descent, but 63–69 percent would not want the president of Poland to be of German, Russian or Ukrainian background. Over the decade between 1992 and 2002, the significance attached to the nationality of presidential candidates, whether Jewish or from other minority groups, declined slightly.

Aside from general sympathy, lack of sympathy, and distance, various studies probed positive/negative attitudes to Jews in more detail, often using very ingenious questions. The sense of closeness or alienation is a fundamental feeling in relation to sympathy, antipathy, and distance, representing the accumulation of many and varied influences. Closeness has many dimensions: the community’s historical fate, blood bond, similar culture, psychological similarities, and the kinship of religion. Various survey results help to assess some of these dimensions.

The 1988 survey by Nowicka’s team examined the sense of biological closeness, and the Poles’ convictions as to whether people of various nationalities belong to “the same race as the Poles.” 35 Approximately the same percentage (42 percent) felt that Jews qualified as the same race, as did not (47 percent). The distinct position of Jews in this respect only becomes apparent when compared to attitudes to other nations. Slovaks, one of the Poles’ neighbors, were classed in the same racial community by 89 percent, and excluded by only seven percent of respondents, while Western European nations — the English, Germans, and Italians — were included by 69–72 percent and excluded by 22–24 percent. Black Africans, Chinese, and Arabs, representing geographically distant ethnic categories, were classed as the same race by six to ten percent of Poles, but considered otherwise by 80–89 percent. In 1988, the question regarding willingness to accept “healthy, screened blood” for transfusion was answered by 23 percent to the effect that they would not accept blood from a Jew; and more or less the same percentage would not accept blood from an Arab, a Chinese or a black. However,

34 Krzemiński, Antysemityzm w Polsce i na Ukrainie, pp. 86–87.
35 Ewa Nowicka, ed., Swoi i obcy (Warsaw: Instytut Socjologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1990), p. 161; this question was not asked in the follow-up study in 1998.
over the 1988–1998 decade, the biological distance from Jews and nations occupying similar positions in the Polish consciousness, diminished considerably. By 1998, only 15–17 percent of the Poles would refuse to accept blood from people belonging to any of these nations.36 These results do not have predictive value, but they do have a considerable diagnostic value with regard to the extent of ethnic prejudice. In spite of this tendency, many Poles still consider Jews, as Georg Simmel put it, “strangers close to us,” an alien race brought closer by contact and a shared life in the same country.

How long have Jews been living in Poland? According to historians, the answer is 800 years. However, most Poles have a poor historical general knowledge, and would have no reason to know this historical fact from textbooks. Nevertheless, awareness that Jews have been living in Poland for centuries is fairly widespread. In a 1996 CBOS study, 27 percent of respondents selected “for 800 years” and 24 percent “for 300 years”; 16 percent thought Jews had been living in Poland “for 100 years,” while the remainder did not express an opinion on this matter.37

However, the question of their positive or negative evaluation of this “cohabitation” with Jews on Polish territory is more crucial. In Krzemiński’s 2002 study, in answer to the question, “Have the Poles experienced more good than bad, as much good as bad, or more bad than good from the Jews?” three times more respondents considered it “more bad” than “more good” (27 percent versus nine percent); while over half (51 percent) selected “as much bad as good.” The tension and asymmetry in this situation is only revealed in the answers to the “reverse” question about what the Jews experienced from the Poles. In the opinion of 43 percent of respondents, the Jews experienced as much good as bad, but 42 percent believe they experienced more good, while only six percent consider they had been through more bad. Thus, the Poles tend to evaluate their cohabitation with the Jews as neutral, but with more negative valuations than positive ones, and very asymmetrically. Neither did this represent an improvement in these assessments: In fact, there was a slight deterioration — ten years ago, only 18 percent, as compared with 27 percent of respondents in the earlier study, thought Poles had experienced more bad from Jews than good.38


1010
However, the evaluation of the Poles’ coexistence with the Jews revealed by this study does not stand out, since a similar pattern was found with regard to the Germans, Russians, and Ukrainians. Moreover, the asymmetry in judgment about coexistence with the Jews is much less than with other nations the Poles have had to live with or alongside. This should not come as a surprise given the history of the wars and conflicts with the Germans, Russians, and Ukrainians. These perceptions and judgments reflect fundamental Polish attitudes to their history. The Poles are accustomed to thinking of themselves as the victims of history; in a 2006 survey, nearly two-thirds of respondents (62 percent) tended toward the view that “the Polish nation has suffered more in history than other nations,” with only one-third (34 percent) claiming it had suffered “the same” as others.39

In Poland, an essentially Catholic country, religious difference was formerly perhaps the most marked attribute of the Jewish community and a major source of negative attitudes toward Jews. The teachings of the Catholic Church did not draw attention to Christianity’s Jewish roots or to the fundamental relationship between Judaism and Christianity. This only changed with the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965.

In 1996 and again in 2000, CBOS surveys asked whether respondents agreed that “the Jews are our older brothers in faith.”40 At the time, thanks to John Paul II, this definition of Jew, which originated in the nineteenth century Messianic ideas of the Polish Romantic circle, was already in public circulation. In 1996, this proposition was accepted and rejected by the same percentage of respondents, 40 percent and 39 percent, respectively; however, in 2000, twice as many people accepted it as rejected it, 52 percent and 26 percent, respectively. The second survey was conducted shortly after the Pope’s visit to the Holy Land and his prayer at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. The effects of such events are reduced over time, but do not disappear entirely, and so it is reasonable to assume that the sense of religious closeness to the Jews is gradually spreading in Poland.41

Surveys suggest that a sense of closeness and positive feeling about the Jews in Polish society is increasing, but this is a very slow and complex process: It is more rapid in some areas than others, and there is even regres-

40 CBOS research report, Żydzi i Polacy w opiniaich społeczeństwa; CBOS research report, Polacy — Żydzi, 2000.
41 In 2001, after the debate around the Jedwabne massacre, the configuration of these views in society returned to the same level as in 1996, and in 2011, to the same level as in 2000.
sion in certain areas. This is largely part of a wider trend of diminishing antipathy toward culturally and ethnically different people, which, in turn, is a consequence of Poland opening up to the world, accelerated by the 1989 political revolution.

**Stereotypes of the Jew**

A stereotype is an entrenched form of collective social consciousness. Stereotypes are created in situations of contact between groups and are simplified and biased records of group experiences. Stereotypes express the positive and negative emotions of social groups toward one another and toward outsiders. These emotions toward others are the result not so much of individual experiences, but rather of conscious or unconscious acceptance of the collective representation, in which similar characteristics are ascribed to all members of the alien group. More recent angles on the stereotype place greater emphasis on its social functions. Stereotypes are part of a body of practical knowledge about inter-group relations shared and recognized by a group. They direct the behavior of group members in their contact with other groups, and serve to generate a shared identity, self-categorization, and valuation of one's own group, and differentiation from others.42

The stereotype of the Jew in Poland is a textbook example of an ethnic stereotype. It was formed over centuries of direct Polish-Jewish contacts with contributions from the Catholic religion and Polish national ideology. The importance of this stereotype in Poland is indicated by the fact that *Nowa księga przysłów i wyrażeń przysłowiyowych polskich* (a book of Polish proverbs and proverbial sayings) registers as many as 266 expressions about Jews, more than those relating to any other social category.43 Nowadays, this stereotype is characterized by a lack of clear reference. Thus, the “Jews” covered by the stereotype include those who once lived in Poland, the Jewish minority in present-day Poland, and the Jewish nation or Jews across the world, including in Israel. However, this is of little significance to the stereotypical mindset, which assumes that all people of a particular category have an unchanging nature — they are essentially the same, always and everywhere.

42 Bar-Tal and Teichman, *Stereotypes and Prejudice in Conflict*.
The stereotype of the Jew in contemporary Polish society was first examined in a nationwide representative survey at the end of the 1980s/beginning of 1990s. At that time, commercial skills and various other positive, neutral, and negative attributes connected with doing business were at its core. In the most fully reported study, carried out by Nowicka’s team in 1988, respondents spontaneously attributed the following characteristics to Jews (only those mentioned by at least two percent are cited here):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tradespeople, merchants</td>
<td>26 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not refined, self-seeking</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrifty, enterprising</td>
<td>9 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business people</td>
<td>7 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cunning, devious</td>
<td>7 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted, intelligent</td>
<td>5 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active, energetic</td>
<td>5 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard-working</td>
<td>5 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>3 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutually supportive</td>
<td>3 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonest</td>
<td>2 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive, possessive</td>
<td>2 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A cited author was struck not only by their “extremely unusual cohesiveness” and concentration on economic activities, but also by their anachronism, “the extremely unusual durability of the image of the Jew, which has survived unchanged for at least half a century,” while the stereotypes of many other nations, including the Poles’ self-stereotype, have changed markedly.44 This can be explained by the disappearance of Jews from Polish society during the Holocaust and post-war emigration: Such lack of contact freezes old stereotypes of social groups, and tradition, which become the source of knowledge about others rather than life experience. However, the extensive 1989 revolution also had some effect on stereotypes of the Jew. As early as 1988 and 1989, Jasińska-Kania noted “signs of evolution in the image of the Jew” in OBOP polls. There was a reevaluation of certain characteristics attributed to the Jew: In place of “traders” and “wheeler-dealers,” such phrases as “commercially gifted” were heard and in place of “self-interested,” “attention to business” became more common. This was reflected in changes in the proportions of positive and negative definitions:

44 Nowicka, Swoi i obcy, p. 147; Jan Nawrocki is the author cited.
37 percent and 38 percent, respectively, in 1988, and 39 percent and 31 percent, in 1989.\footnote{Franciszek Ryszka and Aleksandra Jasińska-Kania, “Antysemityzm polski. Szkic do opisu i diagnozy,” in Jasińska-Kania, Bliscy i dalecy, p. 197.}

Further changes in stereotypes of the Jew that took place after 1989 are revealed in the surveys by Krzemiński’s team in 1992 and 2002.\footnote{Krzemiński, Czy Polacy są antysemitami?, pp. 199–228; Krzemiński, Antysemityzm w Polsce i na Ukrainie, pp. 215–219.} These researchers believe that over the 1992–2002 decade, stereotypes of the Jew, reconstructed from the most important spontaneously mentioned characteristics of “people” from the Jewish nation and “the Jews as a nation,” changed “for the worse,” in both cases.\footnote{The authors of this study identify “exemplary” and “group soul” elements in the group stereotype. See Mirosław Kofta and Grzegorz Sędek, “Struktura poznawcza stereotypu etnicznego, bliskość wyborów parlamentarnych a przejawy uprzedzeń antysemickich,” in Zdzisław Chlewinski and Ida Kurcz, eds., Sterotypy i uprzedzenia (Warsaw: Instytut Psychologii PAN, 1992) (Kolokwia Psychologiczne, vol. 1), pp. 67–86.} In 1992, the stereotype was definitely positive: Positive characteristics were cited far more than negative ones. However, ten years later, it might be defined as neutral: Positive characteristics were listed more or less as much as negative ones. This rather unexpected change is explained below.

The positive characteristics most frequently mentioned in 2002 were: diligence, honesty, capability, and enterprise (listed by 36 percent of respondents); bond with their religion and tradition (14 percent); a friendly, placid nature (12 percent); and a strong community bond and solidarity (seven percent). The negative attributes were: dishonesty in commerce, deviousness and exploitation in business (38 percent); nationalism and focus on, and bid for, power over others (nine percent); a “negative solidarity,” staying within their own group, and deceptive conspiracy (eight percent); and aggression or belligerence (six percent). The national traits do not differ significantly from the individual characteristics attributed to Jews. Thus, the Jews “as a nation” are thought to be: greedy, devious, and self-seeking (24 percent); hardworking and thrifty (22 percent); traditional and religious (20 percent); mutually supportive (17 percent); swindlers and wheeler-dealers (17 percent); capable and enterprising (14 percent); and aggressive and belligerent (eight percent). The characteristics attributed to Jews ten years earlier cannot have been much different, given the nature of the stereotype per se, but their categorization by the researchers was different in 1992 and 2002, which, unfortunately, precluded a more detailed comparison and examination of the change.
The stereotype of the Jew was formed during contact between Poles and Jews, which also fed on mutual images of the Jewish stereotype created by the Poles, and the Polish stereotype created by the Jews. It would be interesting to know which “stereotype of the Poles various Jewish circles formulated.” Before the war, when the Jews in Poland still constituted a large part of society, sociological research was not conducted on this issue, but Sara Hurwic (Polish name, Irena Nowakowska), briefly answered this question from memory in her pioneering study of 1950: “It is a menacing, hostile stereotype. The ‘goy’ (non-Jew), according to this stereotype, is the enemy of the Jew. He is false and should never be trusted.” Hurwic also cites “expressions used in Jewish circles to define various Polish traits, as per the Jewish stereotype”: the feeble “goy’s head (mind)” and the “Jewish head (mind),” which is supposedly far cleverer than the Polish one; “goyish luck” (fool’s luck), which goes against the run of things, is undeserved by the Poles and unexpected for Jews; “goyish blood,” meaning an explosive nature (“a Pole in a fit of rage can even kill a loved one”), or the opposite, “Jewish heart,” meaning goodness and kindness; and, lastly, “as drunk as a goy.” “The stereotypes of Jew and ‘goy’ are mutually hostile, antagonistic,” Hurwic concludes. Indeed, the word “goy” itself, according to Arct’s pre-war Słownik wyrazów obcych (Dictionary of Foreign Expressions) was “contemptuous” and definitely pejorative. However, there was also the word “krist,” in Yiddish, which meant Christian or decent Pole.

To complete the picture, past stereotypes of Jews should be compared with those persisting in Poland today, and with stereotypes of Jews among Jews themselves. In this respect, there are only the results of a study on images of Jews from the Diaspora held by Jews living in Israel, surveyed by the Guttman Center in Jerusalem in 1993. Members of Israel’s Jewish population were asked to what degree they agreed with statements presented to them “about Jews (including Israelis) living abroad.” The selection of statements in itself provides information about the stereotype, while the answers indicate the extent of acceptance or rejection.

49 Guttman Center, Israel Democracy Institute, Jerusalem, Continuing Survey, week 266, 1064 (February 14 to March 22, 1993), data obtained from the institute.
Owing to basic methodological differences in the Polish and Israeli studies, their results are not comparable. However, it should be noted that the Jews’ image of their own group, like the self-images of other nations, is very positive, and the large majority of Israeli Jews deny that Jews living outside Israel have the negative traits attributed to them by stereotypes. More interestingly, a considerable number of Jews from Israel, and not only by Poles, accept the negative elements of the Jewish stereotype. Also striking is the fairly common conviction in the Israeli survey of the Jews’ financial power and political influences in the countries where they live. Since belief in “excessive Jewish influence” is the central thesis of antisemitism the world over, it is difficult to know what such a statement expresses in Israel.50

The “Jewish Influence” Cognitive Schema

Up to this point, the concept of antisemitism has not been addressed. Antipathy alone and negative attributes in a stereotype do not differentiate Poles’ attitudes to Jews from their attitudes to other nations. Antisemitism, particularly in the modern, political form, is more than this, encompassing a broader worldview. It is based on the conviction that Jews exert a massive, disproportionate, undesirable influence on economic, political, and media institutions, and through them, on society as a whole — they “rule the world” and, moreover, covertly or in secret. This conviction is linked with antipathy toward, or even hatred, of Jews. Therefore, in many countries,

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50 As Dr. Raphael Ventura from the Guttman Center, Israel Democracy Institute, Jerusalem, explained to the author in an e-mail, July 13, 2011, “...most Israeli Jews understand this statement as referring to positive attributes of Jews, showing how important and prominent Jews are all over the world.”
issues relating to the evaluation of Jewish influences and power are the most commonly used measures of antisemitism. In Poland, too, various versions of the question of Jewish influence have been posed since the initiation of studies on the attitudes toward Jews.

In an early survey, in autumn 1990, ahead of the presidential elections, 37 percent of respondents agreed and 28 percent disagreed with the statement that “people of Jewish descent play too big a role in the life of our country.” In the AJC/Demoskop survey at the beginning of 1991, 32 percent of respondents agreed and 45 percent disagreed with the view that “Jews have too much influence over our country’s political life”; 17 percent agreed and 48 percent disagreed that Jews have too much influence on economic life; and 20 percent agreed and 56 percent disagreed that they had too much influence on “our country’s culture.” As many as 25 percent of respondents had no opinion on the matter at that time, but by autumn 1992, only ten percent gave this answer, and the proportion of those who believed in excessive Jewish influence had risen more than of those who did not. In September 1992, these percentages were, in terms of politics, 42 percent and 49 percent, respectively; with regard to economics, 37 percent and 53 percent; and, with respect to culture, 29 percent and 52 percent. In January 1991, 11 percent of respondents and in September 1992, 23 percent agreed with all three statements, which are considered to represent an “operational definition” of antisemitism. However, in the former survey, 33 percent and, in the latter, 42 percent consistently rejected these claims, which, analogically, are considered a definition of non-antisemitism.

Antisemitism in society, defined like this, was explained in terms of awakening nationalistic sensibilities in Poland and emerging antisemitic

53 Renae Cohen and Jennifer L. Golub, Attitudes toward Jews in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. A Comparative Survey (New York: AJC, 1991), pp. 10–11. In this comparative survey, more Slovaks than Poles were convinced that Jews had excessive influence in all three areas. Hungarians only saw excessive Jewish influence in the economy and culture, while only 8–12 percent of Czech respondents saw “too much” Jewish influence.
themes in political rhetoric. As also pointed out, the radical market reform under way at the time made many social groups worse off and more frustrated. Many people found the effects of the reform hard to understand. Thus, “Jewish influence,” as well as the interests of foreign capitalists and the machinations of homegrown swindlers, were simple explanations for the miseries caused by the revolution. Nevertheless, these explanations would not have been possible had not the “Jewish influence” schema already been part of the social consciousness. However, the lack of comparable studies precludes empirical verification of this thesis.

The effect of the “Jewish influence” schema, which was formed, or rather activated, at the beginning of the 1990s, can also be observed in later studies, and best of all in the Krzeminski team’s 1992 and 2002 surveys. These rather ambivalent results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Views on the Influence of Jews in Ireneusz Krzemiński’s 1992 and 2002 Surveys*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you agree with the statement that in our country Jews have too much influence in...</th>
<th>1992</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I disagree</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know; it doesn't interest me</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am undecided; hard to say</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I disagree</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know; it doesn't interest me</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am undecided; hard to say</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The press, radio and television</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I disagree</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know; it doesn't interest me</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am undecided; hard to say</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Do you agree with the opinion that...        |      |      |
| Jews have too much influence in the world    |      |      |
| I agree                                     | 55   | 61   |
| I disagree                                  | 16   | 20   |
| I don't know; it has never interested me     | 19   | 15   |
| I am undecided; hard to say                 | 10   | 3    |

* The results are given in percentages.

Note: In 2002, in the questions about Jewish influence in Poland, this answer was in the form: “I don’t know; hard to say.”

Source: Krzemiński, Czy Polacy są antysemitami, pp. 11, 32–33; Krzemiński, Antysemityzm w Polsce i na Ukrainie, pp. 29–32; unpublished data from Ireneusz Krzemiński.
Over the 1992–2002 decade, there was a marked increase in people who agreed with the view that “in our country Jews have too much influence” in politics, the economy, and the media. There was also a slight increase in the number of people who held the opinion that “Jews have too much global influence.” The index of “definite antisemitism,” constructed from these answers, rose significantly: 17 percent and 27 percent of respondents, in 1992 and 2002, respectively, accepted all four antisemitic statements — believed that Jews have “too much” influence in the areas of politics, the economy, and the media, as well as “too much global influence.” However, in the same studies, the percentages of respondents who did not agree with these views of Jewish influence in Poland also increased markedly, while the percentage of those who did not share the opinion about global Jewish influence also went up slightly. The “anti-antisemitism” index constructed from these answers, therefore, also rose: It stood at eight percent, in 1992, and 16 percent, a decade later — twice as many respondents disagreed with excessive Jewish influence in all four spheres. Views had crystallized and polarized. Between 1992 and 2002, the ratio of antisemitic answers to anti-antisemitic answers had not altered at all — there were more “firm antisemites,” but also proportionally more “anti-antisemites.” However, there was a considerable decline in the percentages of people who did not have (or did not wish to express) any opinion on the issue of “Jewish influence.” In 1992, 10–32 percent (depending on the question) of respondents answered “yes,” while in 2002 only 3–19 percent. These findings indicate that this issue had become more central and clear-cut in society.

In 2002, 36 percent of respondents agreed with the view that “there are a lot of politicians of Jewish descent in Poland”; 26 percent said there were “not many”; three percent that there were none; and 24 percent selected the answer “I am not interested in politicians’ ethnic backgrounds.”

55 Krzemiński, Czy Polacy są antysemitami?, pp. 32–33; Krzemiński, Antysemityzm w Polsce i na Ukrainie, pp. 29–32.
56 This change, which is partly artifactual, is connected with the change in formulation of the question. In 1992, 13–15 percent of respondents answered “I do not know; it doesn’t interest me,” while in 2002, this option was not available. In this situation, some respondents who would have given this answer were forced to select one of the “yes/no” answers, thus increasing the percentage of each of them. Analysis of these data (Krzemiński, Czy Polacy są antysemitami?, pp. 255–256) has shown that “I do not know; it doesn’t interest me” answers are de facto pro-Jewish answers, which is of consequence both for the proportion of antisemitic to anti-antisemitic answers in 1992 and for the changes in this ratio between 1992 and 2002.
57 Krzemiński, Antysemityzm w Polsce i na Ukrainie, pp. 20–30.
“Jews” in Poland have no distinguishable influence on politics, the economy or the media, and there are “not many” “politicians of Jewish descent,” the answers to these questions cannot be treated simply as a false description of reality, but must be seen as an expression of acceptance of the antisemitic belief in “Jewish influence.”

This belief is accompanied by more general convictions of excessive, conspiratorial, dangerous “Jewish influences” in “global” matters. In Krzemiński’s 2002 study, the following statements about Jews (they “always support each other at the expense of others”; “they want to be in charge in every situation, but they do not do this openly”; and “they control most of the world’s finances”) were each accepted by around 40 percent of respondents.58 Multinational AJC/TNS surveys provide additional confirmation and comparative background for these results. In the 2005 survey, 56 percent of Poles participating agreed, and 38 percent did not agree with the statement, “Now, as in the past, Jews exert too much influence on world events.” The highest number of participants in Poland, among the countries covered by the survey (see Table 6), supported this statement, though the figure was not much higher than in neighboring Slovakia, which ranked second.59

This table also suggests that a belief in Jewish influence, although certainly not endemic to Central and Eastern Europe, is particularly strong there. It is another trace of the centuries of Jewish presence in this region and the power of intolerant, antisemitic nationalism. It is also due to the return of such nationalism in the post-Communist countries immediately following the collapse of their ancien regimes. As the more systematic and comparative historical analysis suggests, the intense political antisemitism in this part of Europe may be attributed to the coexistence of two factors: significant religious homogeneity (dominance of Catholicism) and the lack of a long tradition of liberal democracy. Such conditions do not create a dominant culture of tolerance.60

58 Ibid., pp. 42–43.
59 AJC, Knowledge and Remembrance of the Holocaust in the Czech Republic, 1999; AJC, Knowledge and Remembrance of the Holocaust in Slovakia, 1999; AJC, Thinking about the Holocaust 60 Years Later; survey report, www.ajc.org (accessed, May 17, 2008). In the 2007 ADL/TNS survey cited above, the statement “Jews have too much power in the business world” was considered “probably true” by 49 percent of Polish respondents; the number of interviewees giving this answer was even higher in Hungary (60 percent) and Spain (53 percent); and there were also high percentages in other countries: between 36 percent and 42 percent in Italy, Switzerland, Austria, and Belgium; answers to the question about Jewish influence in the “international financial markets” were similar.
60 See Ezra Mendelsohn, The Jews of East Central Europe between The World Wars
In light of social research, there is no doubt that a considerable portion of Poles readily accept the view that Jews have considerable, excessive influence in Poland and globally. The problem is how to interpret this result.

1) While the claim of extensive Jewish influence emerges with unusual strength in Poland, it is also quite common in other countries: In AJC surveys, 25 percent or more of all respondents in all the countries covered (including 27 percent in Sweden, which is known for its high tolerance level) considered Jewish influence in global matters to be too great. Thus, the belief in excessive Jewish influence, which is common among Poles, is not an exclusively Polish “product,” but rather a local, “high-percentage” brand of the more widespread “antisemitic mythology.”


2) The conception of excessive Jewish influence incorporates a strong element of more general mistrust of the world. If respondents are asked not only to assess the influence of the Jews, but also to select the most influential groups they know, or assess the influence of Jews and other groups consecutively, i.e., to compare Jews with other groups and not simply react to conceptual clichés and schemas presented to them, there are fewer claims of Jewish influence. This is accurately documented in an unpublished 2005 CBOS survey, in which respondents were asked to assess, on a scale of 0 to 10, “how extensive the hidden influence of a particular group or organization is.” Jews were among the least, and not the most, influential groups with hidden power “in Poland, in Europe, and globally.”

Table 7. Views on the Influence of Hidden Power Groups in the 2005 CBOS Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The former Communist nomenclature</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish “mafia” criminals</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign “mafia” criminals</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big business in Poland</td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign capital</td>
<td>6.71</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secret societies</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freemasons</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Church</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic and political elites with connections to each other</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French-German alliance</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The European Union administration</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal group of politicians and businesspeople “holding power”</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CBOS archives
Poles generally readily attribute to others extensive, hidden influence on their fate. It is likely that they consider their fate worse than they deserve, for which they claim a wide variety of hidden social forces is responsible, in accordance with the psychological theory of attribution. Only in surveys in which their attention is directed to the broader context of society, and not just at the Jews, and they are asked to formulate their views on the Jewish influence, are they able to extricate themselves from the trammels of schematic thought and offer more realistic answers.

An AJC/Demoskop study along these lines, in which reactions to Jews and other groups were evaluated, led to a similar conclusion. In this survey, conducted at the turn of 1994/1995, only 16 percent of respondents considered the influence of Jews (the last in a list, and, therefore, clearly compared with others) as “excessive,” while 53 percent considered that this description applied to the influence of the Catholic Church; 43 percent to businessmen; 27–33 percent to the media, banks, Americans, and Germans; but only rarely were trade unions considered to be too influential. In similar studies carried out by the AJC in various countries across the world from 1990 to 1995, Jewish influence “in our country” was evaluated as “too great” by 19 percent of Austrians, eight percent of Britons, 20 percent of Germans, 11 percent of Russians, 17 percent of Hungarians, and 21 percent of Americans. Therefore, Poland did not stand out among the other countries.

The results cited above do not give grounds for the simple conclusion that a significant portion of Poles “consider” Jews to have excessive influence in Poland. However, the acceptance of such claims in the survey apparently indicates that the “Jewish influence” schema is deeply rooted in the Polish social consciousness, as well as being cognitively accessible.

The differences between these conclusions are highlighted by an experiment that was carried out in a 2002 TNS OBOP survey. Respondents were first asked to name “groups that have too much influence in our country’s
affairs”: 40 percent named politicians, 26 percent the rich and capitalists, etc., but Jews were mentioned by fewer than one percent. Only afterward, when respondents were asked whether “any of the national minorities living in Poland have too much influence on our country’s affairs,” were Jews mentioned spontaneously by 19 percent. Finally, those who did not mention Jews were then asked outright: “How much influence do Jews who live in Poland have on our country’s affairs?” A further 24 percent selected the answer “too much.”

The outcome of this study suggest two theses, which are not incompatible: 1) The influence of Jews is not an issue in Poland on an everyday basis or sufficiently defined to be called to mind automatically when people start thinking about the country’s government. In everyday conversations about politics and groups, privileged or handicapped in their access to power, ethnic categories rarely emerge and there is no research-based evidence to support the contention that Poles believe “it is all the Jews’ fault” rather than of the politicians, big business owners, foreign capitalists and scandalmongers, among others. 2) In Poland, the “Jewish influence” schema is easily activated, often by weak stimuli. The mention of the ethnic context (“national minorities”) or, obviously, direct reference to “the Jews” is all that is required. People who would hardly ever think about whether the Jews have too much influence in Poland are fairly willing to agree with this premise when encountered in surveys.

4) Lastly, the opinion that Jews have “excessive influence” in Poland is not only semantically different from the view that Jewish influence is considerable, but, even more so, it shows that Jews — and not others — “rule” Poland, or that Poland “is ruled by Jews.” The surveys also reflect the fundamental difference among these statements. In a 1991 AJC/Demoskop study, while 27 percent of respondents agreed with the statement “Jews have too much influence over our country’s political life,” only one percent chose Jews from the groups listed as having “the most influence over the government.”66 Similarly, CBOS studies in 1990 and 2003 asked the open question, “Who really rules Poland?” Jews were mentioned spontaneously by only one percent and four percent of respondents, respectively, while those who “really” ruled included the government, cliques, the president, the rich, thieves, the left, chaos, etc., but not the Jews.67 Most recently, in a TNS OBOP survey,

67 CBOS, Kto naprawdę rządzi w Polsce (2), 2000; CBOS, Kto naprawdę rządzi w Polsce, 2003, research reports.
carried out in January 2008, respondents were asked about the influence of Jews living in Poland on “our country’s affairs,” and to assess whether it was major or minor, and not whether it was too great or not. In answer to this question, four percent defined their influence as “very major,” 21 percent as “major,” while 33 percent defined it as “minor,” and 14 percent as “very minor.” Many Poles, over 40 percent, accept the antisemitic cliché of “excessive” Jewish influence in Poland, but only about 20 percent consider it as “major,” and only very few as “very major.”

To complete the picture relating to antisemitic thought in Poland, it should be pointed out that alongside modern, political antisemitism, there is also traditional, religious antisemitism, which has roots in the former teachings of the Catholic Church. The standard question used to measure this concerns the responsibility of the Jews for the death of Christ. In the 1994/1995 AJC/Demoskop survey, 36 percent of Polish respondents agreed, while 46 percent did not agree with the statement, “Now, as in the past, Jews are responsible for killing Christ.” Similarly, in 2007, in a multinational survey by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and TNS (N=500), 39 percent of the Polish respondents agreed with the view that “the Jews are responsible for the death of Christ,” as compared to 26 percent in Hungary, and between 13 percent and 22 percent in the nine Western European countries also covered. Krzeminski used a more stringent measure of traditional antisemitism, asking for responses to the view that “the Jews have so many problems because God [is] punish[ing] them for the crucifixion of Christ.” In 1992, this was affirmed by 15 percent of respondents, but refuted by 71 percent, with similar results in 2002 of 17 percent and 69 percent, respectively. Comparable results were found in answer to the second question used to measure traditional antisemitism: reactions to the statement that “the Jews have only themselves to blame for what befalls them.” In both studies, 43 percent agreed with this opinion, while 40 percent and 39 percent, in 1992 and 2002, respectively, disagreed with it. This supports both the exceptional constancy of antisemitism and the high level of reliability of the criteria used to assess it.

Psychology teaches that cognitive schemas organize the reception, encoding, and recall of new information. Once formed, self-confirmation is

a strong tendency, which means that they are very resilient to change. The studies cited here also bear this out.

**Jews and Polish Memory and Identity**

The Solidarity revolution, followed by the collapse of the martial law regime and changes to the system in 1989, brought public debate in Poland out into the open, with Polish-Jewish relations among the more sharply defined topics. The intense and strident debate on this issue often impacts on Polish-Jewish relations, forming and reinforcing new societal notions. In a society depleted of Jews by the Holocaust and post-war emigration, these arguments now focus on history and memory — they address the extermination of the Jews and the attitude of Polish society, both at that time and also today. Surveys reveal the outlines of these arguments about memory, which are significant because memory, especially in Poland, is a fundamental part of what is now known as identity.

Memory, both autobiographical and collective — “that which in group experience remains from the past, or what those groups do with the past” — is creative and constructive by nature, not reproductive. Remembering involves encoding events using cognitive concepts and schemas, and recollection does not recreate the original experience, but reconstructs it using such schemas. Autobiographical memory plays the historian’s role — by observing, recording, preserving, revising, and recalling experiences under the control of the ego. According to Anthony Greenwald’s theory of autobiographical memory, there are three trends at work in memory: 1) Egocentricity — people and groups remember the past from their own perspective, and portray it as though they were the leading actors; 2) Beneficent perception of causal relationships and responsibility — people attribute the agency of desirable outcomes to themselves, while placing the responsibility for the undesirable ones on others and on external circumstances; 3) Conservatism — resistance to cognitive change, the tendency to preserve existing knowledge structures: categories, schemas,

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and memories, etc. These tendencies are subordinated to supporting the ego, and the more important the issues, the stronger they are.

1) Until recently, Poland’s history was treated like the history of a single nation — the Poles — while marginalizing the history of the other nations in the Republic. Historical memory, in this case regarding the suffering of the Jews and the suffering of the Poles, was dealt with similarly.

The Poles remember their own nation’s suffering better than that of the Jews, especially since the latter affected an alien people, distanced even further by the war and the occupation. The Poles were spared the Holocaust and total annihilation, yet, in the surveys by Krzemiński’s team, only 46 percent and 38 percent of respondents, in 1992 and 2002, respectively, found that the “Jewish nation [had] suffered more than the Polish nation,” while 33 percent and 47 percent believed that “both nations suffered equally,” and six percent and ten percent claimed that the Jews [had] suffered less than the Poles.72 The 1994/1995 AJC/Demoskop survey formulated the question slightly differently: “Which group suffered more from Nazi persecution during the Second World War: Poles or Jews?” Practically the same percentage of respondents named the Poles as the Jews (28 percent to 29 percent in each case), while 40 percent spontaneously claimed that both had suffered “the same.”73 The 1998 OBOP survey included the open question, “Which nation suffered the most?” A total of 50 percent spontaneously cited the Polish nation, 28 percent the Jewish nation, and 11 percent claimed that “it is not possible to compare the suffering of different nations.”74

This general tendency to underestimate the misfortune of others, in this case, the suffering of the Jews, is well illustrated in surveys about the conflict over the crosses at Auschwitz, in 1998. The argument over whether there should be crosses in the grounds of the former concentration camp KL Auschwitz was not only a conflict on this matter alone, but was also a manifestation and clash over deeper convictions regarding the extermination of the Jews and the martyrdom of the Polish nation during the Second World War.75

It is a known fact that out of more than 1.1 million victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau, one million were Jews from Poland, Hungary, and many other

72 Krzemiński, Antysemityzm w Polsce i na Ukrainie, pp. 119–120.
73 Golub and Cohen, Knowledge and Remembrance of the Holocaust in Poland, p. 28.
countries, while 75,000 were ethnic Poles. Yet, in a survey carried out in 2005, on the eve of the sixtieth anniversary commemoration of the camp’s liberation by the Soviet Army, a significant proportion of Poles did not know that mainly Jews died in Auschwitz. Only about 50 percent of the respondents in this survey believed either that the majority (37 percent) or vast majority (14 percent) of victims were Jews; 18 percent thought that the majority were Poles; and 21 percent thought that the numbers of Jews and Poles among the camp’s victims were similar.

Factual knowledge about the victims’ national breakdown does not translate into social categorizations of Auschwitz. It was considered as “an extermination site of Jews” only by eight percent of respondents, and as a “site of martyrdom of the Polish nation” by barely more (11 percent). For the vast majority of Poles, Auschwitz is not their national “Golgotha,” but neither is it chiefly a place of Jewish martyrdom, unlike among Jews and most of the world. The vast majority (66 percent) believe Auschwitz to be “a place of suffering of many nations,” while for 14 percent, “the nationality of the people murdered there is insignificant.” These categorizations “rise above” the national identity of the victims, to some extent, but undoubtedly detract from their primarily Jewish identity. The fact that the vast mass of people transported to Auschwitz from all over Europe were Jews — and died because they were Jews — was concealed as part of the official education policy until as recently as the 1980s. Whatever the reason, the real and symbolic uniqueness of Auschwitz for the Jews and the distinctive position of the Jews among the Auschwitz victims have not registered in the Polish social consciousness. Moreover, diachronic comparison convincingly demonstrates that, in spite of the changes in public education, society at large clings to these categorizations and justice is not restored to the Jewish fate.

Ireneusz Krzemiński’s well-known hypothesis proposes that the Poles “compete” with the Jews for primacy in suffering, giving them a sense of moral superiority or, at least, that their own suffering during the war has become part of their social identity. Awareness of the unique scale and metaphysical dimension of the extermination of the Jews does not have

an easy route to the Polish mind. It is blocked by the vivid awareness of their own suffering, often of their own families, and their conviction of the unique martyrdom of their own nation. This is accompanied by the defensive conviction that the Jews do not respect the Poles’ suffering or sensitivity. In a 1998 OBOP survey, 54 percent of respondents claimed that the Poles respect the Jews’ sensitivity with regard to Auschwitz, while 35 percent claimed that they do not. The assessment of Jews’ respect for Polish sensitivity in the same study showed the reverse trend: 59 percent of Jews do not respect it, while 23 percent do.⁷⁹

2) In Poles’ perceptions of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War, the dominant tendency is to stress and credit themselves with positive, heroic behavior and block out memories of unworthy and criminal behavior, thus justifying themselves.

In the 1992 study by Krzemiński’s team, 78 percent of respondents claimed that the Poles “helped the Jews as much as they could” during the war, while only 12 percent said that they “could have done more.”⁸⁰ The 1994/1995 AJC/Demoskop survey examined this issue in a more sophisticated way. A total of 49 percent of respondents claimed that they had done “enough,” and 26 percent said they had done “as much as they could under the circumstances,” in answer to the question “Did Poles do enough to help Jews during the Second World War, or not?” Only 15 percent gave answers to the effect that they had “not [done] enough.” According to 67 percent of respondents, there were “many Poles who participated in rescuing Jews,” while 28 percent believed that only a “few” attempted to rescue Jews. None of the respondents thought no Poles helped rescue Jews, but 14 percent claimed that Poles had not “participated in the persecution of the Jews,” 62 percent believed that there were a “few” who persecuted them, while 11 percent said there were “many” such Poles.⁸¹ In the TNS OBOP survey carried out in January 2008, the view conducive to the national ego, namely, that “many Poles helped to rescue Jews, but few persecuted them,” was accepted by 43 percent of the respondents. Very few respondents (three percent) subscribed to the opposite, accusatory view, that “few Poles helped

⁷⁹ OBOP, Wokół Oświęcimia.
⁸⁰ Krzemiński, Czy Polacy są antysemitami?, p. 98; in the 2002 survey, these percentages were 87 percent and 8 percent, respectively.
rescue Jews but many persecuted them”; while 17 percent claimed that there were many Poles who helped rescue Jews, but also believed that there were many who persecuted them. A total of 12 percent believed that only a few either helped or persecuted Jews, which is perhaps closest to the historical truth. In percentage terms, those who helped rescue Jews and those who persecuted them constituted very small groups within society, while the majority were taken up with their own survival throughout the war and the Occupation.

Thus, the tendency is clear. It is well illustrated by surveys relating to the Jedwabne Pogrom: In 1941, after the town had been occupied by the Germans, the Polish residents murdered their Jewish neighbors. One such survey, conducted two years afterward and after the wave of discussion the pogrom provoked, showed that the majority of those expressing an opinion as to who had carried out this crime (50 percent of the total), thought it was more the Germans’ work than that of the Poles. Among this group, three percent selected the answer, “the local Poles without the participation of the Germans”; 17 percent went for the answer closest to the historical truth, “the Poles were abetted by the Germans”; 34 percent chose “the Poles were forced by the Germans”; 18 percent, “the Germans without the participation of the Poles”; and 28 percent, “the Germans with the assistance of the Poles.” Thus, the Germans and the Poles were considered as the perpetrators of the crime to a similar extent.

82 TNS OBOP research report, O Polakach i Żydach tuż przed “Strachem,” 2008. This survey was conducted at the time when Jan T. Gross’s book Fear (Strach) was published in Poland. Neither the book itself, nor the attendant debate on the subject, changed public opinion; see TNS OBOP, Efekt “Strachu.”

83 The Poles’ views differ diametrically from those of Jews, which are changeable. As the historian Yisrael Gutman said: “It is largely due to the Righteous [Among the Nations of the World] that the image of the Poles has improved considerably in Israel. That is how it was with me. At first I, too, took those negative stereotypes of Poles as willing collaborators, shmaltzovniks, neighbors who did nothing to help. This is what all the press and the books used to say. But when we were publishing the Encyclopedia of the Righteous at Yad Vashem..., I had to dig through tons of accounts by Jewish survivors. I do not change my mind easily, but those testimonies diametrically changed it.” See “Polacy mogę być dumni z Ireny Sendlerowej,” Rzeczpospolita, May 14, 2008, p. A17.


85 TNS OBOP research report, Polacy o zbrodni w Jedwabnem, 2002; see also Michał Bilewicz, “Wyjaśnianie Jedwabnego: antysemityzm i postrzeganie trudnej przeszłości,” in Krzemiński, Antysemityzm w Polsce i na Ukrainie.
Revealing what had happened at Jedwabne and more generalized charges connected with the Poles’ attitudes toward the extermination of the Jews triggered a mechanism that went far beyond “competition in suffering.” Some Poles accepted these facts, arousing in them remorse and sympathy with the Jews, as well as a kind of shame, the opposite of national pride. Others rejected the charges, which aroused their antipathy and even enmity (deprecation of accusers or others whom one has failed morally is a known phenomenon). The reaction to the discovery of the Jedwabne Pogrom might have been swayed by the following phenomena: the sense of closeness/distance, positive/negative stereotypes of Jews, and rejection/acceptance of antisemitic schemas. Krzemiński caught this polarization in his surveys in 1992 and 2002. In the intervening period between the surveys, the conflicts surrounding Auschwitz, Jedwabne, and Polish attitudes toward the killing of Jews took place, with an increase in the number of declared antisemites in Poland, but also a rise in the number of anti-antisemites, who categorically reject the antisemitic view of the world.

3) Convictions regarding the history of Polish-Jewish relations are very resistant to change. In Poland, often symbolic, virtual Jews, and not real, empirical Jews, are the point of reference for conceptions about Jews. Today, the Jew is not a person, but a figment of the collective imagination, and sometimes may be a label for enemies of the national community. For a significant change in these conceptions to take place, something more is needed than inter-group contact, time, and school programs, although these are of some importance. The Poles’ deeply rooted notions of the suffering of the Jews and Polish attitudes toward the Holocaust are not simply due to lack of knowledge, but also to the links between these notions and the Polish national identity, which is so saturated with history.86 These notions are important to the Poles because they support their national ego, which, in turn, resists change, hampering modification of these notions. Rejection by the Poles of positive notions of their attitude toward Jews might entail painful changes to their national image as a whole.

But change is possible. “Both the individual and the group are constantly

recreating the past, altering it in the interest of the present,” wrote F. C. Bartlett, in a classic book on the psychology of memory, many years ago — not necessarily because they discover new sources and facts, but because new, especially significant experiences alter their identity. A different identity needs a different history. This allows the past to be seen in a new light and the creation of new modes of thought, resulting in the recall by people and societies of facts previously thought to be irrecoverably forgotten.

In addition, the Poles’ notions about the Jews and their extermination are distorted, because the Poles mythologize their own past: They regard themselves as a nation of heroes and warriors struggling for the freedom of others, who are disadvantaged by history and their neighbors, and yet consider their own country to have always been open to others. As shown by the surveys, most of them adopt a defensive stance toward their past: They “know what [they] can be proud of, and are not aware of any reason for shame.” This “self-adoration” applies particularly to the war: The self-stereotype formed then, which remains valid until today, is the Polish martyr, hero, and survivor, who always “pulls through.”

Change in this form of memory will only be possible when the Poles who gained their freedom, after fighting for it, through the Solidarity movement, among other things, will find their rightful place among the nations of the world, making a modernizing leap, which they consider as a major national success, reason for pride, and basis for a new identity. When they no longer need reassurance and comfort, they will be able to look at themselves and at history, including their historical relations with the Jews, with a more critical eye.

Such change in the Polish collective memory may be possible before a historical change of identity, as a result of active work by intellectuals, only when a construct memory is devised, taking in and integrating the entire Polish wartime experience, with its greatness and ignominy — the underground state, the organized struggle, and individual collaboration; the heroes, the majority preoccupied with survival, and the criminals; and the full spectrum of behavior with regard to the Jews, from rescue through

89 See Tomasz Szarota, “Polski autostereotyp w konfrontacji z doświadczeniami lat wojny i okupacji,” in idem, Karuzela na Placu Krasieńskich (Warsaw: Rytm, 2008), pp. 419–437.
indifference to murder will the Poles be able to accept this memory without fear of excessive self-deprecation. As yet, such a narrative has not been created.90

Concluding Remarks: What the Surveys Do Not Say

The above is an interpretation and synthesis of the survey results on the attitudes of Poles toward Jews over 40 years, from 1967 to 2008. However, it does not provide an answer to the question, “Are the Poles antisemites?” and it verifies the thesis that “Poland is an antisemitic country” even less so. Both these issues are considered in journalistic, rather than sociological or scientific, terms. Nevertheless, this article says a great deal about the intensity and extent of negative attitudes toward Jews and about antisemitism, while placing them in the context of overall attitudes toward Jews in Polish society. Antisemitism is only one extreme of the spectrum, and focusing attention on it, although justifiable in terms of the need to fight with this diseased social consciousness, hinders perception of the full continuum of attitudes toward Jews.

1) Polish society has various and divided attitudes toward Jews, as toward many other public affairs and issues examined by surveys. In this sense, the Poles as a nation are neither antisemites nor philosemites — Polish citizens have different, and often indifferent, views on such matters.

2) The Polish attitude toward Jews consists of many facets — from knowledge, through feelings of sympathy and antipathy, closeness and distance, stereotypes, prejudices, and cognitive schemas, to notions about the history of the Poles and the Jews. Some of them, in particular the feelings and distance, are not exclusive to Jews, but also apply to other ethnically different groups, and are more rooted in general antipathy toward foreigners. Rather, the term “antisemitism” is reserved for those facets that are specific to their relationship with the Jews.

3) Polish attitudes, specifically toward Jews, have both collective and individual aspects — stereotypes, cognitive schemas, and images of history stored in the memory. They are created and perpetuated by society, as elements of tradition and consciousness, and are passed on

ready-formed to individuals, and thereby reinforced. For this reason, it is more accurate to consider prejudices toward Jews and antisemitism in Polish society rather than among the Poles.

4) The considerable range of these attitudes, which has been confirmed in many surveys, supports their intensity and deep-rootedness in Polish society. In this respect, Poland is similar to some other Central and East European countries, and differs from Western European countries.

5) Polish attitudes toward Jews are changing, but both the direction of, and reasons for, these changes are complex. Sympathy for Jews is growing and the sense of distance decreasing, but very slowly. These changes are part of the broader transformation in attitude toward foreigners, but the relationship with Jews also has its own dynamic and is linked to public debates on Polish-Jewish issues.

In the author’s view, this is the extent of what the surveys say. But what do they not say? Aside from their well-known and incontrovertible advantages, surveys have their limitations, and there are limits to what can be learned about the social consciousness from them.91 By their very nature, they tend to promote looking at society in an individualistic way, as an aggregate of individuals, and at social consciousness as the sum of the individual opinions and attitudes expressed by the respondents to the survey questions.

The dominant practice of questionnaire-based studies is based on the assumption that society is a collection of individuals, each of whom has the same significance: “one person, one vote.” Nevertheless, in society, “votes count, but resources decide,”92 so while survey respondents are considered as equals, they differ in their social significance and influence. Surveys have easier access to groups in the middle of the social ladder, while it is harder for them to reach extreme groups on the higher and lower rungs. Relations of position in society, social influence, and prejudice against Jews are complicated, but it is reasonable to assume that these studies are likely to underestimate, rather than overestimate, the range of unsympathetic opinions and attitudes toward Jews.

In surveys, the statistical breakdown of individual opinions is usually

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interpreted as reflecting society’s view. Sociology also includes another concept of society’s opinion. Known as collective opinion, this reflects the general mood prevailing in society, a relatively stable and often delicate consensus on what is good and desirable. Such an opinion is formed, sustained, and developed in the course of interaction and communication, both horizontal, on an interpersonal level, and vertical, between the public and various elite groups. Individuals’ views researched in surveys are not so much the bricks from which collective opinion is built, but rather an indicator of its strength. Society’s attitude is a “social fact”: the primal view, as opposed to the individuals’ attitudes, which are only “copies” of collective patterns of thinking, reflecting “collective representations,” and not opinions arrived at independently. Methods other than standard surveys are used to explore such primal attitudes. The picture presented in this article would certainly be fleshed out by analyzing public discourse; gathering information on the print runs and the tone of Jewish-related publications; monitoring antisemitic statements (“hate speech”) and behavior (graffiti); and observing reactions to such incidents — both tolerance and protest. However, such efforts would have to be conducted systematically, and also cover positive processes, such as the spectacular growth of interest in Jewish history and culture, and the fading of antisemitic themes and allusions from the public rhetoric, ahead of the 1990 presidential elections.

Surveys are better for finding out about the superficial layers of social consciousness than the deeper inclinations, dispositions, and resentments. The more crystallized and linguistically distinct the researched attitudes are, the more reliable the surveys tend to be. Surveys impose their language on respondents and hamper expression of convictions that do not fit in with it. Because of this, the anthropologist Clifford Gaertz called them an “authoritative” method. Sociological and anthropological studies, which use freer, qualitative methods, are better for penetrating the shell of language and social conventions, reaching deep emotions and convictions, even those that are not consciously recognized, and revealing antisemitic prejudices that are generally concealed in standardized surveys behind indifference or difficulty with expression. However, one problem with such studies is that they use revealed cultural patterns and society’s prejudices to draw conclusions about the individual’s attitudes and behavior. Another problem is to determine the social reach of the attitudes uncovered, even more so since the territory selected for such research is not necessarily typical or typologically varied, but rather concentrates on areas in which such prejudices emerge easily because they are particularly strong.
Generally speaking, in accordance with the methodological “triangulation” principle, social phenomena that are as multifaceted and hard to pin down as this should be studied systematically using a range of methods, and analysis should be based on several different types of data. However, until such methods are developed, information from surveys, if carefully analyzed and perceptively interpreted, will remain the key source for sounding out attitudes toward Jews in Polish society.93

“Are you a Pole or a Jew?” asked the specialist, putting his pistol on the table.
“Both a Pole and a Jew,” responded Leon.
“One is either a Pole or a Jew.”
“I am an example that it is possible to be both one and the other.”
“And are you connected with Polish culture?”
“Yes.”
“Then recite something from Pan Tadeusz.”
“Jankiel through the whole winter stayed one knew not where; now suddenly with the main staff of the military he made his appearance…”

Henryk Grynberg, Memorbuch, Warsaw, 2000

Some traces will remain. Photographs, printed pages, remnants of graves have survived. The number of people with personal recollections about Polish Jews will diminish. But the past will remain. I don’t mean the time that is gone, I mean the world that has ceased to be. Dead worlds like this do not end; eternity rests upon them. Three million people have lived in these towns along with the Poles, and three million people went up in smoke. For seven hundred years, maybe more. Here they said their prayers, lit their candles, roasted their geese, and baked their bread, here they traded, produced children and read books. For seven hundred years.


The articles in this volume give a detailed and comprehensive account of the history of the Jews and their relationship with the surrounding society and with the political system from the liberation of Poland from Nazi rule to the present day. The 66 years between 1944 and 2010 fall into a series of clearly demarcated periods. The first of these lasted from the Soviet expulsion of the Nazis from Poland to the death of Stalin in March 1953. The Soviet victory
created a new order in Eastern Europe. From the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, Stalin did not deviate seriously from the goals he had set himself in Europe. He wanted recognition of the territorial accessions which the Soviet Union had made in 1939 and 1940. Further, he sought a “sphere of influence” composed of “friendly” states on his western border, including Poland, and he was determined to have a major say in the administration of a demilitarized, united Germany. He believed that the strength of the Communist Party would make it a decisive factor in the politics of this new Germany, was convinced that German industrial power would produce the reparations that would make possible the recovery of the USSR from the devastation of the war, and also probably assumed that only a three-power occupation would ensure that the Germans would not attempt to overthrow the Carthaginian peace that was being imposed on them. These aims, together with the economic devastation of the Soviet Union, meant that, for all his belief in Marxism-Leninism and the inevitable triumph of Communism, he was prepared to coexist for the time being with the Western powers.

Stalin sought to include Poland in the sphere of influence he wanted to establish in Eastern Europe and, as a consequence, these years were marked by a struggle for power there, which, at the same time, contributed to the growing estrangement between the Western powers and the Soviets, and was exacerbated by their worsening relations. In many ways this conflict resembled a civil war and culminated, after a short period of political pluralism, in the establishment in early 1947 of a regime dominated by a small elite of Moscow-trained and -influenced Communists, in which the security apparatus enjoyed a large measure of autonomy and took many of its orders directly from the USSR.

The period that followed, which lasted until Stalin’s death in March 1953, was characterized by the worst tension of the Cold War and by the imposition in Poland of a rigidly Stalinist dictatorship. The Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza — PPR), the name taken by the reconstituted Communist Party, was now firmly set on a path of repression. The party leadership abandoned any serious attempt to build alliances with existing social and political groupings, seeking rather to sweep them aside by transforming the nature of Polish society. The influence of the Church was attacked for the first time, while closer control was exercised over all non-Communist forces. The special role of the state bureaucracy and the security apparatus in building socialism was stressed. So too was dependence on the Soviet Union, and in mid-1948 Władysław Gomułka, the principal
advocate of the “Polish road to socialism,” was dismissed from his position as first secretary to the PPR when Stalin turned against him as a potential Polish Tito.

Gomułka was replaced by Bolesław Bierut, a trusted ally of Stalin. All important decisions were now taken in close consultation with Moscow, and a key role was played by another of Stalin’s confidants, Jakub Berman, the éminence grise of the new regime and the most important figure of Jewish origin within it. The regime’s power depended on its security apparatus, with its network of informers and agents and extensive surveillance. This was headed by the sinister figure of Stanisław Radkiewicz, and Soviet “advisers” played a crucial role. Central planning on the Soviet model now became the accepted way of running the Polish economy, while cultural life was marked by the adoption of the principles of socialist realism. The Stalinist years were also marked by an increasingly bitter conflict between Church and state, which is described in the article by Bożena Szaynok. By the beginning of 1954, a number of bishops and several hundred priests were in prison. Archbishop Wyszyński himself was confined in an isolated monastery. Almost all independent Catholic institutions were either prevented from functioning or coopted by the state. A key element in the Stalinist system in Poland, as in the rest of the bloc, was the use of terror through imprisonment and show trials.

The second period lasted from the death of Stalin to the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. As part of the Soviet bloc, Poland was inevitably affected by the turmoil that followed the death of Stalin. Although the process by which the rigid Stalinist system was dismantled developed initially more slowly in Poland than in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, pressures for change soon began to build up, as a result of both the impact of events in the Soviet Union and local demands. Khrushchev’s rapprochement with Yugoslavia in May 1955 seemed to legitimize the concept of “separate roads to socialism,” the very deviation for which Gomułka had been expelled from the Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza — PZPR), formed when the remnants of the Polish Socialist Party were forcibly united with the PPR. Many intellectuals now demanded an end to the crude rigidities of Stalinism in cultural life, while within the PZPR many members were disillusioned with the way the country was being governed and the way in which its interests were being subordinated to those in the Soviet Union.

It was in 1956 that the pace of change began to accelerate. At the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in February, the concept of
separate national roads to socialism was given legitimization, while Khrushchev’s secret speech, with its revelation of the horrors that had accompanied Stalin’s rule, seriously undermined the authority of local Stalinists in Poland. The party itself remained divided on how to react to demands for change, for, while the party secretariat now had a reformist majority, the conservatives were strongly entrenched in the Central Committee. These divisions were widened by an outbreak of labor unrest at the end of June at the ZISPO engineering works in Poznań, the largest industrial establishment in Poland, in which between 57 and 78 people were killed.

This crisis culminated in a meeting of the Central Committee plenum between October 19 and 21, which co-opted Gomulka onto the Central Committee. In spite of heavy pressure on behalf of the conservatives and from a Soviet delegation headed by Khrushchev, which even threatened military intervention, the liberals triumphed. Gomulka made a strong speech in the plenum attacking the cult of personality and the economic policies that had been pursued since 1949, and stressed the need for equality and independence in Polish-Soviet relations. He was elected first secretary of the Central Committee and a new Politburo, dominated by his supporters, was created, from which the most intransigent Stalinists as well as Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky, the Polish-born but Russified commander of the Polish Army, were excluded. The impact on the Jewish community of Gomulka’s return to power and the political liberalization that followed is analyzed in the article by Grzegorz Berendt. The impact of the changes on Jewish religious life are chronicled by August Grabski and Albert Stankowski.

It was perhaps inevitable that Gomulka should have disappointed the hopes raised by his return to power. The overwhelming majority of Poles gave him their wholehearted support, but did so because they believed that, in his calls for a “Polish road to socialism,” Gomulka envisaged far-reaching measures of internal democratization and a large degree of independence from the Soviet Union. Yet, it was never either within his power or indeed his intention to introduce changes of this type.

In spite of the gulf between his views and those of the majority of Poles, Gomulka enjoyed a measure of success in his first years in power. People welcomed the relaxation of tension after the continual political crises that had affected Poland since 1939 and were grateful for the degree of liberalization that was introduced. In relation to the peasantry, Gomulka kept his promise to allow the reintroduction of private agriculture. However, while some attempts were now made to establish a more flexible economic model,
the centralized planning system was maintained. A limited *modus vivendi* with the Church was also reached. The Jewish community benefited from the reestablishment of relations with international Jewish organizations and from a relaxation of the controls exercised over Jewish life in the Stalinist period. It was in its treatment of intellectual freedom that the Gomułka regime proved most disappointing. Efforts were soon made to suppress the ferment unleashed by the de-Stalinization process in Poland, and the position of the liberals in the party weakened. The failure to democratize the party had important consequences. It meant the abandonment of any hope for radical reform of the economy or the political system. In addition, it created a block to promotion for the younger, ambitious party members that was to have far-reaching effects in the late 1960s.

From 1963, things began to go seriously wrong for the Gomułka regime. The economic situation worsened, since the half-measures of economic reform introduced since 1956 did not stimulate a high rate of growth, which was all the more necessary because of the rapid population increase in Poland. Relations with the Roman Catholic Church also deteriorated, while the Communist authorities were unable to heal their breach with the intellectual community.

Gomułka’s own position within the party now came under fire. The increasing difficulties of the regime and the feeling of stagnation aroused by his unimaginative policies stimulated the growth of a new faction within the party, composed mainly of people who had spent the war years in the Communist underground in Poland. The partisans, as this group came to be known, were bitterly resentful of those Communists, many of whom were of Jewish origin, who had spent the war in the Soviet Union. In addition, they called for more authoritarian policies vis-à-vis the Church and the intellectuals and a greater stress on Polish nationalism.

All the pent-up dissatisfaction in Polish society came to the surface in 1968, a crisis which is described in this volume by Feliks Tych. Although Israel’s triumph was also generally welcomed by the Poles, the victory was seized upon by the partisans as a means of getting rid of their Jewish opponents. The partisans took as their pretext a speech of Gomułka’s shortly after the war in which he attacked “Zionist circles of Jews who are Polish citizens” who constituted a “fifth column” in Poland. During this period, events in Czechoslovakia stimulated demands by students and intellectuals for similar changes in Poland and led to the outbreak of more than 100 student demonstrations all over Poland between March 8 and 23. These student demonstrations, in which agent provocateurs played a part, as is documented by Feliks
Tych, were seen by the partisans as a way of further strengthening their position, and perhaps also of challenging that of Gomułka.

The extent to which the campaign, which was clearly orchestrated from within the Ministry of the Interior, was directed against the position of Gomułka became clearer when the first secretary delivered a speech to 3,000 party activists on March 19, 1968, in the Palace of Culture in Warsaw. Gomułka, seeing the danger to himself, now refused to associate himself fully with the anti-Zionist campaign, which was supported vociferously by a large partisan clique in the audience.

By the end of June, Gomułka was in a much stronger position in the party and ordered the campaign to be stopped. His position was further buttressed by the growing Soviet unease at developments in Czechoslovakia, which culminated in the invasion of that country by forces of the Warsaw Pact in August. Gomułka had consistently opposed the reformists’ plans in Czechoslovakia and had been a keen protagonist of Soviet military intervention, which took place mainly from Polish territory. In the aftermath of the invasion, he was able to count on Soviet support on account of his loyalty, the more so since the Soviets were extremely unwilling to countenance any changes that could affect their position in Eastern Europe.

The 1968 crisis was multifaceted. It was, as Feliks Tych convincingly shows, above all an attempt to use antisemitic rhetoric in order to stir up a degree of public support for the regime. It led to the emigration of a large part of the remaining Jewish community and effectively ended organized Jewish life in the country for over a decade. The crisis further showed that attempts to reform the Communist system from within were doomed to failure and that alternative structures would need to be created outside party control. This led to the emergence of the dissident movement in the Soviet Union and the various political initiatives in Poland aimed at creating an “alternative society” and identified above all with “the generation of ’68,” which culminated in the emergence of Solidarity and the negotiated end of Communism.

The third period lasted from 1968 to the negotiated end of Communism in 1989. Gomułka’s triumph in 1968 proved short-lived. He benefited from the prestige of Willy Brandt’s visit to Warsaw in December 1970, during which the German chancellor signed a treaty that effectively recognized the Oder and western Neisse rivers as the western frontier of Poland. However, by removing the threat from a “revanchist” West Germany, the agreement significantly weakened Gomułka’s hold on the Polish population. In addition, the economic situation of the country continued to deteriorate, and
his ill-considered attempt to deal with this in late 1970 led to strikes and violence in the Baltic towns. Gomułka appealed vainly for Soviet support, but it was clear that he was losing his grip politically and on December 19 he was replaced as first secretary by Edward Gierek.

Gierek was a very different sort of man from Gomułka. He sought to modernize Polish industry by increasing trade with the West, taking advantage of Brezhnev’s policy of détente. This would enable Poland to acquire Western machinery on easy credit terms in order to modernize her industry. The debts incurred in this manner would be repaid by vastly increased exports of Polish goods to the West, the result of the increase in production which the new factories would make possible. He was also prepared to give far greater incentives to the private farmer than Gomułka.

Initially, this bold and rather risky policy enjoyed a substantial measure of success. Living standards rose significantly and the popular mood improved because it was now much easier to travel to the West. Gierek succeeded in establishing firm control of the party and in marginalizing the two principal instigators of the purge that had followed the events of March 1968, General Moczar and Józef Kępa. Gierek was also considerably more flexible in his treatment of intellectuals and the Church. However, his determination to maintain political orthodoxy while opening the country economically to the West, which resembled the policy of Brezhnev, soon undermined these efforts.

What brought the conflict to a head was the regime’s attempt in late 1975 to introduce a new constitution that would underline the socialist character of the Polish state. Gierek might well have been able to contain the opposition of the intellectuals had the economic situation not turned against him. His ambitious policy of modernizing Polish industry to enable export-led growth had been embarked on just as the Western world was experiencing its most severe economic downturn since 1929. By 1976, it was clear that a new austerity program was necessary, and when it was introduced, imposing price increases on food and consumer goods, there was another major outbreak of working-class unrest. Workers went on strike in the Baltic towns, and at the Ursus tractor factory near Warsaw railway lines were ripped up to prevent trains from reaching the capital; in Radom there was a virtual general strike and widespread rioting. Within two days, the Prime Minister, Piotr Jaroszewicz, appeared on television to announce the cancellation of the price rises.

The government now tried, as in 1970, to buy off the workers with further economic concessions, while at the same time intimidating them
by arresting hundreds of the strikers, many of whom were summarily sentenced to imprisonment or dismissed from their jobs. This succeeded only in driving together the workers and the discontented intellectuals. The movement which this created was very different from earlier political groupings in Poland and the other socialist countries, which had all attempted to reform the Communist system from within by advancing their ideas through the various Communist or workers’ parties. Drawing on the experience of the Czechoslovak reformers in 1968, the Polish opposition, many of whose leaders had played a prominent part in the student unrest in Poland that year, came to the conclusion that the PZPR was incapable of reform. In addition, the Soviet Union would use all its influence to prevent any undermining of the principles of Communist orthodoxy, first and foremost the principle that the Communist Party should be the leading political force in Poland. The opposition accordingly concluded that the Communist Party should be left to rule, and that their own role should be to create the foundations of a plural society in Poland that could put pressure on the authorities to behave in a more responsible way and take into account divergent social and political ideas.

The political ferment was further increased by a largely unforeseen development, the elevation of Karol Wojtyła, the archbishop of Kraków, to the papacy in October 1978. This event had an electrifying effect on the Poles. National self-confidence increased dramatically, as did the belief that major political change was now inevitable. In the summer of 1979, Pope John Paul II visited his homeland amid scenes of almost hysterical rejoicing.

The tensions in the country were further fueled by the increasing deterioration in the economic situation. By the summer of 1980, the crisis had become so serious that, in spite of its fears of provoking unrest, the government could no longer postpone the introduction of an austerity program. As on earlier occasions, there was inadequate consultation and when, on June 1, the price of meat more than doubled, protest strikes began in Warsaw and Lublin and soon spread across the country. On August 14, the workers in the Lenin shipyard in Gdańsk came out on strike. At first, their demands had no clear political character. Very quickly, however, the effect of the political agitation and the growing political sophistication that had characterized the years since 1976 made themselves felt.

The negotiations between the union that took the name Solidarity (Solidarność) and the government were to prove long and difficult, and often seemed near to collapse. They took place against a background of threats from the Soviet Union to intervene, and by calls from the Catholic
hierarchy to the workers to compromise. In the end, the government gave way, and agreement was reached on August 31 on all the strikers' demands, the most important of which was the establishment of a free and independent trade union.

Following the government's failure, Gierek resigned and was succeeded as first secretary of the PZPR by Stanisław Kania. The next 14 months were taken up in an attempt to reach a *modus vivendi* between the Solidarity movement, which at its height claimed 10 million members, and the government, which was under pressure from the Soviets to take a firm line. Genuine power sharing ultimately proved impossible between a weak and unrepresentative party kept in power by its apparatus of coercion and a group with overwhelming support. Had the Soviets not been backing the Communists, they would almost certainly have lost power in a popular revolution.

In October 1981, Kania was succeeded as first secretary by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who also retained his posts as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. General Jaruzelski’s appointment did not in itself imply the final abandonment of conciliation and a decision to resort to force. Rather, the general hoped at first to use the considerable prestige of the armed forces in Poland to persuade Solidarity to moderate its demands for a share of power and to agree to accept a consultative role. His aim in this was to co-opt Solidarity so that it could be induced to persuade its members to accede to the government’s austerity plans for dealing with the country’s economic collapse. When this failed, he decided on the use of force. On the night of December 13, he proclaimed martial law. Trade unions and other organizations were suspended, the right of assembly and protest were subject to severe restrictions, and nearly 6,000 people were arrested, including the entire leadership of Solidarity. So heavy was this blow that hopes of paralyzing the country by a general strike dissolved, and resistance to the police and army was only sporadic.

In introducing martial law under the Military Council of National Salvation (*Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodowego*), General Jaruzelski sought to control the threat to Communist power in Poland, which he believed could only provoke Soviet intervention. By using minimum force, he hoped to pave the way to agreement with the more moderate elements in the country and within Solidarity, and to carry forward those aspects of reform that he believed would not undermine the government. In addition, he hoped to use the powers conferred on him by martial law to introduce a drastic economic stabilization plan that would induce Western governments and
bankers to overlook government repression and supply new credits and economic assistance to Poland.

The government was ultimately unable to achieve any of its objectives. By the mid-1980s, its weakness was apparent. Under Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviets were now willing to consider much more far-reaching political change in Poland than previously. Faced with a wave of strikes in the summer of 1988 in response to a new set of price increases, General Jaruzelski and his Minister of Internal Affairs, General Kiszczak, initiated roundtable discussions with a broad spectrum of opposition politicians drawn from the Solidarity movement, with the participation of the Church. These began in February 1989 and lasted two months. They led to the legalization of Solidarity and to the establishment of a Senate, to which elections would be free. In elections to the lower house, 65 percent of the seats would be contested exclusively by the PZPR; the remaining 35 percent would be elected in open competition. In four years’ time there would be completely free elections. However, when the Solidarity movement won all 161 contested seats in the Sejm and 99 out of 100 seats in the Senate, the power-sharing arrangements were no longer tenable. A coalition government was set up in August 1989 under Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a liberal Catholic and veteran opposition politician. It included only two PZPR ministers. General Jaruzelski became president, but the Communist system had effectively come to an end in Poland.

The final period, which has lasted for more than 20 years, is of the pluralistic political system and market economy in Poland. For the first decade-and-a-half after the collapse of the Communist political system, the country appeared to have achieved a degree of political stability, in spite of the bewildering rapidity with which parties arose, split, and disappeared. It rested on the emergence of two groups, one deriving from the Solidarity movement, sometimes called the post-Solidarity camp, and the other deriving from the former Polish United Workers’ Party, which dissolved in 1990 and was transformed, more or less convincingly, into a social democratic party of the West European type, the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej — SLD).

Although some have attempted to distinguish between these groupings on the grounds that the post-Solidarity parties were, above all, concerned with ensuring citizens the greatest amount of freedom, while the post-Communists saw democracy as primarily concerned with providing the maximum security for them, in fact, these two camps had much in common. The post-Communists carried forward the pro-capitalist reforms
initiated in 1989 by the Finance Minister, Leszek Balcerowicz, which rapidly and successfully restructured the country’s economy. Both groups were committed to maintaining a pluralistic and democratic political system and the supported Polish entry into NATO, which took place in March 1999, and into the European Union in May 2004.

The real division in post-Communist Poland has been between the liberals and populists. The liberals have taken the capitalist West as a model, they support Europeanization, and favor the free market and free competition. The populists highlight the negative consequences of unfettered free markets and Europeanization; they tend to favor oversimplified and demagogic solutions, and use concepts such as “the people,” “the majority,” “ordinary people,” and “working people,” whose interests they believe are clearly at odds with those of the elite. They mistrust career politicians and existing political institutions, and are inclined to believe in conspiracy theories of politics. They also represent, for the most part, those who have suffered in the successful transition of Poland to a market economy rather than those who have gained.

This polarization became clear immediately after the fall of Communism, when General Jaruzelski resigned as president in 1990. The ensuing contest for the presidency led to a “war at the top” and to an acrimonious split within Solidarity, pitting the more moderate Tadeusz Mazowiecki against Lech Wałęsa, the ultimate victor, who took a more radical anti-Communist stance. The dichotomy returned in a new form during the parliamentary elections of September 2001, when two populist parties, the League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin — LPR) and the Self-Defense Alliance (Przymierze Samoobrona), together gained nearly a quarter of the seats in the lower house. The division between these two groups and the elite, both those derived from the PZPR and those derived from the Solidarity opposition, also extends to their view of the recent past. The latter groups see the rulers of People’s Poland, particularly after 1956, as, on the whole, well-meaning, trying to do the best for the country in difficult geopolitical conditions. In their eyes, the Round Table Agreements between the government and opposition that made possible the negotiated end of Communism in 1989 were a sensible compromise between people of goodwill.

Ranged against them are those who believe that the Round Table Agreements were the result of a shoddy bargain between that section of the opposition who had started their political careers as revisionist Communists, many of them of Jewish origin, and a moribund regime. They describe this regime as totalitarian throughout its existence and controlled
from Moscow. Those who had served in it were collaborators and should be treated as such.

Two developments allowed the populists to come to power in 2005. The first was the overconfidence instilled in the SLD government by its victory in the elections of 2001. The party was now able to rule on its own without coalition partners and began to display some of the arrogance of the PZPR before 1989. In addition, the crony capitalism it fostered, which was partly an outcome of members of the former nomenklatura having profited from privatization, led to widespread corruption. The SLD began to fall apart and did very poorly in the elections of 2005. The victors were two right-of-center parties, the more conservative Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość — PiS) party and the more liberal Citizens’ Platform (Platforma Obywatelska — PO). In the subsequent presidential election, the PiS party candidate, Lech Kaczyński, defeated the PO candidate, Donald Tusk.

The second factor aiding the populists was the inability of these two center-right groups to work together. The PiS party, which had won the presidential elections and had narrowly won the largest proportion of the popular vote in the parliamentary elections, now wanted to play the dominant role in any coalition. When the PO refused to accept a subordinate position, the key figure in the PiS party, Jarosław Kaczyński, the president’s twin brother, formed a coalition with the two populist parties, the LPR and Samoobrona. The resulting government pursued a highly demagogic foreign policy, antagonizing not only the Russians, but Poland’s ally in NATO, Germany, and the leadership of the European Union. At home, it promoted neo-nationalists in institutions like the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej — IPN) and aggressively pursued a policy of opening the secret police files and exposing those with secret police connections before 1989 in order to compromise its political opponents.

The one area of the traditional right’s policies that the coalition did not follow was antisemitism: The two Kaczyński brothers fostered good relations with the Jewish world and the State of Israel and supported initiatives like the establishment of a Jewish museum in Warsaw, aimed at preserving the memory of the Jewish past. Even Roman Giertych, leader of the LPR and descendant of a long line of Endek and antisemitic politicians, who held the posts of deputy prime minister and minister of education in this government, claimed that Roman Dmowski’s views on the Jews would debar him from membership of the LPR.

The erratic character of this government and its alienation of Poland’s allies in Europe led to its defeat in the elections of 2007. In these, neither
the LPR nor Samoobrona won sufficient votes to be represented in parliament, and the PiS lost significant support. A new centrist government was formed under Donald Tusk of the PO party. The PO candidate, Bronisław Komorowski, defeated Jarosław Kaczyński in the presidential elections held in June 2010, after the tragic death of Lech Kaczyński in a plane crash in Smolensk. It remains to be seen whether the populist challenge has been finally defeated.

The history of the Jews in Poland since 1944 was obviously deeply affected by these developments. At the same time, a number of themes can be observed in that history, which extend over the period as a whole. The first was the failure to establish a viable Jewish community in the period of Communist rule between 1944 and 1989. According to the article in this volume by Albert Stankowski, only some 425,000 of the estimated pre-war Jewish population in 1939 of 3,330,000 were still alive at the end of the war. Not all of them returned to Poland from the Soviet Union, where the largest proportion had survived. As a result, in the immediate post-war period, the Jewish population of the country numbered between 300,000 and 350,000. They were, for the most part, resettled in the Western Territories acquired from Germany. Łódź, the largest undestroyed city in the country, also became a major Jewish center. Many of the Jews who had survived were unwilling to remain in a country where most of their relatives and friends had perished, while their experience of the Soviet Union made them unwilling to live under a Communist dictatorship. They were, moreover, threatened by a wave of anti-Jewish violence, which is described by Alina Skibińska, Andrzej Żbikowski, August Grabski, and Joanna Tokarska-Bakir. Żbikowski points out that “there is no way of establishing accurately the number of Jews murdered directly after the war.” In his view, the present state of research indicates that at least 650–750 Jews perished in this way and that “there were probably many more tragic incidents of which no written evidence has survived.” Feliks Tych estimates the number killed as around 2,000.

The violence was the result of a number of factors. The war had not brought an end to antisemitism or seriously compromised the antisemitic ideology, since the Nazis had persecuted the Polish radical right, the main supporters of antisemitism in Poland, as fiercely as they did all other manifestations of Polish resistance to their rule. In addition, antisemitism had been deliberately encouraged by the Nazis and intensified by the long-standing identification of Jews with Communism. This was reinforced by the belief in extensive Jewish collaboration with the Soviet occupying
authorities in eastern Poland between 1939 and 1941 and by the presence of a number of people of Jewish origin in prominent positions in the post-war government. In these circumstances, old superstitions could take on a new incarnation. The worst outbreak of anti-Jewish violence took place in Kielce in July 1946, when the 200 survivors of the pre-war community of around 18,000 were attacked by an angry mob, incited by rumors that a Christian boy had been abducted by the Jews, who needed his blood because their wartime experiences had left them anemic. In the ensuing mayhem, 42 Jews were murdered and another 30 were murdered in the vicinity of the town.

One important factor in the violence was the failure of the Catholic Church to condemn it unequivocally, a reaction which is discussed in the articles by Bożena Szaynok and August Grabski. Antisemitism in the immediate post-war period was also intensified by resistance on the part of those who had benefited from the expropriation of Jewish property to attempts by its former owners to regain what they had lost and by the breakdown of law and order, which had begun during the Nazi occupation and led to a general barbarization of society and an increase in crime. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir shows how in the Klimontów region, violence resulted from the desire to take over Jewish-owned mills. The massive post-war expulsions of Germans, Poles, and Ukrainians encouraged those who thought that Poland’s few remaining Jews could also be expelled. Anti-Jewish violence was also a product of the near civil war conditions.

In all, by 1950, some 180,000 Jews had left the country, most of them for Israel, leaving an estimated number in Poland in 1955 of between 72,000 and 80,000. Some have questioned whether this remnant could be described as a functioning community. Certainly, only a small proportion declared themselves Jewish in their personal documents, or belonged to one of the two Jewish communal organizations. In effect, what made them Jewish was that they were regarded as such by the surrounding society and the authorities.

The difficulties the Jews faced in establishing themselves in post-war Poland are investigated by Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak, whose article deals with the moral and physical condition of the survivors and their adaptation to post-war Poland, while a case study explaining the reasons for the emigration of the majority of surviving Jews from Kraków is provided by Edyta Gawron. Most of those who fled Poland, including some who had returned from captivity in Germany, found themselves in displaced persons camps in Germany and their fate is analyzed by Tamar Lewinsky.
The years 1956–1958 saw a further exodus of Jews from Poland, which continued into the early 1960s. This was caused, at least in part, by a sense of insecurity arising out of the open expression of anti-Jewish sentiments, which accompanied the crisis that brought Gomułka to power. Anti-Jewish hostility had a number of sources. In part, it was the product of the inter-party struggle in which the hardline Natolin group within the PZPR, which used anti-Jewish slogans to strengthen its position and discredit its opponents. In addition, hostility to Jews seems to have been fairly widespread in the party, in part among those who felt that political liberalization would threaten the social advances they had made in the previous decade. As was the case later with the Partisans, antisemitism was also a tool with which to purge one’s opponents. There was, in addition, a grassroots antisemitism, which drew on the well-established stereotype of Judaeo-Communism and on the belief that Jews had played a key role in the Stalinist system. It is not clear how widespread such sentiments were. According to Security Service records, antisemitic incidents occurred in the first half of 1956 in a number of places, including Łódź, Wałbrzych, Bytom, Dzierżoniów, and Legnica. Hostility to Jews seems to have become more prevalent in the autumn of 1956 as the crisis came to a head, and reports by the party and security authorities record antisemitic statements and actions at many of the meetings and demonstrations that took place in October and November. It was most intense in Lower Silesia, where many Jews lived. Nationalistic emotions were exacerbated by the presence there of Red Army units and other national groups, notably the local German speakers. Ukrainians were also resettled there after 1945, as were political refugees from Greece.

There were other factors in the Jewish exodus. Emigration had been halted in 1951, and many of those who had wanted to leave then now took the opportunity to emigrate. So too did many of the 18,000 Jews who were able to return to Poland (along with another 249,000 Poles) under the new repatriation agreement with the Soviet Union. In all, between 1956 and 1960 more than 51,000 Jews along with non-Jewish members of their families left Poland, including 13,000 repatriates. By the early 1960s, the Jewish population had stabilized at somewhere between 22,000 and 35,000, most of whom had no affiliation with the organized Jewish institutions.

A further exodus took place as a consequence of the “anti-Zionist” campaign of 1968 in which some 9,000 people lost their jobs, the great majority of them Jews. At this time, more than 15,000 Jews and non-Jewish family members left Poland for Israel, western Europe, and North America. Those
who left were given a travel document stating that the bearer was “not a Polish citizen” and were required to declare that their destination was Israel, where only approximately a quarter of them settled.

Jan Gross has characterized fear as the main emotion felt by those Jews in Poland in the immediate post-war years who had survived the Holocaust. It is certainly true that the anti-Jewish violence and the problems inherent in regaining property taken during the war created serious difficulties for the Jewish survivors. At the same time, there was also hope, shared by many Poles, that the new Poland would prove democratic and pluralistic and that it would be possible to find a place in it for the surviving Jews. This is a second theme in the volume. The key factor in the revival of Jewish life was the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce — CKŻP), which had the support of a number of international Jewish organizations, above all the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. One of the main preoccupations of the Jewish leadership in Poland and its foreign supporters was to create a stable economic base for the surviving Jews. A significant proportion of the funds from outside also went to support the Jewish school system. One of the preoccupations of the Jewish organizations in post-war Poland was to provide for those children who had survived and also to reclaim children who had been adopted by non-Jewish families or were being sheltered in convents. An umbrella Zionist organization, Koordynacja, was established to find such children, and until April 1948 more than 1,000 lived at some stage in its homes. There was also strong competition between the Zionists and the Communists for control of orphaned children. The situation of Jewish children in the period from 1944 to 1968 is examined in an article by Helena Datner.

All the main Jewish political groupings, with the exception of the Orthodox, were represented on the CKŻP — the Zionists, the Bundists, and the Communists — and this became the main arena for the political conflicts on the Jewish street. When it was formed in Lublin late in 1944, it had a clear Zionist majority. In 1946, as a result of negotiations between the various Jewish groupings, its Presidium was made up of 13 Zionists, four Bundists, six Communists, and two representatives of the Union of Jewish Partisans (Związek Partyzantów Żydowskich) (the Orthodox Agudat and Mizrahi parties refused to participate because of the failure of the CKŻP to observe the Sabbath). In addition, the needs of religious Jews were catered for by the Organizational Committee of Jewish Religious Associations (Komitet Organizacyjny Żydowskich Zrzeszeń Religijnych), which was soon renamed Jewish Religious Congregations (Żydowskie Kongregacje).
Wyznaniowe) and which, in August 1949, became the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith (Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego).

Attempts were also made to revive Jewish culture. The most successful was the project to document the tragic fate of the Jews during the war. On August 29, 1944, barely a month after the liberation of Lublin, a group of five Polish Jews established the Historical Commission (Komisja historyczna), affiliated to the Jewish committee, which four months later was reorganized as the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland. It sought to collect testimonies from the survivors, calling on them to assist by “immediately delivering [to the members of the Commission] any materials at present in private hands and providing accounts of their wartime experiences, since “each and every Jew that has remained alive is a part of history.” The importance of these testimonies is highlighted by a number of the contributions to this volume. Subsequently, many memorial books (yizker-bukher) were produced, almost all outside Poland, which both allowed the expression of collective trauma and provided valuable information to historians. Their character is examined by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska and Adam Kopciowski.

Among the articles that examine the hopes of reestablishing a Jewish community in Poland is that of Grzegorz Berendt, who describes the attempts to rebuild Jewish institutions and organizations between 1944 and 1950, and that of Albert Stankowski and August Grabski, who investigate Jewish religious life in Poland in this period and later.

The history of Polish Jewry, like the history of Poland itself, took a radical new turn with the Communist establishment of a monopoly of power in 1947. The authorities now proceeded, under the close supervision of the Kremlin, to impose their own “solution” to the “Jewish question,” which involved the suppression of all groups not under direct Communist control. In February 1949, the CKŻP was taken over by the Communists, and its chairman, Emil Sommerstein, and a number of other non-Communist members, including Adolf Berman, the brother of Jakub Berman, emigrated. Like the Polish Socialist Party, the Bund was forced to unite with the PPR, and all independent Jewish newspapers were suppressed. From the second half of 1948 the Jewish fraction of the PZPR, like the party as a whole, began to attack Zionism much more aggressivel and in July 1949, the Ministry of Public Administration prohibited the organization of Zionist summer camps. In the autumn, all Zionist parties were banned. In April 1949, the various Jewish school networks, which now had around 3,000 Jewish pupils (60 percent of the Jewish age cohort) in 18 schools, were taken
over by the government. In October 1950, the CKŻP merged with the Jewish Art and Cultural Society (Żydowskie Towarzystwo Kultury), which had been set up in autumn 1947 to form the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów), firmly under Communist control and with no political role. Already in the previous year, the Joint Distribution Committee had been compelled to halt its activities in Poland.

One of the most disputed issues in the historiography of this period, which is discussed in this volume in August Grabski’s article, is the role played by Communists of Jewish origin in the new regime. The war had certainly strengthened the perceived identification of Jews with Communism. In their hope that the new regime would remedy the defects of the Second Republic, Jewish supporters of the new order were at one with a significant part of the Polish intelligentsia. In addition, in the near civil-war conditions of post-war Poland, the Jewish community could expect protection only from the new Communist-dominated authorities.

Communists of Jewish origin played a significant, though not dominant, role in the new regime. In the political apparatus, they included Jakub Berman; Roman Zambrowski, who had been one of the principal creators of the Communist-dominated Polish army in the USSR; and Hilary Minc, a key economic planner. Jews also played a key role in the cultural policy of the new regime, among them Jerzy Borejsza, the founder of the journal Odrodzenie and chief executive of the Czytelnik publishing house, until he was dismissed from all his positions in 1949.

However, antisemitism was also not absent from the PPR itself. Official government policy was to defend the Jews and foster their economic rehabilitation, but within the party some factions were much less sympathetic to the difficult plight of the Jews. This was also the case in the local administration, as is documented by Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak. In the country as a whole, Jews were widely viewed as playing a key role in the security apparatus of the new regime. Certainly, there were a number of Jews in leading positions in the security apparatus, including Anatol Fejgin, the head of the notorious Tenth Department of the Ministry of Public Security (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego), which was responsible for the surveillance of all members of the PZPR, and his deputy Józef Światło. At the same time, there was a strong tendency to categorize as Jews anyone of whom one disapproved. Thus, in his account of his tenure as American ambassador in Poland, Arthur Bliss Lane, writing presumably under the influence of his Polish contacts, described Stanisław Radkiewicz the (non-Jewish) minister
of public security, as “a good-looking man, apparently of Russian Semitic origin, with carefully combed oily black hair, a keen mobile aesthetic face.”¹

Our understanding of the situation in Poland (as of that in the Soviet Union) has been transformed by the opening of the archives, which give a much fuller picture both of the role of Jews in the Polish security apparatus in the immediate post-war years and of the process by which they were purged from it after the death of Stalin. They have revealed that Jews made up a significant proportion of the workforce of the Ministry of Public Security, though never a majority, and that Soviet “advisers” played a key role. The percentage of Jews in the head office fluctuated between 30 and 40 percent, with the exception of the years 1944 and 1945, when it was somewhat lower. In the local administration, the percentage of people of Jewish origin was much smaller. Of course, these were Communists and internationalists far from any involvement in Jewish life. They entered the security service at a time in which the struggle to impose Communism was particularly intense and when loyalty to the system was the overriding criterion both of the Polish Communist leadership and their Soviet overlords.

After 1956, Jews were to be largely purged from the security apparatus. Even in the period between 1944 and 1955, their role had aroused opposition among “native” Communists who felt that it increased their own unpopularity in Polish society and barred their path to high office. Why was it that Jews were allowed to hold a considerable number of important posts in the security apparatus in Poland when they had already been removed from such positions in the Soviet Union and at a time when Stalin was engaged in the destruction of the Soviet Yiddish cultural establishment and in a full-scale purge of “Jewish cosmopolitans”?

At root, the presence of Communists of Jewish origin in significant positions in the security apparatus has to be seen as a consequence of Stalin’s deep distrust of the Poles. It took place at the same time as the purge of Yiddish cultural activists in the Soviet Union and the wider campaign against “cosmopolitanism,” which was essentially an attack on Russified Jews within the new Soviet intelligentsia. The retention of Jews in these positions in Poland was clearly intended by Stalin to be a temporary expedient until a larger group of reliable local Communists could be trained. Indeed, the history of Polish Communism can be seen as the unsuccessful attempt to create such a group.

The thaw period from 1954 and, in particular, the early 1960s, saw the final removal of Jews from the security apparatus, as is described in the articles by Grzegorz Berendt and Feliks Tych. A series of defections by intelligence officers of Jewish origin in the Polish Military Intelligence Service, which started with that of Paweł Monat in September 1959, had already set in motion a succession of countermeasures that aroused intense suspicion and paranoia, as well as antisemitism, throughout the military as well as the state security organs. Investigations accused Jews collectively of disloyalty and undermined the position of those among them who remained inside the party state apparatus. One result was that the most senior Polish Jew in the party, Politburo member Roman Zambrowski, was forced to resign in 1963.

At the same time, among those who remained in Poland, the processes of acculturation and Polonization proceeded rapidly — another major theme which extends over the whole volume. This made the revival of Yiddish cultural life difficult to achieve. A number of major Yiddish writers, including Chaim Grade and Avrom Sutzkever, spent short periods in Poland after the war, but they soon moved on to the United States and Israel. Some other surviving Yiddish writers, like Itzik Manger, Sholem Asch, and Isaac Bashevis Singer, remained in the West. A small number did reestablish themselves in Poland, including Binem Heller, Leib Olitski, Hadasah Rubin, Lili Berger, Moshe Szkliar, Shlomo Beilis-Legis, and Daniel Kac, but most subsequently emigrated in 1956 and 1968. The attempts to revive Yiddish culture are the focus of the article by Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikov and Magdalena Ruta, who also examines, in a separate article, the way the Holocaust was treated in post-war Yiddish literature. The attempt to foster Jewish art is analyzed by Renata Piątkowska.

One index of Jewish acculturation was the large role played in Polish literary life by people of Jewish origin and the emergence of what has been called “the Jewish School of Polish literature” — a group of writers including Julian Stryjkowski, Stanisław Wygodzki, Henryk Grynberg, Bohdan Wojdowski, and Hanna Krall — who have explored the main dilemmas faced by Polish Jewry, above all, how to record and memorialize the Holocaust and how to go on living in the country where it took place and where the attitude of the majority of the population gave rise to serious questions. In this volume, Jewish literary responses to the Holocaust in Polish are compared to those in Yiddish by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska and Magdalena Ruta.

A third theme is the slow and incomplete revival of Jewish life since 1989. The events of 1968 dealt a devastating blow to organized Jewish life in
Poland. In 1971, a publication of the New York-based committee for Jews in Poland described the “recent exodus of the Jews from Poland” as “the end of a thousand years.” Yet, from the late 1970s, Jewish life began to revive. People of Jewish origin, including Stanisław Krajewski, Konstanty Gebert, and Adam Michnik, who came from the Polonized Warsaw Jewish milieu, which is described in this volume in the article by Małgorzata Melchior, played a large role in the political unrest that ultimately gave rise to Solidarity in the summer of 1980. Already in the summer of 1979, the American sociologist Carl Rogers had conducted a summer workshop in Poland. Approximately ten of those attending discovered that they shared a similar Jewish background, which became apparent during a special smaller session devoted to the subject of Jews in Poland. Discussion of their Jewish background continued in Warsaw and involved members of the liberal Club of the Catholic Intelligentsia (Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej). As early as 1971, members of the club organized the first annual Week of Jewish Culture, intended to provide a better “understanding of the rich and yet poorly known culture” of a people that “lived among us for centuries” and whose “gigantic tragedy in the last war we witnessed.” The discussions took place in different private apartments in order to circumvent restrictions on meeting. The group called itself the Jewish Flying University, modeling itself on the Flying University organized by the democratic opposition, itself drawing on experiences of the similar movement that had functioned under Russian rule before 1914.

The group, which numbered nearly 100, met periodically until the imposition of martial law in December 1981. According to one of its founders, Konstanty Gebert, they regarded themselves as the “last Jews” of Poland, although the nature of their Jewish identity was still undefined. Essentially, their interest in their Jewish background was driven not so much by a desire for Jewish continuity or religious belief as by their opposition to the Communist regime and the desire to shape a Polish identity with which they could identify.

As martial law was relaxed, the group resumed its activities and, in April 1983, it took part in an alternative, oppositional celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Their activities continued on a larger scale after the negotiated end of Communism in 1989. It is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the number of Jews who remained in Poland. According to the Polish census of 2002, 1,100 people gave their ethnicity as Jewish. The 2005 survey of the Jewish population estimates the core Jewish population as 3,300. These figures clearly underestimate the
number of people with some connection to Jewish life; according to Michael Schudrich, Chief Rabbi of Poland, there are at least 30,000–40,000 Jews in Poland. The number of people with some connection to the Jewish world is considerably larger.

With the end of Communism and the decline in hostility to Jews, more people have been willing to acknowledge their Jewish identity, while significant numbers of “hidden children” were told of their Jewish roots by their Christian foster parents.

Although the community is small, it has shown remarkable dynamism since 1989, partly as a result of a new generation of leaders, above all the journalist Konstanty Gebert and the philosopher Stanisław Krajewski. The two principal Jewish organizations remain the Union of Jewish Religious Communities, which was reorganized in 1993, and the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, which existed throughout the Communist period, but which has been transformed since 1989. Each has around 2,000 members.

The Union of Jewish Communities is made up of eight Jewish communities. The largest congregation is in Warsaw, with well over 500 members, followed by Wrocław, Łódź, and Kraków. In recent years, a Reform congregation, Beit Warszawa, has been established in Warsaw, which is affiliated to the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

Chabad has also now established itself in Warsaw, where it has set up a small yeshiva, a departure from the position of the last Lubavitcher Rebbe who believed that no attempt should be made to revive Jewish life in the Polish “cemetery.”

Other smaller Jewish organizations are the Polish Union of Jewish Students, reorganized in March 2007 as the All-Poland Jewish Youth Organization (Żydowska Ogólnopolska Organizacja Młodzieżowa), and the Association of “Children of the Holocaust” (Dzieci Holocaustu), which is made up of child survivors. The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation funds the Lauder-Morasha School, the only Jewish school in Warsaw, as well as summer and winter camps. Additional funding for the community is provided by the Ted Taube Foundation and from the proceeds of the restitution of communal property under a law passed in 1997. The Lauder Foundation has also sponsored the publication of a high-quality monthly, *Midrasz*, originally edited by Konstanty Gebert and now by Piotr Paziński, which is devoted to the past and present Polish Jewry. The Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency both have offices in Poland. In June 2007, the cornerstone was laid of an ambitious museum of the history of Polish
Jews in Warsaw, with a remarkable design by two Finnish architects, Rainer Mahlamäki and Ilmari Lahdelma. In 2004, the late Chris Schwarz, a British photographer, and Professor Jonathan Webber of the University of Birmingham founded the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków, dedicated to the celebration of Jewish culture in Galicia and the commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust. In Oświęcim, under the influence of the New York-based philanthropist Fred Schwarz, the Auschwitz Jewish Center has been established with a prayer hall and museum, located in the premises of a pre-war beit midrash.

Some aspects of the revival of Jewish life in Poland have only been possible because of the participation of non-Jewish enthusiasts. The Kraków Festival of Jewish Culture, first held in 1988 and organized by Janusz Makuch, has become an annual event, drawing more than 20,000 people for eight days of music, theater, art exhibitions, and workshops, led mostly by Jewish performers and educators from Europe, Israel, and North America. Its character is described in the article by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska and Magdalena Ruta. The Center for Jewish Culture, established in 1993 by the Judaica Foundation and headed by Joachim Russek, runs programs of Jewish and civic interest in a restored beit midrash in Kazimierz. Finally, the Pograniczne (Borderland) Foundation was established in 1990 by Krzysztof Czyżewski in Sejny, near the Polish border with Lithuania, Belarus, and the Kaliningradskaya oblast. Its goal is to examine and commemorate the multicultural and multi-ethnic heritage of this region.

Jewish studies have also thrived. The Jewish Historical Institute has had a new lease of life since 1989 and has reorganized its archives and undertaken an extensive program of publication under its former director Feliks Tych, which is being extended by its new director, Paweł Śpiewak. Its journal, *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* (formerly *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*), is one of the best in the field. Impressive Jewish studies programs have also been established at the universities of Warsaw, Lublin, Gdańsk, and Poznań, and at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. In 1995, the Polskie Towarzystwo Studiów Żydowskich (Polish Association for Jewish Studies) was formed, with its headquarters in the Department of Jewish Studies at the Jagiellonian University. Today it has around 90 members.

One of the most difficult tasks facing the community is the preservation of Jewish heritage in Poland. Poland has over 400 synagogues still standing, which are used for various purposes, some appropriate, others not. In addition, there are at least 1,400 Jewish cemeteries, a few well preserved, many in a parlous state. Some of the synagogues have been returned to the
community under the communal restitution law, but resources for large-scale preservation are not available. The problems of preserving and making adequate use of this heritage are discussed in the article by Eleonora Bergman and Jan Jagielski.

Certainly, the efforts of all those involved in the re-creation of Jewish life in Poland have been little short of Herculean. The revival of the Jewish community here is described by Helena Datner. She stresses how this revival has been affected by the memory of the Holocaust, an impact which is also investigated, over a longer period, by Małgorzata Melchior. August Grabski and Albert Stankowski analyze the Jewish religious revival starting from the 1980s. Yet, at the same time, a note of caution should be added. It may be possible for a Jewish community as small as that in Poland to survive on the basis of pride in its past, rather than upon the existence of a critical mass of Jews prepared to commit themselves to sustaining the collective Jewish existence. It remains an open question as to whether this community can again become self-sustaining and a significant cultural center, even on a much smaller scale than in its heyday.

A final topic in this book is the slow posthumous integration of the Jews into Polish history and the attempts to come to terms with the painful legacy of the past. There was little serious discussion of the character of antisemitism after 1944. The only general account of Polish antisemitism published in Polish immediately after the war was the collection Martwa fala (Dead Wave), which appeared in 1947, before the rigors of Stalinism. This was a controversial collection, intended to reeducate the Polish public, but it was not followed up and it also appeared too late to have a significant effect on the violence in the immediate post-war period. The issue soon became bedeviled by Communist politics as the new Stalinist regime insisted that the entire anti-Communist opposition was tainted with antisemitism and that only the Communists had resisted anti-Jewish prejudice and attacks. This led to the liquidation of the short-lived League for the Struggle against Racism (Liga Przeciw Rasizmu).

The wave of antisemitism that accompanied the process of de-Stalinization so worried the authorities that they allowed the publication of a number of articles in mid-1956 warning of the danger of antisemitism, including one by the philosopher Leszek Kołakowski. In February 1957, the Prime Minister, Józef Cyrankiewicz, in a speech in the Sejm, stressed the need to respect the equal status of all citizens. However, in the early 1960s, as part of their bid for power, the partisan faction in the PZPR attempted to recast the memory of the Holocaust. In this, they made use of Gomulka's attempt to widen
the base of the regime by reaching out to members of the non-Communist resistance. This led to the erection of a monument to the fighters of the AK in the Powązki cemetery in Warsaw in 1957, and to the appearance of books and films depicting more accurately the situation in Poland during the Second World War. In May 1954, an international committee for the museum in the Auschwitz concentration camp was established, and a large monument was built at Treblinka. The official narrative stressed “the resistance and martyrdom of Poles and citizens of other nationalities” and tended to pass over the specific fate of the Jews. When Prime Minister Cyranckiewicz unveiled the monument at Treblinka, he referred to the victims as “800,000 citizens of European nations.” Almost all were Polish Jews.

The partisans extended this interpretation to construct a radical version of the dominant line, adding strongly anti-Jewish elements. In some ways, their ideological position was an eerie reincarnation of the views of the pre-war National Democracy (Endecja). They came to view the Holocaust, in which the murder of the Jews was the principal focus, as detracting from their stress on Polish wartime martyrdom and suffering as the basis for establishing the legitimacy of the unpopular Communist regime. The official narrative of the “parallel” fates of Jews and Poles during the war was replaced by one that “equated” the fates of Jews and Poles, insisting that both groups were similarly persecuted by the Nazis. An illustration of this shift was the replacement in 1968 of the entry on Nazi concentration camps, which had appeared in volume viii of the Wielka Encyklopedia Powszechna (Great Universal Encyclopedia) in 1966. The editors of the original article had distinguished between the annihilation camps, in which almost all the victims were Jews, and the concentration camps, in which many of the prisoners were ethnic Poles. In the partisans’ amended version, this distinction was explicitly repudiated and the editor responsible for the original article, who was of Jewish origin, was dismissed.

Alongside this concept of an equal fate shared by Poles and Jews, the partisans developed the argument that in the West, Polish martyrdom was being downplayed because of Jewish “anti-Polonism,” a prejudice they claimed was similar to antisemitism. This idea developed at a time when critical accounts of Polish behavior towards the Jews during the war were appearing in the West. The partisans attacked accounts of the Holocaust that described the Poles as “eternal antisemites” and accomplices to the Nazi genocide. They exploited resentment among Poles, both in the country and in émigré circles, and used these stereotypical images to advance their political ends, hoping to portray the West as “anti-Polish” and themselves as
the defenders of Polish national honor. Any investigation into the negative aspects of the Polish past was labeled as “anti-Polish,” and those undertaking such investigations were seen as tools of “anti-Polonism.” As Hanna Węgrzynek shows in her article, these attitudes were also reflected in the school textbooks produced in these years.

With the defeat of the partisans and Gierek’s assumption of office, the Jewish issue became effectively taboo. However, the late 1970s and 1980s were marked by a revival of interest in Jewish matters in Poland. It was increasingly realized in Polish opposition circles that the country had been, for nearly 700 years, a focal point of the Jewish diaspora, and from the early 1980s the importance of this community in the history of Poland was increasingly recognized. This interest was partly nostalgic in character. By the early 1980s Poland was practically mono-ethnic and mono-religious (although this homogeneity should not be exaggerated), and there was a genuine sense of loss at the disappearance of the more colorful Poland of the past, with its mixture of religions and nationalities. However, this interest in Jewish affairs also went deeper. The experiences of the Solidarity movement in 1980–1981 gave the Poles a greater sense of self-esteem. In sharp contrast with the traditional stereotype of the Poles as quixotic and impractical political dreamers, in these years Poland astonished the world by its political maturity. A non-violent movement challenged the might of the Soviet empire for nearly a year-and-a-half, and although it was finally crushed, it paved the way for the negotiated end of Communism less than ten years later. Against this background, there was a greater willingness to look at the more controversial aspects of the Polish past and to consider more critically how the Poles had treated the peoples alongside whom they had lived, above all the Jews and the Ukrainians.

Increasingly, too, particularly among the younger generation, there was a growing feeling of shame over the events of 1968. At the time, the prevailing view was that this was merely a settling of accounts among the Communist elite and that all the party factions fighting for power were equally tainted. By the late 1970s, however, the realization that one of the consequences of those years had been to deprive Poland of most of what remained of its Jewish intelligentsia, and that Polish society had allowed itself once again to be manipulated by the crude use of antisemitic slogans, led to an increasing feeling of anger. The role of the 1968 crisis in depriving the Communist regime of political legitimacy has, until recently, been underestimated.

In Israel, North America, and Europe there was a growing awareness of the importance of the Polish-Jewish past, which soon began to have an
effect in Poland and led to the holding of a series of academic conferences, culminating in one in Jerusalem in February 1988. One of the participants in these conferences was the literary critic Jan Błoński and this led him to write the article “Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto” (The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto), which appeared in the liberal Catholic weekly Tygodnik Powszechny on January 11, 1987. It called on Poles to acknowledge their “guilt” for failing to facilitate the integration of the Jews and for holding back from offering assistance to them during the war, and was a major turning point in the discussion of Polish Jewish issues in post-war Poland. The debate it provoked is discussed in the articles by Bożena Szaynok and Dariusz Libionka.

In the 1990s, a series of debates similar to that aroused by Błoński’s article took place, which are also described in Libionka’s article. What is striking about these debates is their moral character. It is no accident that several of them took place in a Catholic periodical; they were mostly conducted by theologians, philosophers, and literary critics. As Jerzy Turowicz, editor of Tygodnik Powszechny, pointed out, the argument between the two sides was “conducted on totally different planes,” one side stressing moral imperatives, the other seeking to justify Polish behavior on the grounds of the conditions of the occupation.

Two developments now began to affect the debate. The first was the more recent historical research undertaken since 1989, which has given us a much fuller picture of Polish-Jewish relations in the twentieth century. From this research, a clear and unambiguous picture is emerging, which was set out in an important review article by Maria Janion in Tygodnik Powszechny on October 22, 2000. She expressed the opinion that, although Daniel Goldhagen’s work Hitler’s Willing Executioners (1996) has many flaws, his concept of “eliminationist antisemitism” is a useful analytical tool. She argued that there are several stages before a society adopts such a stance. First, Jews are seen as undesirable and to be denied some rights. Then comes a demand for the voluntary or compulsory removal of the bulk of Jews from the society. Only then does the progression to mass murder occur. Janion argues convincingly that the majority of Polish society and Polish political parties had, by the 1930s, adopted the view that the “solution” to the “Jewish problem” was the voluntary or compulsory removal of most Jews from Poland. This, she claimed, is a key factor in understanding the Poles’ reaction to the mass murder of the Jews. These are conclusions that a significant number of historians in Poland have come to accept.2

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The second development was the important corpus of work produced by Polish-Jewish writers in the 1990s. These writers dealt extensively with their Jewish backgrounds, often previously concealed. Several had common experiences in that they lived through the war as children, hidden on the Aryan side, and grew up in the complex post-war years. Their work gives a graphic and largely negative picture of what it was like to be a Jew in a hostile environment both during the war and under Communism.

This was the context for the debate engendered by the appearance of Jan Gross's book *Sąsiedzi* (Sejny, 2000), which appeared in English as *Neighbors* in 2001. Using evidence from a trial held in 1949, the book describes in detail an incident in the town of Jedwabne in the northeast of today's Poland. In July 1941, the local population, with some German incitement but little actual assistance, brutally murdered the overwhelming majority of their Jewish neighbors. The debate that this provoked has been the most serious, protracted, and profound on the issue of Polish-Jewish relations since the end of the war. Its course is described in this volume by Dariusz Libionka.

A number of other articles also treat the more general question of coming to terms with the painful legacy of the divisive Polish-Jewish past. They include that of Robert Kuwałek, who investigates the role of the museums in former Nazi death camps; Sławomir Kapralski, who outlines the controversies that have arisen in the former death camp at Auschwitz; Hanna Węgrzynek who gives an account of how the Holocaust was dealt with in Polish school textbooks between 1945 and 1989 and how this has changed since the end of the Communist system; and Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs who investigates how much is known about the Holocaust among young people in Poland today. Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak analyzes the way attitudes to rescuers and the discussion of the nature and extent of the assistance provided by Poles to Jews during the war has evolved; Bożena Szaynok examines the changing attitudes within Polish Catholicism towards Jews down to 1989; and Antoni Sulek gives an analysis of Polish attitudes towards Jews as reflected in sociological surveys from 1992, 1996, and 2002. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir provides an account, based on a series of interviews in the area of the town of Klimontów about 30 kilometers west of Sandomierz, of how antisemitic attitudes are still perpetuated in the countryside, while Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska and Magdalena Ruta examine the significance of Jewish cultural festivals in contemporary Poland. Monika Krawczyk of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland describes the complex and difficult problems inherent in the restitution of private Jewish property.
CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Certainly, what now seems to be the case is that in the discussion of problems in Polish-Jewish relations, we are now beginning to enter a new stage, in which apologies and apologetics will increasingly be replaced by careful and detailed research and reliable first-hand testimony. The goal should be to move beyond strongly held, competing, and incompatible narratives of the past and reach some consensus that will be acceptable to all people of goodwill and will bring about a degree of normalization both in Poles’ attitudes to the past and in Polish-Jewish relations. The articles in this volume are an important contribution to this process.
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**Jan Jagielski** is Head of the Section for Documenting Monuments at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. His publications include *Niezatarte ślady Getta Warszawskiego* (*The Remaining Traces of the Warsaw Ghetto*, 2008).

Sławomir Kapralski is a sociologist and social anthropologist, a researcher at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and lecturer at the Center for Social Studies in Warsaw, jointly operated by Lancaster University and the Polish Academy of Sciences. Since the end of 1980s, he has been involved in various research activities and educational initiatives in the field of Polish-Jewish relations and among Roma communities of East-Central Europe. His research interests focus on nationalism, ethnicity and identity, collective memory, antisemitism, Polish-Jewish relations, the Holocaust, and the problems of the Roma. His most recent publications include Naród z popiołów: Pamięć zagłady a tożsamość Romów (A Nation from the Ashes: Memory of Genocide and Roma Identity, 2012), and Roma in Auschwitz (with Maria Martyniak and Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, 2011).

Adam Kopciowski is Assistant Professor of History at the Center for Jewish Studies at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. He was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington (2005) and recipient of a research grant from the National Science Center in Poland (2012). He is author and co-author of numerous publications regarding the history of the Jewish communities in the Lublin region before, during, and after the Holocaust period and the phenomenon of Jewish memorial books, as the source of knowledge on the history and culture of Polish Jews. His books include Zagłada Żydów w Zamościu (The Holocaust of Jews in Zamość, 2005) and Księga pamięci żydowskiego Lublina (The Memorial Book of Jewish Lublin, 2011). His current research project deals with the history and content of the pre-war Jewish press in the Lublin region.

Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak is a sociologist, a research fellow at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, and a collaborator and contributor to Midrasz, a Jewish bimonthly. She received an award for her MA thesis, Polish-Jewish War Dilemmas: Challenges of the Holocaust. She is currently working on her PhD dissertation on post-war strategies of adaptation among Polish Jews (1945–1950). She participated in the work of the research group studying antisemitism in Poland, headed by Professor Ireneusz Krzemiński. She is a
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Member of a research team studying attitudes toward the Holocaust in Polish literature (1939–1968), headed by Professor Jacek Leociak. Her edition of the Gelbarts' family letters from the Warsaw Ghetto (collection of almost 70 postcards and letters sent from the ghetto) was published in 2009 as Adresat nieznany (Addressee Unknown). In 2013, she published among others a collection of the Finkelstein's family war letters (1939–1941) (Tęsknota nachodzi nas jak ciężka choroba... Korespondencja wojenna rodziny Finkelsztejnów 1939–1941), and several articles concerning Jewish press in wartime Poland and in Poland in the 1940s.

Monika Krawczyk is an alumni of the Law Departments of the University of Warsaw and the University of Toledo, Ohio. She is currently attorney-in-law with an independent practice in Warsaw, and formerly worked as an associate in a law firm in London, specializing in real estate transactions and property finance. Since 1999, she has been a member of the Governmental Regulatory Commission on Jewish Property Restitution. Since 2001, she has been a consultant of several international Jewish organizations dealing with the restitution of Jewish properties. Since 2004, she has been Chief Executive Officer of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, an organization established by the World Jewish Restitution Organization and the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland to carry on the restitution process, manage the returned properties and protect the historical heritage. In 2009, she was awarded a high civilian decoration by the president of Poland.

Robert Kuwałek (1966–2014) was a historian and from 1999 an employee of the Research Department at the Majdanek State Museum in Lublin. From 2004–2008, he was director of the Bełżec Memorial Museum (a branch of the Majdanek State Museum). In 2002, he became a Kościuszko Foundation fellow at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. His research interests included the history of the Jews in Lublin and the Lublin region in the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, Polish-Jewish relations, and different aspects of Operation “Reinhard” in the General Government. His publications include Lublin. Jerozolima Królestwa Polskiego (Lublin: Jerusalem of the Polish Kingdom, with Wiesław Wysok, 2001) and Obóz zagłady w Bełżcu (Death Camp in Bełżec, 2010) and numerous articles in Polish and German on the death camp in Sobibór in Polish and foreign historiography, Jews of Lublin in the Majdanek concentration camp, transit ghettos in the Lublin District, German Jews deported to the Lublin district, and others.
Tamar Lewinsky is a researcher at the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Basel, Switzerland. She previously worked as a Yiddish lecturer in the Department of Jewish History and Culture at the University of Munich, from which she received her PhD, and was a visiting professor at the University of Düsseldorf. She also served as the coordinator and co-author of the Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart (Michael Brenner, ed., 2012). She is the author of Displaced Poets: Jiddische Schriftsteller im Nachkriegsdeutschland, 1945–1951 (2008); Unterbrochenes Gedicht (editor, 2011), an anthology of Yiddish DP-writing in German translation; and East European Jews in Switzerland (editor, with Sandrine Mayoraz, 2013). Currently, she is preparing an archival document collection on the history of Jewish displaced persons (with Atina Grossmann) and is engaged in research into the history of Jewish transmigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Dariusz Libionka is Associate Professor of History at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw and Head of the Research Center at the Majdanek State Museum in Lublin. He is editor-in-chief of the yearbook Zagłada Żydów: Studia i materiały (The Holocaust: Studies and Source Materials). His numerous publications include Żydzi w powstańczej Warszawie (Jews in Warsaw during the Uprising of August 1944, with Barbara Engelking, 2009) and Bohaterowie, hochsztaplerzy, opisywacze: Wokół Żydowskiego Związku Wojskowego (Heroes, Swindlers, Informers: On the Jewish Military Association, with Laurence Weinbaum, 2011).

Małgorzata Melchior is Professor of Sociology at the Institute of Applied Social Sciences of the University of Warsaw and a member of the Polish Center for Holocaust Research (IFiS PAN). Her interests include sociological issues related to social minorities, problems of individual perception of social identity, the history of the Holocaust, and Polish-Jewish relations. Her recent publications include Zagłada a tożsamość: Polscy Żydzi ocaleni “na aryjskich papierach.” Analiza doświadczenia biograficznego (Holocaust and Identity: Polish Jews Who Survived on “Aryan Papers”: An Analysis of Biographical Experience, 2004) and many articles, including “Holocaust Survivors Who Passed As Non-Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland and France. A Comparison of the Survivors’ experience,” in IGGUD. Selected Essays in Jewish Studies, vol. 2: History of the Jewish People and Contemporary Jewish Society (Gershon Bacon et al., eds., 2009). She is a founding member of the “Open Republic” Association against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia.
Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikov is Assistant Professor at the Institute of History at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. Her research interests include the history of East European Jewry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the history of Yiddish culture and Polish-Jewish relations. Her books include *Strategie przetrwania: Żydzi po aryjskiej stronie Warszawy* (Strategies of Survival: Jews on the Aryan Side in Warsaw, 2004), *Obywatel Jidyszlandu: Rzecz o żydowskich komunistach w Polsce* (Citizen of Yiddishland: A Story of Jewish Communists in Poland, 2009), *Studia z dziejów trójjęzycznej prasy żydowskiej na ziemiach polskich* (Studies from the History of Trilingual Jewish Press in the Polish Lands, editor, 2012) and *Lesestunde/Lekcja czytania* (Lesson in Reading, 2013, co-edited with Ruth Leiserowitz, Stephan Lehnstaedt, and Grzegorz Krzywiec). She was the 2010 recipient of the Jan Karski and Pola Nireńska Award. She was the chairperson of the Polish Association of Yiddish Studies (2013–2016).

Renata Piątkowska holds a PhD in art history. She is curator of the collection at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. Her main field of research is Jewish art from the second half of the nineteenth century to World War II. In the years 1986–2006, she served as a curator at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. She organized a number of exhibitions of Polish-Jewish artists and published numerous articles and a monograph, *Między Ziemiańską a Montparnasse: Roman Kramsztyk* (Between Café Ziemiańska and Montparnasse: Roman Kramsztyk, 2004).

Magdalena Ruta is Associate Professor at the Institute of Jewish Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, where she teaches Yiddish language and literature. She has translated several prose works from Yiddish into Polish and published numerous articles on modern Yiddish literature. She is the editor of three books: Nusech Pojln: Studia z dziejów kultury jidysz w powo- jenjej Polsce (Nusakh Poyn: Studies on Yiddish Culture in Post-war Poland, 2008), Under the Red Banner: Yiddish Culture in the Communist Countries in the Post-war Era (co-edited with Evira Groezinger, 2008), and a trilingual (Yiddish-Polish-English) anthology, Nisht bay di taykhn fun Bovl: Antology fun der yidisher poezye in nokhmilkomedikn Poyln (Not on the Rivers of Babylon: An Anthology of Yiddish Poetry in post-WWII Poland, 2012). Her monographs include Pomiędzy dwoma światami: O Kalmanie Segalu (Be- tween Two Worlds: Kalman Segal, 2003), and Bez Żydów? Literatura jidysz w PRL o Zagładzie, Polsce i komunizmie (Without Jews? Yiddish Literature in Post-war Poland on the Holocaust, Poland and Communism, 2012).

Alina Skibińska is a historian, representative in Poland of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, and member of the Polish Center for Holocaust Research at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. Her publications include Źródła do badań nad zagładą Żydów na okupowanych ziemiach polskich. Przewodnik archiwalno-bibliograficzny (Sources for the Study of the Holocaust on the Occupied Polish Territories: An Archival-Bibliographic Guide, 2007) and Wybór źródeł do nauczania o zagładzie Żydów na okupowanych ziemiacach polskich. Materiały pomocnicze dla szkół ponadpodstawowych (A Selection of Sources for Teaching about the Holocaust on Occupied Polish Territories: Auxiliary Materials for Secondary Schools, co-author, 2010). Among her research interests are the history and culture of Polish Jews, with a focus on Polish-Jewish relations in the twentieth century. Currently, she is researching the topic of crimes committed against Jews during the war in the Kielce province perceived in the context of delinquency under the Nazi occupation.

Albert Stankowski is a graduate of the University of Szczecin, where he studied history and political sciences; and the Warsaw School of Econom- ics, where he completed his post-graduate studies in business management. He is coordinator of the Virtual Shtetl multimedia project at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. He also works for the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland. He was a visiting
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS


Antoni Sułek is Professor at the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw. His interests encompass the history of sociology, sociological methodology, and public opinion research. His recent books include Sondaż polski (Polish Survey, 2001); Ogród metodologii socjologicznej (Garden of Sociological Methodology, 2002); Socjologia na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim: Fragmenty historii (History of Sociology at the University of Warsaw, editor, 2007); and Obrazy z życia socjologii w Polsce (Pictures from the Life of Sociology in Poland, 2010). Since 1992, he has been associated with the major survey organizations in Poland. In the years 1994–1998, he served as the President of the Polish Sociological Association, and from 1999 to 2001 as Chief Adviser on Social Affairs to the prime minister of the Republic of Poland. He is a founding member of the “Open Republic” Association against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia.

Bożena Szaynok is Associate Professor in the Department of History at Wrocław University. She has conducted long-term research on Polish-Jewish and Polish-Israeli relations. Her books include Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach. 4. VII 1946 r. (The Kielce Pogrom, July 4, 1946, 1991); Osadnictwo żydowskie na Dolnym Śląsku 1945–1950 (Jewish Settlement in Lower Silesia 1945–1950, 2000); and Z historią i Moskwą w tle. Polska a Izrael 1944–1968 (With History and Moscow in the Background: Poland and Israel 1944–1968, 2007). She has also written numerous articles on Polish-Jewish relations, Polish-Israeli relations, and the history of Jews in Poland after 1945 published in Polish, English, and Hebrew. She is a member of the Council of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir is Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Since 2005, she
has directed the ethnographic archive team that is collecting oral history on
the Holocaust and blood libel accusations in eastern Poland (in the areas of
Sandomierz, Zamość, Podlasie, and others). Her books include Rzeczy mg-
liste: Eseje i studia (Hazy Things: Essays and Studies, 2004); Legendy o krwi.
Antropologia przesądu (Blood Libel Legends: Anthropology of Prejudice, 2008,
forthcoming in French); and Okrzyki pogromowe: Szkice z antropologii histo-
rycznej Polski lat 1939–1946 (Pogrom Cries: Studies in Historical Anthropology
of Poland in the Years 1939–1946, 2012, forthcoming in English). She is a re-
cipient of the 2007 Jan Karski and Pola Nireńska Award and currently a Marie

Feliks Tych is Professor Emeritus of the Jewish Historical Institute, War-
saw, and in the years 1996–2007 served as Director there. From December
1939 to September 1942 he was in the ghetto of Radomsko and was saved
by the family of a Polish teacher. He graduated from the Faculty of History
at the University of Warsaw, was a researcher at the Archive and Institute
of the Polish Labor Movement, professor at the Institute of History of the
Polish Academy of Sciences, visiting professor at universities in Göttingen,
Darmstadt, and Freiburg, Zentrum f. Antisemitismusforschung TU Berlin,
and Franz Rosenzweig Professor in Kassel. His recent publications include
Facing the Nazi Genocide: Non-Jews and Jews in Europe (co-edited with
Beate Kosmala, 2004), Pamięć. Historia Żydów polskich przed, w czasie i po
zagładzie (Warsaw 2004, 2006, 2008, published in English as Memory: His-
tory of Polish Jews Before, During and After the Holocaust, editor and co-au-
thor, 2008); Widziałem Anioła Śmierci. Losy deportowanych Żydów polskich
w ZSRR w latach II wojny światowej (I Have Seen the Angel of Death: Vicis-
situdes of Polish Jews Deported to the USSR in the Years of WWII, co-edited
with Maciej Siekierski, Magdalena Prokopowicz, and Adam Rok, 2006);
and Kinder über den Holocaust. Frühe Zeugnisse 1944–1948 (co-edited with
Alfons Kenkmann et al., 2008, 2009).

Hanna Węgrzynek is a research fellow at the Jewish Historical Institute in
Warsaw. In her research she focuses on Jewish-Christian relations in the
fifteenth to eighteenth centuries and the Jewish presence in Warsaw’s early
modern period. She is also engaged in the popularization of Jewish history
and especially the Holocaust in the Polish school curricula. She has written
several analyses devoted to this topic for the American Jewish Commit-
tee, the Polish Sejm (Parliament), and the Polish Ministry of Foreign Af-
fairs. Her books include “Czarna legenda” Żydów: Procesy o rzekome mordy

Andrzej Żbikowski is Associate Professor, head of a team on Holocaust research at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, and lecturer at the Center for East European Studies in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Warsaw. He is the author of several monographs and articles on the Holocaust of Polish Jews and editor of historical sources on this topic. Among his recent publications are the edition of Friedrich Katzmann’s Rozwiązanie kwestii żydowskiej w dystrykcie Galicja, Archiwum Ringelbluma. Relacje z Kresów Wschodnich RP (The Final Solution in the District of Galicia, Ringelblum Archive: Testimonies from the Eastern Borderlands of the Polish Republic, 2002); U genezy Jedwabnego. Żydzi na Kresach Północno-Wschodnich II Rzeczpospolitej. Wrzesień 1939-lipiec 1941 (The Roots of Jedwabne: Jews in North-Eastern Borderland of the Second Polish Republic, 2006); Wysiedlenia, wypędzenia i ucieczki 1939–1945. Atlas ziem Polski, co-edited with Grzegorz Hryciuk, Małgorzata Ruchniewicz, and Bożena Szaynok, 2009; German edition Atlas Zwangsumsiedlung, Flucht und Vertriebung Ostmitteleuropa 1939–1959, 2009); and Raport Juergena Stroopa — Żydowska dzielnica mieszkaniowa w Warszawie już nie istnieje! (Juergen Stroop’s Report: Jewish Residential District in Warsaw Is No More!, 2009).

Eli Zborowski (1925–2012), Polish-born Holocaust survivor, founded the American Federation of Jewish Fighters, Camp Inmates and Nazi Victims. He helped establish the world’s first academic chair in Holocaust studies at Yeshiva University in Manhattan in 1976, the first such professorship in the country. He initiated publication of Martyrdom and Resistance, the first newspaper devoted to Holocaust issues. In 1981, Zborowski founded and chaired the American Society for Yad Vashem, which leads and coordinates support for Yad Vashem, The Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority, throughout the US. He also endowed the Diana Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the Shoah at Yad Vashem. His biography, A Life of Leadership — Eli Zborowski: From the Underground to Industry to Holocaust Remembrance by Rochel and George Berman was published in 2011.
**List of Abbreviations**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAL</td>
<td>Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Lublinie</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAN</td>
<td>Archiwum Akt Nowych</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIPN</td>
<td>Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AK</td>
<td>Armia Krajowa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKO</td>
<td>Armia Krajowa Obywatelska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Armia Ludowa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMSW</td>
<td>Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Archiwum Państwowe</td>
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<tr>
<td>APG</td>
<td>Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku</td>
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<tr>
<td>APK</td>
<td>Archiwum Państwowe w Kielcach</td>
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<tr>
<td>APKr</td>
<td>Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie</td>
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<tr>
<td>APŁ</td>
<td>Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMSZ</td>
<td>Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APMM</td>
<td>Archiwum Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APR</td>
<td>Archiwum Państwowe w Radomiu</td>
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<tr>
<td>AŻIH</td>
<td>Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCh</td>
<td>Bataliony Chłopskie</td>
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<tr>
<td>BŻAP</td>
<td>Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BŻIH</td>
<td>Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBOS</td>
<td>Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej</td>
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<tr>
<td>CKŻP</td>
<td>Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce</td>
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<tr>
<td>CODN</td>
<td>Centralny Ośrodek Doskonalenia Nauczycieli</td>
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<tr>
<td>CZA</td>
<td>Central Zionist Archive in Jerusalem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CŻKH</td>
<td>Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDZ</td>
<td>Dział Dokumentacji Zabytków</td>
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<tr>
<td>FODŻ</td>
<td>Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego</td>
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<tr>
<td>GG</td>
<td>Generalne Gubernatorstwo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GL</td>
<td>Gwardia Ludowa</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFiS PAN</td>
<td>Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II RP</td>
<td>II Rzeczpospolita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III RP</td>
<td>III Rzeczpospolita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPN</td>
<td>Instytut Pamięci Narodowej</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISA</td>
<td>Israel State Archive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISNS</td>
<td>Instytut Stosowanych Nauk Społecznych</td>
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### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISP PAN</td>
<td>Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk (Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBW</td>
<td>Korpus Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego (Internal Security Corps)</td>
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<tr>
<td>KHŻ</td>
<td>Kwartalnik Historii Żydów (Jewish History Quarterly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOŻP</td>
<td>Komitet Organizacyjny Żydów Polskich (Organization Committee of Polish Jews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPP</td>
<td>Komunistyczna Partia Polski (Communist Party of Poland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPRP</td>
<td>Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski (Communist Workers’ Party of Poland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KRN</td>
<td>Krajowa Rada Narodowa (National State Council)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS</td>
<td>Komisja Specjalna (Special Commission of the Central Committee of Polish Jews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWP</td>
<td>Ludowe Wojsko Polskie (Polish People’s Army)</td>
</tr>
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<td>MAP</td>
<td>Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej (Ministry of Public Administration)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MBP</td>
<td>Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego (Ministry of Public Security)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCEAH</td>
<td>Międzynarodowe Centrum Edukacji o Auschwitz i Holokaustie (International Center of Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEN</td>
<td>Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej (Ministry of National Education)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Milicja Obywatelska (Citizens’ Militia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MON</td>
<td>Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej (Ministry of National Defense)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych (Ministry of Internal Affairs)</td>
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<td>MSZ</td>
<td>Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>Narodowa Demokracja</td>
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<td>NKVD</td>
<td>Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOW</td>
<td>Narodowa Organizacja Wojskowa</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPŠW</td>
<td>Nauka o Polsce i świecie współczesnym</td>
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<td>NRR</td>
<td>Naczelna Rada Religijna</td>
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<td>NSZ</td>
<td>Narodowe Siły Zbrojne</td>
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<td>OBOP</td>
<td>Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej</td>
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<td>ONR</td>
<td>Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORMO</td>
<td>Ochotnicza Rezerwa Milicji Obywatelskiej</td>
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<td>OUL</td>
<td>Okręgowy Urząd Likwidacyjny</td>
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<td>OZN</td>
<td>Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCK</td>
<td>Polski Czerwony Krzyż</td>
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<td>PKWN</td>
<td>Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMAB</td>
<td>Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau</td>
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<td>PMM</td>
<td>Państwowe Muzeum na Majdaniku</td>
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<td>PP PKZ</td>
<td>Przedsiębiorstwo Państwowe Pracownie Konserwacji Zabytków</td>
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<td>PPR</td>
<td>Polska Partia Robotnicza</td>
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<td>PPS</td>
<td>Polska Partia Socjalistyczna</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRL</td>
<td>Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSL</td>
<td>Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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