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“... we are entirely at their mercy...”

The Everyday Experience of Hiding and Relations with Landlords on the Basis of Fela Fischbein’s Diary

The topic of help provided to Jews during the occupation can be presented in various ways. Apart from panoramic, historical and thematic approaches, it is also beneficial to present a case study which allows for closer examination – conducted on a specific example – of the relations between the person in hiding and the helper. I have chosen to analyse the story of Fela Fischbein, whose detailed and fascinating diary written in hiding allows us to examine many phenomena involved in the experience of being a rescuee. It will be, by necessity, a one-sided analysis based exclusively on the documents produced by the Jewess in hiding. Unfortunately, there is no analogical account or memoir written by the Poles who were hiding her.

Hence, I shall undertake to tell the story of Fela, of her experience of hiding and her relationship with Katarzyna Dunajewska. Fela wrote her diary¹ in the attic of the house on the Dunajewskis’ farm in the village of Wola Komborska, 25 km from Krosno. In this study I wish to focus mostly on the encounter of these two extraordinary women in unusual circumstances. But before I describe the encounter, I need to present the situation in which it happened and portraits of the heroines.

1. The Fischbeins’ Wartime Fate

Fela (Fejga, Fania) Fischbein, née Galpern, came from a poor Litvak family with many children from Kobryń. The youngest of thirteen siblings, self-reliant and determined, after her mother’s death she found a job in Warsaw, where in romantic circumstances she met her future husband – Ozjasz Fischbein. Their affection conquered his family’s reservations (Ozjasz came from a well-off family from Krosno), they got married and in 1936 their only daughter Dora was born. They lived in Kros-

¹ Yad Vashem Archive, O3/3785, Fela Fischbein’s *Dziennik [Diary]*. The *Diary* consists of two parts: a retrospective diary and – from 13 August 1943 – daily entries. The typed version of the testimony, the only one available to me, is 283 pages long, of which 133 pages are a description of the past and 150 pages are regular daily notes containing 145 dated entries.

no, where they owned a store. Just before the war they moved to Iwonicz, where they built an elegant hotel called Bristol (where their apartment was located). At the beginning of the occupation the hotel was requisitioned by the Germans, and the Fischbeins rented a room in the suburbs of Iwonicz.²

On 26 June 1942, when they had to move from Iwonicz to the ghetto in Rymańów, Fela packed her "possessions from wardrobes, chests, etc, into 17 suitcases of various sizes."³ The better suitcases she took to some acquaintances, and the worse ones she put in the attic. "The memorable evening and last night were nearing. I was still packing. It was raining heavily." Fela said goodbye to the neighbors, with whom she had lived on friendly terms for years: "We got on so well, always sharing our worries and joyful moments with each other. We lived close to each other, always knowing what was going on in each other's lives."

The Fischbeins stayed in Rymanów for seven weeks, until the deportation on 10 August 1942. On that day Fela escaped together with her husband's family (the mother-in-law and two sisters-in-law - Franka and Ewa - and their children) onto a farm in Bzianka, whose landowner, Grodzicki, employed Jews there. Initially, they lived there at the parents' of Polański - a farm steward. After a few days, when Ozjasz (Fela called him Szyjek in her diary) came over from Krosno, they found a place for themselves in a solitary house by the forest, on a peasant farm owned by the Szafrans. The very next day Germans came and took all the Jews from the farm. They were also looking for the Fischbeins, who luckily managed to escape into the forest. Fela managed to "dress the child in a flash, catch the suitcase, beach bag, all the bread" from the table. They were hiding in the forest for a few days. Stasiak - steward Polański's son - came to them. "[T]he mother-in-law gave [him] as a gift an automatic pencil or a fountain pen, and my husband took out a clock, a phenomenal one, ... so that we would have a chance of survival." The mother-in-law promised Polański "that she would give him a plot in Iwonicz for keeps and that she could sign it for him immediately, if he rescued us." The following day, on 15 August, the Polańskis brought over forester Mietek Siwak, who agreed for the Fischbeins to stay at his station near Zmiennica. After they got there, tired by the long walk, they paid him "something like 100 or 200 zlotys for the walk. ... We immediately began giving them various presents. I gave: a wicker basket, new purse, 2 pairs of stockings, 2 pairs of children's stockings, a shaving device and various accessories, and handkerchiefs. The mother-in-law: an alarm clock, a piece of 'margizet', etc."

They stayed partly in his house, partly in a shelter in the forest until 15 September, when Mr. Mietek found a place for them in a nearby village, at his cousin Kędrzyna's, for "150 zlotys a week, apart from lunch and bread only some milk in

² Information on the family history comes from the interview with Dora Cohn née Fischbein, Shoah Visual Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, code: 48253, interview conducted on 8 December 1998 in Los Angeles.

³ Quotations without a date come from the first, retrospective part of Fela's *Dziennik*.

the morning and dinner." Fela moved in there with her husband and child while the rest of the family was placed someplace else. On 27 October 1942 a tragedy happened in the village: following a denunciation, the Ukrainian police discovered an 18-year-old Jewess in hiding. Both she and the Polish woman who was taking care of her were shot dead on the spot. This event "has greatly shocked everybody in the neighborhood." Kędrzyna ordered the Fischbeins to leave her house (without giving them back the 300 zlotys they paid for two weeks in advance) and on 3 November they went to Krosno. Szyjek went to the still existing local ghetto and Fela found a place at Mrs. Kierońska's in Zawodzie, and she renewed her contact with Mrs. Wilk - her old friend. The woman found a place for Dorka: her *Volksdeutsch* neighbor Mrs. Marchlik was just moving to Gorlice, and she agreed to take the child with her. In the new environment "it would look as if she were her daughter. And everything seemed wonderful and fine." For the Fischbeins, Mrs. Wilk found an "amazing place, 'in the middle of nowhere'" - i.e. in a village twenty-five kilometers away, on the Dunajewskis' farm. On 3 December 1942 Szyjek and Fela, dressed as a countrywoman, left Krosno escorted by Mrs. Dunajewska and went to Wola Kombońska, where they survived until the end of the war.

During the first few months, the Fischbeins lived in the room where their landlords slept. When guests came, Fela would lie covered on the bed with Dora (who in the meantime had been taken back from Gorlice), and Szyjek would hide under the table covered with a long tablecloth. This situation was very burdensome. In March 1943, Mrs. Dunajewska found a place for the child at the Koszarskis', who lived nearby. "He was a junior high-school French teacher before the war. Now, during the war he did not have any position with Germans and they were simply starving." They agreed to take the child for 500 zlotys a month, due to security considerations (they were known anti-Semites) they were told, as Dorka was a child of converts. Then Fela and her husband moved onto a nearby farm owned by the Mireckis, where Szyjek's mother and sister with her children were hiding. After the denunciation at the Mireckis', in June 1943 Dunajewska let the Fischbeins live at her place again - this time they were to stay in the attic where a hideout was prepared. Initially, the Fischbeins went there in case of danger. Later on they lived there permanently after the helper had decided to hide them without her husband's knowledge.

Fela begins writing the account of her experiences in the attic of the Dunajewskis' house. She describes everything that happened after their deportation from Iwonicz, and then, from 13 August 1943 on, she keeps a diary writing about current events. The last entry of 7 July 1944 describes their escape from the Dunajewskis' (two German police cars enter the village), their hiding in a field and wandering from village to village. A few days later the Red Army marched into the village, and after another couple of days Germans regained the area. The Fischbeins retreated with the Russians to Dębica, and then to the already liberated Przemyśl.⁴

⁴ After the end of the war they moved to Katowice, where Ozjasz opened a store and quite quickly became once again a wealthy man; in 1949 they emigrated to Venezuela, and

2. Fela's Self-Portrait

Fela Fischbein is a fascinating person. The diary shows her as an energetic, brave, self-reliant and determined woman. Her notes contain just a handful of biographical facts: she was born in 1905, when her mother was already fifty-one and "she was proud of me and rejoiced over me, that the heavens gave her such a good daughter in the latter days of her life" – she loved and pampered her daughter. Her death was a severe blow to Fela: "I could not come to terms with my Mother's passing. ... I was devastated for quite a long time, I had stomach problems, for about two years my stomach did not digest anything" (28 October).

Fela got married quite late, when she was thirty years old; hence, she must have been considered a spinster. From her daughter Dora's account we learn that Fela worked in a bank in Warsaw, and that on a bench in a park she met Ozjasz Fischbein, who had just come back from Latin America due to his father's passing. He was on the way to his home town of Krosno and he was passing through Warsaw, where he met Fela; they fell madly in love with each other. His family regarded the marriage as a *mésalliance*, and for a long time Fela was not accepted by her mother-in-law.

Fela was a dynamic, energetic, quick person; during the war it was she who made decisions; her husband turned out to be weak, hesitant, wavering – he was no support for her. At difficult moments, Fela felt forlorn; she had to make decisions on her own; she could not count on her husband ("As always I was in charge of all the packing, while my husband was running around. I didn't have anybody to ask for advice. When he came back in the evening, I had to repack the things, because he was of a different opinion. We would have spared ourselves so much stress and worry if he'd listened to me"; 27 November). His decisions were usually mistaken ("my husband even went to the city, but I can't say that I've ever seen him taking the initiative!") He was looking for a place to bury their savings again. But he did not bury them; he could not find a proper spot. ("Some fate..."). Usually it was Fela who was right and her decisions, apart from being right, also facilitated the further survival of the family. Fela is in charge, she has more initiative, presence of mind and courage, and she complains about her husband. However, at a moment of serious danger Fela breaks down and Szyjek talks and negotiates with the landlady, trying to persuade her to let them stay.

Fela is a representative of merchant mentality and ethics – keeping to the terms of contracts, reputation, solvency, debts of honor, observance of property rights, value of objects and money – these issues are all very important to her. Fela does not take well her insolvency, she suffers because of the lack of money – not only because she is worried that if she stops paying they will be thrown out, but also because it can tarnish her reputation and it is a matter of honor: "For the first time

then (in the 1960s) to the USA, where Ozjasz died in 1963 and Fela in the 1980s. Dora still lives in Los Angeles with her husband. She has two children. In the 1990s she visited Poland twice and established contact with the Dunajewskis and Koszarskis.

since we began to live in hiding we had to face money problems. Not that we didn't have it, but we got let down once, twice, he didn't exchange or sell the stuff for us in time, which we counted on, I was afraid that the deadline would come and that I would not have [the money]. But somehow it ended well. We saved our name, paid everything before the deadline as if nothing had happened. But how many tears it cost me, we had 50 zlotys in our pocket" (19 August 1943).

In the Fischbeins' situation money plays a decisive role; it is the foundation of their survival. It is Fela's main concern: "I shudder to think what I'm going to do; I need to pay for my child. This concern for money will make our hair turn grey. It's tough for us. Due to all the worrying we both look v. bad" (26 May). Of the two of them it is Fela who is responsible for the situation – she has to think about finding a source of money, about who to turn to and what decisions to make. She deliberates all the time, does not sleep, ponders over possible solutions. When it comes to such things, she cannot actually count on her husband, who "is thinking less than me, claiming that one can go crazy from all the thinking" (21 September).

Another serious concern is her thinking about "when it is going to be finally over" (16 April), how much longer they will have to suffer and when the war is going to end. On 19 September 1943 Fela writes: "Despite the fact that politics plays a key role in our situation, money plays an even more important role. As long as we have it we can count on the hideout. If, God forbid, we run out of it, then they won't hide us any longer. So many Jews were thrown out because of that. As long as they had it, they kept it, but later, when they ran out of dough, they didn't want to risk their lives for nothing. The end was always the same, bitterly tragic." I shall return later to the issue of money and matters which played an important role in Fela and Katarzyna's relationship.

At the same time, it should be said that Fela is a brave person, and that the feeling of responsibility for her family makes her prone to recklessness. Despite her "characteristically Jewish face" and her accent ("I speak with a distinctly Jewish accent and I'm not fluent enough in Polish"), on 31 May 1944 she undertakes her first individual (without her helper's company) journey to Krosno in order to sell things. Without her husband's consent or knowledge, Fela leaves the Dunajewskis' house at five a.m.: "I ran out as fast as a greyhound. . . . My legs were walking fast, barefoot, I felt as strong as a lioness, full of energy, the weather was nice. There was nobody to be seen so early in the morning. The hike was going smoothly; I was automatically finding my way. I didn't feel tired." This lonely journey is a pleasure for Fela: she has a refreshing sense of controlling the situation, of resourcefulness, self-reliance, her own effectiveness, which strongly motivates her to act. Unfortunately, her daring escapade ends in failure. Fela states with self-criticism: "What's going on, how is it actually? So my things are no good during war. There needs to be a buyer for my things.⁵ But gold is getting cheaper, because the front line has stopped. The

⁵ Objects from the Fischbeins' pre-war shop include: "Vienna powder compacts, Czech (i.e. from Prague) artistic jewelry."

exchange rate will be even worse. I was such a fool going there with the dough!... I counted on [selling] the things, without selling the gold. And now I can sell neither the things nor the gold, for peanuts. In short: tough, tough, tough luck all the way. I have no luck or maybe no brain, more probably the latter" (30 May).

Nevertheless, Fela generally thinks highly of herself; she has high self-esteem. She sees herself as a good hostess, a diligent, practical and resourceful person. "In my home all the overdue housework was done" – she writes at the beginning of her diary. Although she did not like housework ("housework is such unproductive, unrewarding work"), "I always had something to do, I never had enough time to do all of that." Hence, in the Dunajewskis' attic she furnishes her small household, she is busy building a hideout in hay – she designs and constructs it herself: "I told my husband that ... a shelter, a '*suka*' could be made in the straw with the sides made of straw, sticks on the walls, and then we'd put straw on it and we'd have a small room. ... The lantern was on, and the shelter was made. ... A good idea for a small room in the straw... The ceiling was made of iron bed sides instead of sticks. ... Although the room looks shapeless and misshapen, the important thing is that we have a hideout and actually a v. comfortable one" (27 November).

Fela puts a lot of effort in constructing this "hut," and then in converting it into a summer one: "I couldn't stand the sight of that misshapen den. ... And the day came, I made a beautiful tiny room in the straw, rectangular in form, more than one meter high, a carpet hanging on the side, I asked the landlady. I changed the bed clothes. ... On Wednesday 12/4 I had plenty to do. I had to convert our winter hideout into a summer one. First of all it was too hot and there was no air. ... It took till five p.m. The landlady helped me a bit, but apart from that I did everything myself. My husband was trying to help but he couldn't, he's like a dead man. ... And what could I do? He was lying in the corner and I had to grind on. I worked like a dog. ... But for now there's enough air and light, we are covered from the outside world, and we can even stand there. A couple of things should be improved, straightened out, but we'll see about its defects while using it" (3 December and 12 April).

Fela is always busy while in hiding: she does the laundry, mends clothes, sews, reads. She tries to keep herself busy: "Actually we are not at all bored in here. My husband reads all the time, and I always find something to do so as not to sit idly" (21 September). On top of that, she writes the diary: "I write all packed in the straw, with my back to the chimney, which is quite warm thanks to the fire in the kitchen stove" (27 October).

Fela tries to solve everyday problems soberly. I shall write about the financial issues later, but now I will present an example of Fela's practical sense with respect to fighting the plague of mice and rats: "Mice are a nuisance. A rat bit me on the hand while I was asleep, that was enough for me, for I'm terribly afraid of mice and I find them repulsive. I decided to bring a cat for the night into the hideout. When it came, it started jumping, it was cold, it also preferred to lie on the stove in the room, so did my husband, the whole situation was tragicomic, since my husband is afraid of both mice and the cat. Before I let the cat out, my husband was screaming,

give me a rest, I prefer living with the mice to having a cat here” (8 February). Fela has a sense of humour and a sense of comedy, which sometimes allows her to look at her own situation from quite a distance: “My husband suffers from toothache all the time, and he is all wrapped up, but I had a toothache for the first time. I didn’t cry so much due to pain but because I was sorry that we were both suffering from toothache, both wrapped up like that, looking tragicomic, swollen like two bombs” (16 February).

The above-mentioned elements of Fela’s self-portrait – the ethical standards, self-esteem and dignity, life dynamism, courage, responsibility but also a sense of irony – are her inner psychological resources from which she can draw the strength to survive. Psychologists believe that dealing with difficult situations requires first and foremost self-esteem and faith in one’s effectiveness, but also other psychological resources such as: sense of humour, possibility of expressing emotions, previous experiences, constructive ways of dealing with stress, pro-social orientation, realistic and rational reasoning, knowledge and intelligence⁶ as well as a sense of coherence.⁷

Fela possesses all these assets: she is distanced from the world and can look at herself in an ironic way. Writing the diary perhaps helps her reduce the emotional tension in which she lives, while her previous experiences taught her how to handle things; she is active and focuses her efforts on ensuring her husband and daughter’s survival, she has a practical sense and sharpness of mind – this conglomerate of features and life experiences gives her a solid basis for coping with a difficult situation. Fela is also a highly coherent person: she comprehends what is going on, she interprets both Germans’ activities and Poles’ behavior. Even if her interpretations are not always right, they are cognitively and emotionally coherent. Fela is also highly confident of her ability to manage and her potential for dealing with difficulties. However, her dependence on others and consequent inability to control the situation are painful for her.

The sense of meaningfulness is also a matter of spiritual resources or – in other words – the feeling that life has a purpose, the conviction that struggle is not point-

⁶ See e.g.: J. Chodkiewicz, *Zmagając się ze światem. Znaczenie zasobów osobistych*, <http://www.psychologia.net.pl/artukul.php?level=136>; R. Schwarzer, “Poczucie własnej skuteczności w podejmowaniu i kontynuacji zachowań zdrowotnych. Dotychczasowe podejścia teoretyczne i nowy model,” in *Psychologia zdrowia*, ed. I. Heszen-Niejodek and H. Sęk (Warsaw, 2002).

⁷ According to the sense of coherence theory formulated by Aaron Antonovsky, one copes with stress better and comes out of it less harmed when one understands what is happening, can influence it and is convinced that events have a deeper sense. These three dimensions – *comprehensibility*, *manageability* and *meaningfulness* – play a key role in one’s inner sense of coherence. The greater this sense, the easier it is to survive stress. According to Antonovsky, understanding, possibility to act or influence the situation and making it meaningful are conditions necessary to remain mentally healthy in a situation of prolonged stress. See A. Antonovsky, *Unraveling the Mystery of Health – How People Manage Stress and Stay Well* (San Francisco, 1987).

less, that one has somebody to live for. For Fela the issue is simple – her child is her sense of life: “we live each day not only for ourselves but first and foremost for our child, for as long as we live, the child is fine, even if she could be better off, she is still better off than, God forbid, if we weren’t here. Sometimes my husband says, we shouldn’t be suffering so much perhaps, God forbid, for nothing; but then I always tell him, but it is better for our daughter, and to suffer for her is not hard, if only we ease her, my dear and only child” (5 April 1944).

Fela is not a devout believer; she follows the tradition (“as always, on Saturday I had everything in order, the floor had been washed, the candles had been lit”), but perhaps she did not follow the kosher food rules (she moved out of the Wolfs’ in Rymanów, who “were very observant of ritual, but I in turn was not so”). While respecting her tradition, Fela has very, as we would call them today, ecumenical views: “we people are divided only by various religions, which one should value and respect as much as one’s own religion, because they are sacred to somebody, but one should practice only one’s own religion. People who change their religion change their soul. I don’t understand such people” – reads the entry of 16 November 1943.

Fela goes through a period of increased religiosity when the Fischbeins are hiding in a forest and in osier clumps for a few days after their escape from Bzianka. It was there – perhaps under the influence of great fear – that Fela became “pious to a fault, as if I were to die any minute. I had my mother’s prayer books, how fervently I began to pray, I was saying a prayer which one says when one goes through agony. And I never stopped praying, asking God to rescue us.” Nevertheless, she approaches her own religiosity with irony: “I surely looked comical with this fervent piousness of mine” – she writes.

Fela is a superstitious person: “there are various superstitions among people: to avoid the number 13, not to croak, etc. For example, the number 13 has never done me any harm, but I can never go to sleep relaxed except at night. Going to sleep in the daytime must bring misfortune upon me, it haunts me” (24 September). She is absolutely sure that if she lies down for a moment in the daytime to take a nap or rest, it will bring her bad luck. Magical thinking – believing in the power of wishes and in the ability to influence the world by means of certain activities and spells – often stems from fear and it seems that this is the case with Fela, who is a person of rather sound judgment. But being in hiding, constant uncertainty, growing fatigue, fear for her own life and the lives of Dora and the rest of the family – that is, living in constant, almost unbearable fear makes Fela look for a way to reduce the negative emotions. Anyway, she has enough common sense to distinguish between magical and wishful thinking and reality. Even when she treats God instrumentally: “And I was constantly thinking and begging God for just 1,000 zlotys, so that I’d have money to pay for my child and to pay here,” she self-ironically adds: “I’m curious if God can hear me” (26 May).

Fela’s wishful thinking manifests itself in her bargaining – with God or fate. Fela’s tool in these negotiations is her fasting in exchange for which she hopes things

will go the way she wants. "I'm fasting today so that things go the way I hope. I have already given the 'neider' that I shall fast when I send for the things to Iwonicz" (18 April). Since the fast did not help and she did not recover the things from Iwonicz, Fela writes in the entry of 10 May 1944: "I have been fasting today again. I sent for the things to Iwonicz. He came back empty-handed again. My husband was laughing that I was fasting, you will not get the things, but nevertheless I'm going to fast again, so that God has mercy upon us, so that I get my things." The next journey was also unsuccessful, so Fela decides to fast yet again: "22/May - Monday. I'm fasting because Mr. St[aszek] is going to Iwonicz for the fourth time. At 3 I felt faint. I began to eat. My husband was laughing at me, you've stopped fasting, so the things are going to arrive. And indeed Mr. St. has brought something." Fela's hopes have been shattered - it turns out that she has been deceived by her former Iwonicz neighbors whom she gave her things for safekeeping. It is a severe blow to her: "I was dreaming about Iwonicz for so long, was dreaming so much about it, but now all the hopes have been wrecked. They took my things. . . . My heart was aching because I regretted all of it so much, I looked after each one of those things with such devotion. I put mothballs in the suitcase I gave them, and now they have returned it empty, with nothing inside. And I was so stupid to send them the keys so that they could open the suitcases, I counted on it being there, intact, and they have taken everything out" (22 May). Such behavior might be regarded as a sign of Fela's gullibility, but on the other hand, - for a merchant the matter of trusting a customer or middleman was exceedingly important. Hence, it might be more of a sign of Fela's pre-war trading experience and her ethos. It simply did not occur to her that one could look into another person's locked suitcases.

Another important element of Fela's self-portrait is her health deteriorating in hiding. At first, rheumatism begins to give her problems. "I fear my rheumatism, which is slowly but steadily getting worse," she writes on 31 October 1943, when it is starting to get colder. Due to lack of exercise Fela is beginning to experience problems with her legs: "my legs hurt, I have grown unused to walking and I get dizzy (27 January). . . . I can't walk, these three months of constant lying under the eiderdown are taking a toll on me. I simply can't, my calves hurt, my thighs hurt, I walk like a duck, lugging my head before me. . . . God forbid if my legs fail me and I wouldn't be able to walk. Of what use would freedom be for me if I couldn't walk. . . . Dear God, why, I can't walk, what is going to happen to me? I've lost my legs in this attic" (21 and 25 February, 14 March).

Fela's hair is getting grey due to all the worrying ("they told me that a lot of my hair has become grey" - 25 February), and due to the cold they both get a toothache: "My husband has a constant toothache . . . My face has become all deformed. It was all swollen. It hurt for three whole days, 17, 18, 19" (16 February). Lack of hygiene causes skin trouble: "I've got a terrible itch on my legs. . . . I am very jittery because of it, and all I'm doing against it is washing myself. Maybe water makes it worse, I don't know. Apparently my blood is getting bad" (26 May). In turn, washing herself in the cold attic results in her catching a cold: "we rarely wash ourselves

as thoroughly as I'm used to, but each month I need to wash myself. Heavy frost, steam belching out, water getting cold right away, I washed myself thoroughly, even my hair, and then I gradually got dressed, I got so chilled and it was so cold. And also, I've caught a cold, I feel pain in a couple of places, my left leg hurts so much I'm dragging it, if I step on it I immediately feel stabbing pain in my stomach, ovary or bladder. We'll leave this place crippled if it lasts much longer..." (14 March).

The tragedy of the situation, uncertainty, fear – despite Fela's usually brave and optimistic attitude – inevitably make her experience mood swings: "I sleep badly, I often cry, I'm losing my memory, I make mistakes when speaking, but the worst thing is that I'm so jittery. It's no wonder, one is experiencing such a lot, all the discomfort and worrying, let alone fear, that one must be a man of iron to stand all this. But not for long. I can't do it anymore, I can't. I'm totally exhausted," she writes on 28 October, in a moment of deep depression. Another day she writes, "despair, tears, heartbreak. I have nobody to talk to. I keep all of it inside. I look bad. So does my husband" (30 May). Mood swings, exhaustion, resignation – all this is totally understandable in Fela's situation. But, despite the depressive emotional state, she is a person who tries to comprehend what is happening around her, to make sense of it and to act accordingly to the situation. She has a deep feeling of her own actions' meaningfulness – she is responsible for rescuing her family; she has a clearly-defined aim: "we want to live, we are young; moreover, we have a child, we need to live for her, it is so bad, God forbid, to become an orphan, let alone when one is such a little child" (21 September).

The above-quoted entry – "I have nobody to talk to" – indicates lack of social support, or – in the language of psychological categories of the resources theory – limited social resources Fela has at her disposal. For to successfully deal with a difficult situation one needs not only inner resources, but one can also use external, social resources: external reserves, emotional support, which Fela clearly lacks, and spiritual support (faith in God), which has already been discussed. Practical support – both with respect to providing information and in the material dimension – is provided to Fela by Katarzyna Dunajewska.

3. Katarzyna's Portrait

The portrait of the landlady Katarzyna⁸ Dunajewska's is much more vague than Fela's self-portrait. This image is reflected, one-sided, distorted by the diary author's outlook on the world, by their relationship and the specificity of the situation. Nevertheless, I shall try to retrieve from the text all facts concerning the landlady.

Katarzyna is probably a bit older than Fela: she has three children, the oldest of whom – daughter Maria – gets married on 2 October 1943. Hence, the helper might be in her late forties. We get to know only a handful of facts about the Dunajewskis. Katarzyna's husband is a "blue" policeman. Later on, he is appointed the chair of

⁸ Fela does not mention the landlady's name. We know it from the daughter's account.

Wola Komborska village council (“this year they appointed⁹ the landlord the village council chair, so even if they wanted to take us downstairs we would not go, it is a great danger” 27 October 1943). The Dunajewskis live in the village on their farm. They also own a room in Krosno, where their oldest daughter lives with her newly-wedded husband. But in November 1943 the daughter “was evicted from the room in the town, because a Volksdeutsch woman is to move into the room, she is trying to get it via the municipal council. . . . For they have priority and one cannot oppose them” (1 December).

Apart from Maria, the Dunajewskis have two more children, “who have finished their education;” hence, they are almost adult: a son named Staszek and the youngest daughter (Fela does not mention her name), who helps on the farm. While reading Fela’s account it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the two daughters; we do not always know to which one she is referring, but it seems that the older one is in conflict with her mother: she takes offence at her (“she went to the town and she hasn’t been here for a month {she had an argument with her mother}. . . . Well, finally, after having made them wait for such a long time, the Dunajewskis’ elder daughter came back after four and a half months” [3 March]). During another argument the daughter makes a threat: “today the landlady had an argument with Miss Marysia, and the daughter dared to tell her that she would denounce her to the Gestapo, that she was hiding Jews, that she would be sent to the gallows. . . . She’s a devil, not a human being. The landlady clearly says that she fears her daughter” (25 May). However, Marysia does many things for the Fischbeins in Krosno, sells their things, and Fela is worried when she does not visit her mother. The younger daughter has an unfavorable attitude toward the Jews hiding in the house: “The landlady’s daughter was sulky, I supposed that it was only because they are catching them [to deport them to forced labour] while we are supposedly safe. That is, we are doing too well. . . . She is jealous for example that we do nothing, read newspapers, while she works hard, she would also prefer to rest like we do and sleep her fill, and not be rushed by her mother out of bed” (28 October).

We do not know how big the farm where the Fischbeins were hiding was. We do not find out much about it, since Fela is totally uninterested in the countryside, she does not understand farm owners’ everyday problems. Moreover, she is a city woman, from a different environment, who has different habits and customs. The countryside is for her something alien, exotic and disparate, possibly perceived as something worse – both in terms of standard of living and lifestyle. On 10 March 1944 Fela writes: “The landlady says that the prices are sky-high and that there’s going to be hunger, because the winter crop has evaporated under the snow. I do not fully understand it, but the point is that the frost is doing a lot of damage.” Fela does not write what the landlady’s everyday duties on the farm are; she only informs that she is usually extremely busy: “I must characterize our landlady, she is always v. busy and never has time to gossip or make small talk with us, she’s always

⁹ Obviously, Dunajewski was appointed chair of the village council by the Germans.

in a hurry" (22 November). Katarzyna must have other worries too – problems with the farm, family problems (her daughter is often ill), roundups for forced labour, Germans' visits. But Fela does not participate in these worries – she arrives as alien and stays alien. The experience of hiding, risking one's life, does not bring them closer, does not become a mutual aim which could unite them and encourage them to seek closer contact and to support each other.

Still, there are matters of interest to Fela – for example Marysia Dunajewska's wedding reception, which she watches while hiding in the attic as if she were an amateur ethnologist describing the customs of the natives: "I've never seen a Christian wedding before. My husband did not leave the hideout, but I slipped out of it, covered myself with the eiderdown and watched ... The bridesmaids and the maid of honor were dressed in the Cracow fashion and they looked pretty. So did the best men decorated with ribbons. The bride all in white, a bit comical with white ribbon in her braids. But on the whole it was pretty. The maid of honor's husband called the tune, holding a stick with a pink bow. I called it (the stick) a field marshal's baton. During the wedding reception the maid of honor was walking about all serious, proud as a peacock. ... The 'marshal' commanded everything with his baton. ... And then everybody went to church with the orchestra playing. The wedding ceremony took place. It was on Saturday and Sunday. During these two days I heard so much music that my eardrums were hurting" (2 October).

But Fela writes almost nothing about the farm itself. There must be some animals (only a cat appears in the diary), horses, a cow (Fela gets milk from the landlady). The issue of farming appears only incidentally: "My landlady works together with everybody in the field. Everything is proceeding as usual" (25 June). The Dunajewskis' house must have at least two rooms. "The room where we slept they called a chamber. That room was their bedroom. The three of us in one bed, the landlords in the other. During the day the chamber was closed." There was also an attic in the house, which plays an important role in this story. It seems that the attic with a small window was located above the rooms. In the attic there was an entrance to another part, above the barn, where hay was stored. It was possible to get into the attic also from the side of the barn. There was no window, but since the barn had a thatched roof, they managed to make a hole for light and air to come in. Initially, the Fischbeins lived downstairs, then in the attic above the rooms, and later – when Dunajewska decides to hide them without her husband's knowledge (which is quite unusual) – they move into the other part of the attic, into the hideout in the hay, which Fela turned into quite a comfy hut.

I suppose that the Dunajewskis' farm was averagely prosperous; apart from the Dunajewskis and their three (and then two) children there also lived the old grandmother, a servant and farm hand. Two servants might testify to the owner's material status and level of affluence. The Dunajewskis are peasants but they simultaneously have contact with the town. The husband ("blue" policeman) could even have had secondary education; it seems that they are more progressive than average Polish villagers of that period.

An element important in Katarzyna's portrait is the analysis of historical and sociological context within which the attitude of the rural population toward Jews was shaped. Perhaps the Dunajewskis also shared – at least partially – these overall tendencies. Despite a few hundred years of living on the Polish land, Jews remained alien – and in peasants' consciousness this strangeness was total, based on difference in religion, language, social class, communities and occupations. Peasants thought farming the most valued occupation; they despised other ways of earning money. I suspect that Katarzyna, like other villagers, had contact with Jews in their typical roles – of a middleman, trader or shopkeeper. Perhaps such contacts were the source of the Dunajewskis and the Fischbeins' acquaintance, though it is not certain if they knew each other before the war. But perhaps they met in the shop in Krosno, for Fela writes that the Dunajewskis “respected us, they knew us from Krosno.”

At that time Polish peasants constituted a traditional community, which fulfilled all the needs of its members, enclosing them within the community and performing various functions: economic, administrative, cultural, educational and of social control. Nevertheless, the Dunajewskis – in my opinion – were not as dependent on the local community and its norms as average villagers. Perhaps they could afford to be so independent on account of their social and financial standing, and the authority associated with the functions of a policeman or village council chair. The matter of contacts with the town, and above all, of personality, also plays a role here. For Katarzyna was – similarly to Fela – a strong, independent, self-reliant and brave woman.

Fela thinks that Katarzyna's greatest merit is that “she is not overly religious, which is usually associated with comes down to anti-Semitism, and thanks to it she is not an anti-Semite in the slightest . . . The others in the house have changed under the influence of German propaganda, their attitude toward us was not like last year” (27 November). To Fela anti-Semitism was an inseparable aspect of Catholicism, which constitutes an element of her stereotypical image of Poles. Nevertheless, Katarzyna is independent in her reasoning, “has her own brain,” does not yield to clichés and propaganda even when her family comes under its influence. Katarzyna is so independent that she opposes her husband and resolves to keep hiding the Jews against his will, despite the fact that he – the head of the family! – orders them to leave. This decision seems very daring; it is a manifestation of Mrs. Dunajewska's self-reliance and autonomy.

Katarzyna is brave – she decides to hide the Fischbeins even though she is afraid and despite the fact that Germans shot local Poles who were hiding Jews. Initially, she wants to throw them out, arguing: “So should, says the landlady, they kill me and everybody else, I sheltered you as best I could, now we are afraid” (23 November). However, thanks to the Fischbeins' begging, insisting and promises (mostly on the part of Szyjek, for Fela is so worried that she falls into depression) she decides to provide them with hiding – without the knowledge of her husband and most of the household. The landlord “initially was controlling the landlady, he came a couple of times a day, under the pretence of getting hay, at such times the landlady was terri-

fied, but our hole was closed. Recently he has stopped spying on her, he is sure we are not here, because we are extremely well hidden" (21 March).

Katarzyna is quick, dynamic and loud: "she cannot talk in a whisper, so I always need to whisper so that, God forbid, we do not reveal our presence, and so I often avoid questions, even if I don't understand something, simply so as not to prolong the conversation." She is joyful by nature: "she sometimes finishes the conversation with a cordial laugh, she is a v. cheerful woman. ... In normal circumstances one can laugh cordially with her" (22 November). She cannot be angry for long: "she has one advantage: she is angry for a while but then she's all nice again" (20 June).

Fela thinks that "the landlady is not bad, she is extremely fond of money ... she is not a bad woman and this means a lot. She likes money a lot, that's true, but why wouldn't she, why, she's risking her life. I am not complaining despite the unreliability and various inconveniences in reaching an agreement" (27 November and 21 February).

In hiding, the Fischbeins are entirely dependent on the landlady, her good will, willingness to help and personality. On 26 January 1944 Fela writes: "we know nothing, are totally alienated from the world and solely dependent on our landlady's mercy, the only person who takes care of us, God forbid that we should fall into disgrace with her. And God only knows how decent her character is. We often ponder about it."

The landlady is for them the most important source of social - external - resources. She provides instrumental, material support - above all the roof over their heads. She caters to their other needs as well: she washes their clothes, brings water for washing, takes away the bucket with waste: "This is not our business, it's the landlady's job, it has to be so, tough luck {you cannot do otherwise when you cannot move, when not everybody in the house knows about our living above their heads}" (24 September). What is more, she feeds the Fischbeins. We should devote some attention to the diet of the Jews in hiding. Fela writes when the food was exceptionally good or exceptionally bad. Consequently, we might infer that usually the food was nothing special, not exceptional. During the initial period of their stay at the Dunajewskis', when the Fischbeins lived in the chamber, the helper "gave us coffee with bread twice a day and once soup." The situation gets complicated when the Jews move into the attic and it becomes even more difficult when their stay is kept a secret from some of the household members. The landlady "cannot come often on account of her husband," she comes by less often, the food is less varied, they do not get dinner and there is not enough drinking water. "We are hungry. Since the accident she has not been giving dinner, on account of her husband, so that he does not notice anything, and she has served lunch at 10 a.m. also because of him." One can starve for a few days but not constantly, we have, that's true, as much bread as we want, she gives us a whole loaf, but we want water, water. We decided to buy apples, for we cannot stand it. ... They are very cheap at the moment" (13 December). Szyjek cannot come to like Katarzyna's cooking - "he often does not eat lunch, because he doesn't find it tasty, so he eats nothing and I have recently noticed he's

gone all yellow. ... He doesn't find the landlady's meals tasty, he's disgusted and he'd prefer something else, but where and from where can I get something" (13 December and 10 March). Fela is not fussy: "I, in turn, eat whatever I can, even though I also don't like the lunches and I, by contrast, am fat and my face is all round. ... I have put on a lot of weight and I feel faint" (27 January and 7 April).

Better food is served at the Dunajewskis' - and consequently at the Fischbeins' - on the landlady's name day ("a wonderful breakfast, lots of sweet bread and milk;" 25 November) and on holidays. The first winter, when they are still downstairs, the landlords invite them to eat Christmas Eve Supper with them: "Christmas came, they invited us to the table, we shared the wafer." On Holy Saturday of 1944 the landlady brings them into the attic "a big wheat cake, perhaps 4 kilos, as a gift." The Fischbeins reciprocate: "we were so grateful that she remembered about us and we gave her a rubber pillow and a cloth cushion, hand-painted, both new." Katarzyna liked the presents so much that "she brought half a litre of sweet vodka as a token of gratitude" - which ended badly, because Szyjek got drunk and loud, and in the end "vomited a few times in a row, and he got up yellow as wax, I did not even have any water to give him to drink. All sweaty, weak ... he was lying like a corpse. Give me water, water. He was thirsty. But the landlady had some guests and brought no dinner" (8 April).

On Easter Sunday "the landlady brought ... in the morning five different types of biscuits, a full plate and another huge chunk of wheat cake. Lunch with meat, two eggs and pieces of sausage. Very nice and we are celebrating their holiday as well" (9 April).

Food gets worse - as always is in the countryside - in the pre-harvest period. Fela seems not to understand the principles of farming and the reason for the worsening food, since on 6 April she writes that the landlady "must have a lot of *pencak* [groats] for she cooks *pencak* with milk four times a week, which is not bad, but we have had enough of it, my husband cannot look at it. For the main course she gives potatoes with cabbage, and the potatoes are usually cold, because they are cooked in the morning, and she can't always heat them up, sometimes there are too many pairs of eyes in the house, for they cook potatoes only in the morning, and in the cabbage there are long, dead worms. One can't eat that, I hope that God will not punish me, even I don't eat that." Indeed, it must have been quite disgusting. ...

The landlady provides not only material but also informational support, which is important since thanks to it the Fischbeins know the situation. Katarzyna brings them news about the political situation on the front lines as well as local news and gossip. Fela writes down mostly the news about Jews. "As soon as the Italians capitulated, our landlady came to tell us that she had learnt from some source that 7,000 Jews from nearby towns were gathered and killed in Tarnów" (28 September). "A tax clerk came and told the landlords that the remaining Jews - the Goldsteins, tailors from Żebnia near Krosno - were all shot, all shot" (6 February). She also writes about Germany's military failures: "they are saying that the Bolsheviks are as close to us as from here to Lvov, only in a different direction" (12 February), "the landlady

brought news that frantic fighting was going on, that she heard that they had seized Zbaraż and they had been approaching Tarnopol" (8 March), "today at breakfast she informed us that 'the English had landed in France'" (8 June). It is worth noticing how fast important news from the front line was spreading, thanks to newspapers or radio. It immediately reached the most provincial towns of occupied Europe.

Despite similar personality and age, and the fact that both risked equally much, Fela and Katarzyna did not manage to establish a closer relationship. The mutual goal did not unite them. Let us analyse their relationship and answer the following questions: Why did the life saving not bring them closer? Why did it have the opposite effect - mutual conflict and dislike?

4. Fela and Katarzyna's Encounter

Between Fela and Katarzyna there stretches an undeveloped, "empty" area - a field of potential relationship - in which a lot could happen. To some extent they are psychologically similar; however, they differ in origin, religion, lifestyle, culture - in the sphere of references, symbols and opinions. The encounter of Fela and Katarzyna, who represent two worlds - bourgeois-merchant and peasant mentalities - was a misunderstanding of meanings. Both enjoyed prestige and high social standing in their environment, but at the same time each belonged to a group the other regarded as having a lower social status, or which she simply despised. Although there was no personal disrespect between them, for Katarzyna Fela is a synonym of strangeness, even an archetype of the Other, whereas for Fela Katarzyna symbolizes the lower, uneducated social class and hostile Polish anti-Semitism. Therefore, how they perceive their own position runs counter to the attribution of prestige in the other woman's eye. Moreover, their strong, independent personalities also do not facilitate establishing contact and developing the empty space between them. Psychological similarities - perhaps an element of mutual curiosity - cannot overcome the forces pushing them apart: the differences, prejudices and discrepancies. The differences turn out to be more important than the similarities. But establishing personal contact is rendered impossible above all due to the situational context: Fela's total dependency and Katarzyna's unlimited authority over the Jews in hiding. Such conditions - the dynamics of dependency: domination, suspicion and uncertainty - are not conducive for willingness to reach mutual understanding and to get to know the other woman or to befriend her.

I do not know what Katarzyna thinks about Fela - I can only surmise on the basis of the situational context. Fela clearly expresses her opinion on Katarzyna - she thinks that she is hiding them only because of financial considerations, that greed motivates her actions: "I do not believe in their rescuing us out of the goodness of their heart. ... We live, aside from above all thanks to God, only thanks to money, we would not do without it. ... Money and money alone is our only hope" (19 September, 10 March and 2 June). It seems that this assessment is unfair, although totally understandable. It is unfair because if Katarzyna had been motivated by greed

then she would have thrown Fela out when the latter ran out of money, or out of fear after the local Poles hiding Jews had been killed. It is also worth noting that the monthly fee for hiding the Fischbeins, fixed in December 1942, did not change until the end of the war, which seems quite unusual. Usually the fee increased with each month – the Fischbeins themselves had experienced that at Kędrzyna’s, and from 1 June 1944 the fee for Dorka’s stay at the Koszarskis’ increased by a hundred percent (“the child’s landlady informed us that she wanted double the fee, supposedly because of the increase in prices over the last year”). By contrast, Dunajewska continues to charge Fela 2,000¹⁰ zlotys a month. Hence, she honors the agreement, which Fela seems not to notice at all. In her notes only rarely does there appear a thought that perhaps Katarzyna is a sympathetic, noble person, who has her own honor, and who helps the Fischbeins not only because of financial considerations. On 19 November 1943 Fela writes a sentence which can set us on the trail of Katarzyna’s noble motivations: “Our landlady has been extremely good for us all the time, rejoicing at the hope that she would bring her work to the end and save us.”

Fela’s assessment, although unjust, does seem understandable in the context of what she was going through during the stay in the attic. For her negative opinion on Katarzyna is influenced by contacts with other Poles as well as by the tension, tiredness and fear occasioned by being in hiding. I think that it must also have been extremely difficult for Fela to stand her total dependence on Katarzyna, “being at her mercy” – not only because for dynamic and energetic Fela idleness and helplessness were highly unpleasant, but also because dependency on a person, in her opinion, of lower social standing must have been humiliating. Moreover, Fela was convinced (perhaps rightly) that nobody would sell the things at a higher price than she would, and she suspected (and rightly so) swindles during the transactions. What is more, using the services of middlemen always involved paying some commission.

On 13 August 1943 Fela had been in hiding for a year. On that day she began to write her diary and she and her husband were recalling the events that had transpired so far: “I can’t believe what we have been through. But it’s true. We began recalling individual persons who had played a part in our survival, so many of them and we owe them so much. Moved by these thoughts, I wrote letters to a couple of people who were among our first rescuers, that I remembered their kindness and that we wished to live to see the day we could repay them as much as they deserved. . . . Just today Mrs. Wilk, one of the people in our chain of rescuers, came. I showed her the letters written to our previous benefactor, so that she would put them in a letter box. ‘No,’ she said, ‘God forbid, don’t send any letters, they should not know about you, let them think you are dead.’ She is older, perhaps she is right, I gave it up” (13 August).

¹⁰ In 1942 “the price of two piglets a few weeks old – outside price regulations – was 2,000 zlotys. . . . The official price for a pig weighing 100 kg was 340 zlotys,” writes Waclaw Jastrzębowski in *Gospodarka niemiecka w Polsce 1939-1944* (Warsaw, 1946), 341-342.

Less than a year later Fela writes: "I have a feeling that Poles will finish off the handful of Jews who survive the war Life will not be easy with Poles either. We will have to leave after so many centuries of our ancestors' [living here] etc., part with everything and start anew where one will not be different, where people would respect you. . . . If God lets us survive, we will run, run far away, so that people do not point fingers at us and we are equal with others" (2 and 14 June).

What transpired during that time that Fela's gratitude toward the "chain of rescuers" has transformed into general and intense hatred of Poles? Why did her emotional attitude change so much? The answer to this question can be found in the diary; a careful reading of it explains the reasons for the metamorphosis. I am convinced that the change in Fela's attitude – from gratitude to antipathy – is a result of her deep disillusionment with Poles in two key areas: probity in trade and attitude toward Jews. Poles lose their economic credibility in Fela's eyes and turn out to be capable of participating in the Holocaust. I shall present the process of losing respect for Poles the way Fela perceives and experiences it.

The first area of disillusionment is the matter of honesty in business, lack of loyalty and taking advantage of the situation on the part of neighbors and acquaintances. Fela expected sympathy and help from them, and she experiences a terrible disappointment: "It is unbelievable how unfairly, dishonestly and meanly our best friends from Iwonicz have been acting since the beginning of the war. I myself am not sure if these are the same people who were crying and sympathizing with us when they were bidding me farewell when I was leaving Iwonicz. . . . Who would have thought? The Trzynows, Dering, Princka, our best neighbors, oh, oh. . . I cannot come to terms with it. But our life depends on them" (29 October).

The reason for this disillusionment lies in the economic relations between Fela and Poles. Apart from the unquestionable psychological resources and limited social ones, Fela also possesses certain material resources, which are an important element of her relations with Katarzyna and other Poles. The shop in Krosno, although temporarily under German management, is worth a lot, and is the Fischbeins' collateral. They promise it to Dunajewska after the war: "we promised it to her out of our free will, additionally to the normal fee we agreed upon: the store and two rooms for keeps, after we survive the war, . . . For we simply decided to give her such a paper" (23 November). In turn personal property Fela owns or disposes of is a very important resource in her situation – it is her life insurance. This is why she devotes so much attention to the story of her seventeen suitcases. She takes the less valuable ones into the attic, and leaves the more valuable ones with her neighbors in Iwonicz, hoping that she will have unlimited access to them. Moreover, she buries the box with gold dollars. During her stay in Rymanów, Fela sends for some of the things in Iwonicz. Leaving Bzianka, she has "a big suitcase with more valuable things such as washed linen and clothes as well as a full *rucksak*."¹¹ Some of the things remained in Rymanów, for the husband "sent the suitcase to Mr. Nadziakie-

¹¹ Rucksack.

wicz via our landlord and he also had a packed sack, which the landlord left at his place, for in the daytime one cannot carry [such things], and my husband neglected the matter and did not settle it then. (I have still not got the sack.)”

Escaping from the Szafrans in Bzianka into the forest, Fela leaves “almost all the things at the landlord’s,” and she takes only “the suitcase, beach bag, all the bread.” Afterwards, she does not manage to collect the things. Although she gives the Szafrans 100 zlotys to retrieve her property, they “completely denied [having] my father-in-law’s coats which my husband’s Mother brought while running for cover on the 1st day, my husband’s shoes, sports men’s stockings, my skirt, linen, my child’s things, dishes, food, soap, candles, etc, etc.” What they returned fitted into the *ruksak*. Already at Katarzyna’s, Fela tries again to collect the things from the Szafrans with Staszek Polański’s help. When the attempt proves unsuccessful (“your tears will not help, they’ve taken everything,” Polański says to her) they “are trying to get our things from Rymanów, from our builder,¹² first the suitcase.” But engineer Nadziakiewicz “does not want to give it back, claiming that the police have taken some.” The Fischbeins manage to retrieve only one suitcase, which costs them 40 zlotys, and a few stolen things. Fela writes in detail what was in each suitcase and that is why she easily knows what is missing. The suitcase brought by Stasiak Polański “lacked 1 shirt and a pair of briefs and 1 pair of long underwear, 1 pair of gloves and 1 meter of satin from the linen fabric and perhaps also something which I did not write and what my husband put inside in Rymanów.”

After being thrown out of Kędrzyna’s, Fela sells through Mietek Siwak “everything that was possible to sell, not dearly, so that we have fewer parcels, the important thing was to have money.” She also leaves him for safekeeping “various important documents to hide, such as report cards, diplomas, passports, mortgage documents. If I survive he’ll return them to me.” Going to the Dunajewskis’, the Fischbeins do not carry any baggage, for it could attract people’s attention. They have enough money for a few months with them. The Fischbeins have run out of things they have had since their stay in Rymanów – they were either stolen or sold. Their only hope is the money and things left in Iwonicz: “we’ve started thinking about getting the money buried in Iwonicz. It would be v. convenient to have it with us. But how should we start, who will go. I knew I had to do it, in order to survive, you’ve got to have money, there’s no other way.” On 12 May 1943 Fela (together with Dunajewska) sets out on a desperate journey which ends in success: they find and dig up the box with gold dollars. In Iwonicz they also manage to retrieve some things from ex-neighbors. Nevertheless, it does not last for long; Fela is in constant financial trouble. She would prefer to sell the things, and leave the money in case of a necessity to escape or for a rainy day. “My only hope is the things from Iwo-

¹² Engineer Nadziakiewicz (Nadziekiewicz), who built their villa in Iwonicz, was among the Poles who were helping the Fischbeins. However, another engineer, Starach [Sarychak], her mother-in-law’s acquaintance, who was selling their things in Krosno, appears more often in Fela’s account.

nicz. Without them God only knows what will happen to us, and it is such a hassle. They're swindling, swindling, it's not a piece of cake to get the things. Nevertheless, I will not give up trying to get them back, since unfortunately I have to" – the entry of 19 September reads. She goes a couple of times to Krosno with Dunajewska, where she sells gold or objects, usually with Starychak's help.

It should be mentioned that in the traditional peasant economy, money played a specific role. The economy, basically non-monetary, was based on direct exchange of favors and products of one's work. Money, needed if only for consumption, taxes, dowries or weddings, often posed a serious problem – hence, villagers borrowed and lent money. Obviously, the Dunajewskis must have had money, if only from the husband-policeman's salary. However, it should be noted that the Fischbeins bring into their household extra spare money. What will it be spent on? Will it cover part of the daughter's dowry and wedding expenses? Obviously, Fela does not know that, but she is convinced that "the landlady is extremely fond of money." Perhaps – if we reject the suspicion of greed – the money gives the landlady a prospect of independence, a certain aspect of freedom? Could it give a chance of changing her social standing, of fulfilling some ambitions or dreams?

The Fischbeins – in compliance with the initial agreement – pay Dunajewska 2,000 zlotys on the 21st of each month. But the real costs of hiding are higher. In exchange "for quite a lot of money" Dunajewska sets out with Fela to Krosno to recover the hidden dollars. Similarly, "for a generous sum we managed to beg our landlord into rescuing our child from Mrs. Marchlik." Dunajewski brings Dorka from Gorlice, where, as it turns out, the child has been very badly treated. Her stay at the Koszarskis' costs 500 zlotys a month (from June 1944 – a thousand), which is to be paid on the 7th of each month. Moreover, the Fischbeins give extra food for Dorka's helpers whenever they can, for the household is quite poor and the child is hungry: "we have decided to bring them some food apart from the agreed sum for the child, we shall see, besides we cannot do anything else" (21 October). Dorka begins her education at the Koszarskis', which costs as well: "the child costs me 700 zlotys instead of the agreed 500 zlotys, as well as 50 zlotys for the lessons" (21 February).

Fela also buys extra food: apples or sausage, which she feeds to her husband and daughter. Katarzyna does the shopping. According to Fela, the woman "earns 50%-25% on each purchase." This is somehow acceptable, but Fela gets angry when the difference in prices is glaringly high: "I asked the landlady for water for washing. She also bought for me 1 kg of washing soda and dye for underwear, a trifle, but I must write it down, so when I asked her how much it had cost she had the nerve to demand 15 zlotys from me, and it should cost 2-3 zlotys. She had never done such a thing before. ... 5 times more, that's the first time. But apparently she felt remorse (for she is not evil by nature, only she likes money a lot) because the next day she came and apologized to me for having made a mistake, because vinegar was included in the sum, so she's giving me 5 zlotys. How generous of her" (9 June).

The Jews in hiding have many things to be taken care of – they want to pass news to the child and to Szyjek’s family hiding nearby at the Mireckis’. They need to retrieve the things left in Iwonicz and sell them. They go out very seldom; hence, they must make use of favors, services and middlemen. I think that Fela introduced the rule of paying for each favor, since it let her hope that her request would be complied with fairly quickly and reliably. She treats it as a commercial transaction in which she pays and consequently has the right to demand good service. Various favours have their price: going to the child costs 20 zlotys (“my husband’s whim cost me 60 zlotys. The landlady did three errands without a need, and it costs us, that is half a kilometer from here,” 21 January), buying a newspaper – also 20 zlotys (“I gave the landlady 20 zlotys especially for the newspaper subscription,” 14 March), going to Krosno – 50 zlotys (“my husband wrote a letter and . . . asked Stasiak to take it, saying that he would give him 50 zlotys for the favor”), the landlady’s trip with Fela to Krosno cost as much as 100 zlotys (“she went so reluctantly . . . And my heart was aching because of the 100 zlotys, and she was grimacing” 24 May). When summed up, these individual sums constitute considerable expenses. In April 1944 Fela remarks: “this month we have spent almost 600 zlotys on various messengers” (19 April).

Fela is not thinking about the fact that her way of doing things – appropriate for her merchant experience – demoralizes the Poles and poses temptations that are almost irresistible for them. In general, providing Jews with hiding – apart from risking one’s life – was also a kind of moral challenge, for it created a situation of temptation – of impunity, easy money and enriching oneself. The desire for things, money whose acquisition was so uncomplicated, could arouse one’s greed, which was self-driven and impossible to satisfy. This is why, as Fela points out, people are becoming “awfully greedy for money, excessively greedy, so that sometimes one is scared [emphasis F.F.] that, God forbid, they might get possessed by the devil through this greed and commit a crime” (27 January). But Fela herself unconsciously became a gearwheel in this mechanism. She herself arouses such motivations by speaking to Poles in a language of money, almost without giving them a chance to act disinterestedly. Fela uses “her way of doing things” – bribery. When the landlady does not want to go with her to visit the child, Fela proposes “using my way of doing things, I will give you 40 zlotys instead of 20 zlotys” (21 February).

Fela quickly learns (or had she always known?) that appealing to greed is more effective than appealing to decency. At a moment of the gravest crisis, when the Dunajewskis want to get rid of them, at least temporarily, because some Poles living nearby have been killed for hiding Jews and everybody is scared, the Fischbeins initially try to beg Katarzyna to let them stay. They convince her that nobody will find them in their hideout in the hay, that the village council’s house is safe, etc. They promise: “we’ll go to America, and we’ll leave you everything, madam. . . . Why, you will be rewarded for hiding us. . . . The future rewards we had promised did not help. In danger nothing matters.” Szyjek “has run out of things to say, he has no more arguments to convince her” (24 November). Finally, it is bribery that works:

"On 25 November it is her name day. . . it's an occasion to give her a gift, as if on the occasion of tomorrow's name day, maybe this will convince her. . . we have a ring, quite pretty but inconspicuous, we thought that it was not enough and I decided to give her sheer curtains. I had some which I had not been able to sell then. . . I took out the ring, gave it to her, how moved she was, like an 18-year-old girl who's happy with the gift from her beloved, and she began kissing me cordially, and when I went to give her the sheer curtains, she did not want to take them, [she said] that it was too much, that we needed them for everyday expenses. Take them, madam, I said and gave them to her from the bottom of my heart. She thanked me cordially again, showered me with kisses and went away happy. This is what this accident cost us with our limited material resources." Then the landlady resolves to let the Fischbeins stay without her own husband's knowledge. "It was on 25 November, on Thursday. I decided to fast that day," writes Fela. One should note how strategically Fela played it out using Katarzyna's greed and decency dynamics, and at the same time skilfully manipulating her emotions.

But the Fischbeins' initial resources are not unlimited. They get into serious financial problems in August 1943. Fela is worried: "Nights are the worst, I don't sleep and after the first sleep I wake up at 1 on the dot, till morning I think, I ponder, I figure how to find these couple of zlotys so that we can get by, for our cost of living alone is very high - 2,000 apart from the expenses of 500. Each month we need to have this sum and what can we do when the months stretch like rubber and the war will not end" (21 September).

Although they do have the gold coins brought by Fela from Iwonicz, they are selling them gradually - they would prefer to sell the things first, for the dollar exchange rate is always too low. They are constantly cheated and exploited: "Instead of 1,500 they give 500. One is still angry at these human injustices. They are free people and they do not sympathize at all with us unfortunates, and what can I do? We cannot do anything on our own, because we cannot go anywhere, but every time somebody does something for us, we always have problems" (19 September).

Dependency on people whom one does not trust brings more anxiousness, arouses the feeling of being wronged and cheated. Fela constantly experiences disillusionment: "this one did not fix up, the second one did not bring, the third one did not sell, and the deadline's nearing, we need to pay, I've fallen into despair" (21 October).

The Poles are perhaps not thinking about the fact that their behavior harms other people. The situation in which they found themselves influences who they have become. They give in to greed, they use their authority over the Jews entirely dependent on them, which e.g. for Fela is extremely humiliating: "Week after week passes and we are still waiting for the answer, and we cannot go in person. You can get furious and mad and swear like a trooper. Dear God, you might kick the bucket before you get something done here. . . I don't know what they are thinking. You need to have, as my mother-in-law once said, 100,000 zlotys here. . . And that's how it is with us. We don't sleep at nights, we worry about the child, we worry

about Iwonicz. But we're helpless. Who knows what might come, perhaps the living will envy the dead. I'm in a very pessimistic mood, everything looks black to me" (26 January).

Even Mrs. Wilk, who initially is kind and helpful, begins to cheat on the price of things she is supposed to sell. "[S]he did a mean and awful thing, it does not happen with ordinary mortals. One needs to be as calculating and greedy as she is to be so unsympathetic and to hurt others financially, not caring that the other also needs to live off this money and in such misery as we are in" (20 April).

How is it that with time disinterested and sympathetic people begin to take advantage of Jews in hiding? There are - in my opinion - four types of helpers' stances: from disinterestedness to ruthlessness. They might occur separately or be phases or stages of a process. The first stage or level is disinterested help often stemming from an impulse of one's heart, compassion, pre-war obligations, etc. I shall not discuss it here, but it is obvious that there were many such acts of help. We know many examples of heroic sacrifice and nobleness, kind-hearted acts of rescue for which the only reward was the gratitude of the rescued. The helping process might undergo gradual erosion. In such a case, the next stage is help in return for financial reward: the degree of helper's disinterestedness is smaller here, since he counts on his own profit - money, valuables or real estate - received during the war or having the character of postponed gratification, which is to come in the future. If the helping process undergoes further demoralization then the act of help might turn into a transaction not aimed at rescue but at obtaining profit. In such a case, the helpee becomes totally objectified; the transaction is solely of a financial character. In the last stage of erosion of the helping process the helpee's life is measured by his financial resources and it might be in danger if he runs out of them. Rescuers might become ruthless - there is no space for either morality or aid: there is only profit.

The helping process might stop at any of the stages - it might be entirely disinterested, profit-oriented but aimed at rescuing the Jew in danger; it might turn into a transaction aimed only at the helper's profit or it might lead to complete ruthlessness and endangering the helpee's life. Similarly, the helper might enter the process at any of the stages. Some resolved to rescue Jews disinterestedly, others were thinking also about their profit, while still others thought solely about profit and used the situation without scruples.

While showing these four stages of helping process degradation - or perhaps simply four variants of providing help - I concentrate on the economic aspect, ignoring the risk assumed by the helper. In fact, fear about one's life, felt by both Jews and Poles, had a great, or perhaps even decisive, influence on the helping process. The erosion of help was the result of the dynamics of fear and greed, the impinging power of temptation and impunity; a dark mechanism of gradually succumbing to evil.

It seems that Fela and Katarzyna's relationship was in the second stage of the helping process, and Fela and other Poles' relations were in the third. But Fela herself is worried that people helping her are on the edge of crossing the threshold of

ruthless greed. Against the backdrop of troubles and financial worries, the landlady's attitude differs favorably from the others. Naturally Katarzyna also succumbs to temptation to some extent; she is worried when Fela does not pay. At times the latter is worried that it might end badly: "I could already feel that I was almost overstepping the mark with my landlady, because I wanted to pay her in instalments, and not the whole sum. We barely scraped the sum and we saved our face, but usually it is hard, how is it going to be in the future?" (21 October). But the landlady – despite cheating on the price of products – does settle the bills with Fela in a very honest way. First of all, as I have already written, she does not increase the "rent." Moreover, she takes into consideration Fela's problems and postpones the deadline, she accepts payment in instalments, acknowledges in their mutual settlement the money Fela gives to her daughter or son ("I paid, she deducted the daughter's debt, v. nice, in order" 21 December; "I delicately reminded her about the 200 zlotys Mr. St[aszek] has owed me since last year, ... and the landlady paid the debt back to me" 30 May). But first and foremost, Katarzyna lends money to the Fischbeins so that they can pay for the child: "Today the landlady promised to lend me some money to pay for the child, I was so happy I kissed her" (4 May), "The landlady lent me the money and went to pay as much as they demanded" (8 May).

But Fela distrusts Poles to such an extent that she explains Katarzyna's very decent behavior in terms of her calculation and greed: "She has been v. fair to us recently. We suspect that it is in connection with the Iwonicz things, for which she too is waiting." Fela suspects that the vision of personal profit begins to dominate over Katarzyna's decency, that she cares more about the profit than about rescuing the Fischbeins' life. She generally perceives their relationship like a transaction.

The authority Poles have over Jews, which the latter regard as humiliating, and the way Poles use it – not only by cheating but also by disrespecting and humiliating Jews – is an element of this transaction; hence also of the Jews' objectification. Fela writes: "We [Fela and her sister-in-law] were talking also about how our current helpers treat us sometimes, that we have to be blind and deaf and act the fool. We would like to live to see the day we can let them know that we saw through it alright, but that we had to pretend we did not understand and we trusted them; because it is not time for that. Besides, we have plenty of evidence of their mean behavior" (7 October). The Jews cannot accept experiencing humiliation, disrespect and indignity – all of which constitutes Jews' objectification and dehumanization – on the part of the rescuers.

The other important area of Fela's disillusionment with Poles is their attitude towards Jews who are looking for help or are in hiding, toward whom – as the landlady says to them a couple of times – "nobody is sympathetic" (28 November). Fela knows that Poles are anti-Semites ("which Pole isn't one"), but while in hiding she realizes that Poles can also be executioners' helpers, that they denounce helpless Jews, that they constitute – also for her – a direct threat to life. In her diary there frequently appears information about denounced and murdered local Jews. The thirty-three people murdered in the neighborhood, during Fela's

hiding in Wola Komborska, whose death was recorded in her diary, should be recalled here.

On 27 September 1943 Mrs. Akselrad from Krosno perished after having been apprehended by a Polish watch near Korczynna and handed over to Germans. The following day “the landlady says that a peasant saw a handsome little Jew, Mrs. Akselrad’s youngest son, being escorted to the entrenchment in the local village and then shot” (28 September). On the same day Fela writes about a rumor going round in the neighborhood about four apprehended Jews not allowing themselves to be taken alive: “they found some Jews and came for them, and the Jews set the attic on fire and all the property went up in smoke, and there were four of them, some kind of intelligentsia from Korczynna, and it was near Odżykoń.” Several days later “2 Warsaw girls on Aryan papers were shot in Krosno, this week in a nearby village a Jew – a sheet-metal worker – was shot by mistake” (11 November). Also in November 1943 “a Polish watch apprehended a doctor’s wife from Jasiennica, 9 km from Krosno, and shot her, and she had documents”¹³ (22 November).

The next day a tragedy happened in Wola Komborska itself, where the Fischbeins were hiding. One of the watchmen discovered and told ranger Kleiner, who informed the Germans that a Jewess with a son was hiding in the village. She was discovered because in the evenings she went to the neighboring house to help in the kitchen. The German police came to the village – they killed both Jews and six Poles.¹⁴ “And nowadays people get rewards for that, and so people are tempted to denounce Jews,” comments Katarzyna Dunajewska (23 November). Scarcely had the crisis connected with this event passed, the wave of fear subsided and the landlady resolved to keep hiding the Fischbeins without her husband’s knowledge, when, just a week later in a nearby village, people found “a dead Jew, already decomposing, in a haystack. . . . Probably he died of hunger” (30 November).

After two month’s break another series of denunciations and murders of hiding Jews begins: “in a clay hole in Dukla they found five Jews and shot them” (5 February 1944), in Jaśło in a basement seven Jews were found and killed (8 February). A week later Fela writes that “a Jew called Szymek from a nearby village was killed in Jabłonica” (15 February). He was apprehended by a Ukrainian watch. The next month “in Brzozów they shot . . . a Jewess who had a dry goods store. She lived at one student’s¹⁵ all the time, suddenly she was taken ill so they called a doctor and probably he exposed her” (1 March). The series ends with an episode in Iwonicz,

¹³ This means that she had forged papers.

¹⁴ According to a 1945 survey, written by K. Leszczyński (*Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce* 10 [1958]), in Wola Komborska, Krosno district, on 19 October 1943 three Poles were killed for providing help to Jews. Quoted in: J. Fajkowski, “Eksterminacja wsi polskiej w woj. rzeszowskim,” in *Rocznik Dziejów Ruchu Ludowego* 12 (1970).

¹⁵ Fela is referring here to a Christian sect of Bible Students, also known as Jehovah’s Witnesses.

where "they escorted out of a hotel a rich Jewess for one thing, and a rich married couple for another and shot everybody" (1 June).

Of the deaths of all the denounced and murdered, Fela is most devastated by the death of two children from Korczynna – siblings Josek and Hena. The whole village provided for them, everybody knew about them. But in October 1943 the children were denounced: "they were caught in the village where they had been and they were brought, tied up, to the police station, where an executioner arrived from Brzozów and shot them" (28 November). The event was widely discussed in the village, everybody knew that forester Kleiner denounced the children and "got for it 100 kilos of rye;" his deed met with common condemnation. Fela's sister-in-law, Ewa, says that "the landlady damns him that 'he deserves death for what he did'" (29 November).

Fela is greatly moved by this event – she pities the children and she identifies with the orphans, for she herself was motherless for a long time. On 29 November she writes: "When they shot the siblings, this brother and his sister, I was crying, who knows, maybe nobody apart from me was mourning them, I pitied those children, they suffered so much. They survived 13 months, and then death came." Perhaps Fela is also concerned about what would happen with Dorka if she were killed; in her mourning of the dead siblings there is perhaps also an element of projection of her own fear.

It is also puzzling why the landlady informs Fela about all events of this kind in such detail. Is it only because they are widely discussed in the village, because they are events important for the local community, or also because it gives her an opportunity to emphasize her decency and to remind Fela (and herself) once more about the risk involved in hiding Jews? Fela also wonders about that in her entry of 29 October: "today the landlady came with the news about Jews who were killed earlier this week. In such cases they always come to tell us, so that either we would know what is going on in the world, or perhaps to give us to understand what their care means for us, that if it weren't for them then we would have met the same fate. And who knows if they are not right?" Perhaps it is the landlady's way of creating the right atmosphere to increase the hiding fee, which might be a symptom of her entering the stage where personal profit has primacy over willingness to help, i.e. the transaction stage. But Katarzyna does not raise the price; perhaps the prospect of owning an apartment and store in the town after the war is attractive enough since it gives her a chance to change her social standing? I do not know what Fela really promises to Katarzyna, what is in the papers which the Fischbeins "simply decided to give" to Dunajewska.

Of course Fela is aware that the Dunajewskis are risking their lives and she understands the greatness of her commitment. But I suppose that a debt of that kind will forever remain unpaid, for it belongs to a different order of things. It is impossible to put a price tag on rescuing somebody's life. However, according to Fela's outlook on the world, helping and rescuing a person's life does not permit the helper to cheat and humiliate the helpee. She comments on the behavior of Kędrzyna, who

was exploiting them: "I perfectly understand that by hiding us she was risking her life, and that what we were paying her was not much compared to being alive, it is natural, but there is the norm, there's the agreement and there is a little bit of honour." Fela would like to be treated like a human being and not like an object whose value is determined by how many things and how much money she possesses.

As I have written, Fela becomes disillusioned toward the Poles when it comes to their personal honesty and their attitude toward the Jews. Her initial gratitude and willingness to shower her helpers with gifts turn into fear due to her experiences in hiding. Perhaps she becomes infected with the hatred she experiences: "We're in a bad situation, we feel more and more hatred toward us on the part of the Poles" (30 May). Everybody around them cheats and everywhere in the vicinity Jewish survivors are being denounced – these two most important elements of Fela's relations with the Poles result in her opinion about them becoming more and more critical. This is not offset even by Katarzyna's kindness and decency. Fela feels resentful toward her as well, and on 28 May 1944 she commits a bitter reflection to paper: "we are entirely at their mercy, they can do with us whatever they want. And we are afraid of them, to be honest. I described our landlord's whole family to my husband: the landlord wants our soul, the landlady wants our house, the elder daughter does not get involved, she does not want either us or our money, the younger one wants the gloves (for which she's prepared to denounce us), and the son is extremely fond of our money and hates us passionately."

* * *

The fate of many Jews in hiding depended on the Poles – if one could not depend on their nobleness, one had to appeal to their greed, play dumb, withstand humiliation and count on their mercy. There was something more in the relations with the Poles. For not only did Jewish life depend on them but also the memory of the murdered was in their hands. In September 1943, writing about the Jews killed in the vicinity, Fela made a very astute comment: "I always ask my husband about one thing, how will we – the Jews – learn the truth about how such actions or shootings were conducted. We will never know it for sure, we will rely only on Poles' recollections . . . Nobody will tell us about the whole horror, the deceased cannot speak from the other world. There will only be what the Poles tell. That's the only source."

So let this text be a contribution to repayment of the Polish debt – ours, Holocaust witnesses' share, who should tell about those who perished and also about those who lived among us and suffered – like Fela Fischbein, who was in hiding for over a year in Katarzyna Dunajewska's attic in Wola Komborska twenty-five kilometers from Krosno.

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Abstract

The text is an analysis of the relations between a hiding Jewess, Fela Fischbein, and her landlady, a Polish woman, Katarzyna Dunajewska. In hiding, Fela wrote her diary, which was the basis for the description of her feelings, experiences, her perception of the Poles who helped her, and her change of attitude toward them. The hiding Jewess moves from gratitude to the Poles to disappointment and aversion, which is caused by the attitude of the Poles to the Jews who needed help: financial exploitation of their situation and denouncing them to the Germans.

Key words

Jews, the Holocaust, hiding, help, Polish-Jewish relations