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The Image of Poles in the Writings of Jews from the Warsaw District[1]

Introduction

My intention is not to describe the Polish-Jewish relations during the war and occupation from 1939 to 1945. The first attempt to draw such a synthesis, undertaken by a professional historian in the face of the Holocaust of Polish Jews, was the study *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej. Uwagi i spostrzeżenia* [Polish-Jewish relations during the World War II. Notes and observations], written by Emanuel Ringelblum in Polish while he was hiding in a bunker at Grójecka 81 Street in Warsaw (the study was written between the second half of 1943 and March 1944, and later edited and published by Artur Eisenbach in 1988). In the historiography of World War II, this issue has been present for a long time. Authors of books, articles, historical essays, and compilations of documents favor a synthetic approach,[2] and relate to specific

[1] This article is an abridged version of the text originally published in *Prowincja Noc. Życie i zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim*, ed. Barbara Engelking, Jacek Leociak, and Dariusz Libionka (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2007), 373–441 (publisher's note).

[2] For example, let us list in chronological order the number of significant publications, though they are different in terms of volume and research methods: Israel Gutman, Shmuel Krakowski, *Unequal Victims. Poles and Jews During World War II* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1986); Marian Marek Drozdowski, "Refleksje o stosunkach polsko-żydowskich w czasie drugiej wojny światowej," *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 97, no. 3/4 (1990); *Społeczeństwo polskie wobec martyrologii i walki Żydów w latach II wojny światowej*, ed. Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz (Warsaw: IH PAN, 1996); *Polacy–Żydzi 1939–1945. Wybór źródeł*, ed. Andrzej Krzysztof Kunert (Warsaw: ROPWiM and Rytm, 2001). Finally, the latest and critical work in this area, establishing a necessary reference for future research: *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945. Studia i materiały*, ed. Andrzej Żbikowski (Warsaw: IPN, 2006). As far as historical essays are concerned, there are such significant texts as: Jan Błoński, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto; Polak-katolik i katolik-Polak. Nakaz ewangeliczny, interes narodowy i solidarność obywatelska wobec zagłady getta warszawskiego," in idem, *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1994); Roman Zimand, "Piołun i popiół," in idem, *Materiał dowodowy* (Warsaw: PoMost, 1992); Jan Tomasz Gross, "'Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej…,' ale go nie lubię," in idem, *Upiorna dekada. Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków i ko-*

areas or issues.[3] A separate category is studies on aid provided by the Poles to the Jews.[4]

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munistów 1939–1948 (Cracow: Universitas, 1998) or papers collected in *Aneks* 41–42 (1986) under the title "Żydzi jako polski problem."

[3] Here are several examples in chronological order: Krystyna Kersten, "Problem Żydów w Polskich Siłach Zbrojnych w ZSRR i na Wschodzie w kontekście stosunków polsko-żydowskich w czasie II wojny światowej," in eadem, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm. Anatomia półprawd 1939–1968* (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992); Teresa Prekerowa, "Stosunek ludności polskiej do żydowskich uciekinierów z obozów w Treblince, Sobiborze i Bełżcu w świetle relacji żydowskich i polskich," *Biuletyn GKBZPNP-IPN* 35 (1993); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2000); Tomasz Szarota, *U progu Zagłady. Zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie. Warszawa, Paryż, Amsterdam, Antwerpia, Kowno* (Warsaw: Sic!, 2000); Gunnar S**.** Paulsson, *Secret City. The Hidden Jews of Warsaw 1940–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); *Wokół Jedwabnego*, vol. 1: *Studia*, vol. 2: *Dokumenty*, ed. Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak (Warsaw: IPN, 2002).

[4] Let us list the three books which have played an important role not only in the historiography of helping the Jews during the Holocaust, but also in the dimension of public life: *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945*, ed. Władysław Bartoszewski, Zofia Lewinówna (2nd edition, Cracow: Znak, 1969); Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, *Kto ratuje jedno życie… Polacy i Żydzi 1939–1945* (London: Orbis, 1968); Teresa Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie 1942–1945* (Warsaw: PIW, 1982). And here are books and studies worth mentioning, listed in chronological order: Basia Bermanowa-Temkin, "Akcja pomocy Żydom w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej," *Biuletyn ŻIH* 21 (1957); Tatiana Berenstein, Adam Rutkowski, "O ratownictwie w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej," *Biuletyn ŻIH* 35 (1960); Irena Sendlerowa, "Ci, którzy pomagali Żydom," *Biuletyn ŻIH* 65–66 (1963); Tatiana Berenstein. Adam Rutkowski, *Pomoc Żydom w Polsce 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Polonia, 1963); Szymon Datner, *Las Sprawiedliwych. Karta z dziejów ratownictwa Żydów w okupowanej Polsce* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1968); Marek Arczyński, Wiesław Balcerak, *Kryptonim "Żegota." Z dziejów pomocy Żydom w Polsce 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1970); *Polacy–Żydzi 1939–1945,* ed. Stanisław Wroński, Maria Zwolakowa (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1971); Władysław Smólski, *Za to groziła śmierć. Polacy z pomocą Żydom w czasie okupacji* (Warsaw: Pax, 1981); Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); *The Courage to Care. Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust*, ed. Caroll Rittner, Sondra Myers (New York: New York University Press, 1986); Wacław Bielawski, *Zbrodnie na Polakach dokonane przez hitlerowców za pomoc udzielaną Żydom* (Warsaw: GKBZHwP IPN, 1987); Marian Fuks, "Pomoc Polaków udzielana Żydom podczas powstania w getcie warszawskim," in *Powstanie w getcie warszawskim. Sesja w 45. rocznicę (14–15 kwietnia 1988 r.)* (Warsaw: GKBZHwP, 1989); Franciszek Stopniak, "Uwagi o efektach pomocy duchowieństwa dla Żydów w okresie II wojny światowej," *Studia nad Faszyzmem i Zbrodniami Hitlerowskimi* nr 14 (1991); Michał Grynberg, *Księga Sprawiedliwych* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993); Stanisław Kaniewski, Bożena Roguska-Gajewska, "Gdy stawką w walce o życie było inne życie," *Biuletyn GKBZPNP-IPN* 35 (1993); *"Żegota". Rada Pomocy Żydom 1942–1945*. *Wybór dokumentów*, ed. Andrzej Krzysztof Kunert (Warsaw: ROPWiM, 2002); Marcin Urynowicz, "Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc Polaków dla ludności żydowskiej eksterminowanej przez okupanta niemieckiego w okresie drugiej wojny światowej," in *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945. Studia i materiały*, ed. Andrzej Żbikowski (Warsaw: IPN, 2006).

My research is based on the source material in the form of personal and autobiographical documents (diaries, memoirs, and testimonies). I use these sources, however, slightly differently than those researchers strongly emphasizing the duty "to describe the facts." Such an understanding of historiography refers to the idea of historical writing founded by the influential Prussian historian, Leopold von Ranke, who in his book 1824 *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514* included his famous manifesto: to write "how it really was" (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*).[5] According to this concept, the task of a historian is to present objective facts. This is achieved through the requirement of careful criticism of sources and comparing them with others for verification. Another element of this model is also emphasis on the function of "explaining" (as opposed to "understanding"). Respecting this approach, I have a different objective for my investigation.

What I seek in the sources is not only – and not even so much as – the knowledge of the facts, but rather a record of a certain experience, which could be revealed and interpreted. It is, I think, impossible simply to translate different types of autobiographical narrative into a factual order inferred from them. Such arrangement is an interpretive construct of a researcher. What interests me most of all is how authors of the studied texts talk (write) about the reality, how they perceive the world, themselves, and others. The objective is therefore to describe the means of experiencing reality, attested and recorded in the text, and not reconstruction of events. This characterizes my approach to the sources and reading them.[6]

I do not ask myself the question: what Poles were like during the Nazi occupation and how the different strata of Polish society behaved towards the Jews. I ask instead: how certain Jews, the authors of sources I have analyzed, perceived the Poles. I try to avoid the large quantifiers and generalization, I am far from expressing judgments about the condition of the general Polish populace at the time, I refrain from figures and statistical estimates. In this context, reaching for individual, fragmented and subjective testimonies saturated with emotion is not a professional error, but an accepted rule of conduct. By principle, I am not seeking to present an "objective" panorama of complex Polish-Jewish

[5] See Jerzy Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię. Tajemnice narracji historycznej* (Warsaw: Rytm, 1996), 23–26.

[6] I have written extensively about the methodological prospects for research on the autobiographical texts concerning the Holocaust in the article "Literatura dokumentu osobistego jako źródło do badań nad zagładą Żydów. (Rekonesans metodologiczny)," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 1 (2005). I have explained my own method of reading personal documents from the time of the Holocaust in the book *Tekst wobec Zagłady. (O relacjach z getta warszawskiego)* (Wrocław: Fundacja na rzecz Nauki Polskiej, 1997; chapter "Poszukiwanie formuły"). For more on the cognitive status of autobiographical forms and their reference value, see Paul John Eakin, *Touching the World. Reference in Autobiography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

relations (others have done it before me), but to uncover the Jewish "subjective" perception of Poles.

I wish to reconstruct the image of Poles which appears in the records written by the Jews during the war or just after it, and thus immediately, under the direct influence of events taking place and still fresh experiences, which have not yet faded in the memory, or have not yet been processed. I am interested in what place is occupied by the Poles in Jewish records, what the Jewish authors think of Poles, what emotions they associate with them, in what situations the Pole appears, and what types of relationships they have with the Jews. My purpose is to present a picture, which is a correlate of a certain mental and emotional state. It is primarily the result of actual experience, namely the experience of the Holocaust penetrating the consciousness of the writers, but it is also rooted in the experience of earlier, pre-war times. The carriers of such "mental image" are the Jews residing in the Warsaw district. I am interested primarily in the countryside; therefore the material will be taken from towns and cities (provincial ghettos) excluding Warsaw – the capital of the country. Warsaw, as well as other areas of the General Government, may appear in the background, as the backdrop for comparison.[7]

Avoiding the confrontation of the testimonies of Poles and Jews, confrontation of the Polish and Jewish memory, I avoid depicting tensions, often on unprecedented scale. The Jewish perspective was not monolithic, with a uniform emotional shade. The drama of attitudes played out before the eyes of the Jews often can be expressed as a dilemma between heroism and villainy, nobleness and brutal aggression, between wounding indifference and solidarity giving hope, and finally – between blind lust for profit and selflessness. In many cases, the negative pole of the opposition prevails in the examined records, in fact, it often outweighs by far.

I do not intend, however, to assess how much wrong there was, and how much good. I am not going to count how many Poles helped the Jews, how many reported them, and how many were indifferent. Heroic behavior is not the social norm and cannot be made a rule. It must be seen as unusual and unique. The price of common decency in a situation of the occupation-era degradation and in the face of ultimate risks has manifold increases. But can all be an excuse for cowardice, cynicism, and often cruelty?

I examine the testimonies of victims, which recorded their fear, pain, terror, isolation, desire to live and the constant threat of death. These are documents

[7] The missing link in this work is the image of a Jew in the records written by the Poles. The issue was examined by Feliks Tych. See "Świadkowie Shoah. Zagłada Żydów w polskich pamiętnikach i wspomnieniach;" "Ocaleni z Zagłady i ich ocena postawy społeczeństwa polskiego w okresie okupacji. Zapomniane świadectwo z roku 1944;" "Obraz Zagłady Żydów w potocznej świadomości historycznej w Polsce," in idem, *Długi cień Zagłady. Szkice historyczne* (Warsaw: ŻIH, 1999).

of repression and crimes, and as such they reflect the experiences of those who were subjected to such criminal practices. The truth of these testimonies is the experience of a victim contained in them. A victim desperately seeking refuge from pursuers; prosecuted, blackmailed, robbed and killed; encountering help, but also cruelty, and compassion, but also contempt. My purpose is to describe how victims perceived their neighbors – Poles at the hour of their greatest ordeal, in an extreme situation. I will not achieve such a purpose by "verifying" sources or "objectivizing" them. Is it possible to verify a person's sense of threat, one's anxiety, bitterness or their despair?

The authors of the texts quoted here are not writers of history and the rigors of the historian's discipline do not apply to them. They have a right to have their voices heard as they were, and to remain audible. The voice of the victims: "unobjective" and "biased", focused on the injustice and harm, coming – as the voice of the psalmist – "from the depths…"

* * *

The image of Poles as preserved in the Jewish records compiled in the war era and the period immediately following it will be presented in six sections. I shall start by showing the anti-Jewish prejudices and stereotypes, invariably rooted in the Middle Ages, and anti-Semitic attitudes growing in the subsoil of the interwar period. Jews were confronted with a variety of such attitudes: from reluctance dictated by the economic anti-Semitism to openly declared hatred and approval of genocide. They could, however, observe that in the face of the Holocaust some erstwhile anti-Semites underwent a metamorphosis and became involved in providing help (section "Hardened 'anti-Semites' and 'converted' anti-Semites"). Next, I shall focus on a very important area of the Jewish experience, namely the indifference of Poles towards the persecuted, hunted and mass-murdered Jews. Such indifference had different manifestations and different causes. Consistently maintaining the Jewish perspective, I record this phenomenon as it appeared in the perspective of the Jews. I draw attention to the special situation of the gaze, often recorded in the examined materials. It is about different ways of looking at the surrounding world, and how the Poles look at the Jews: watchful observation, mindless stare, watching the show, watching in silence, with empathy, with derision (section "The Indifferent"). The attitude of indifference paralyses action, it leads to passivity. But under the influence of experience it can attain its own dynamics, precipitating man out of his inertia. This may result in either a positive evolution – towards acts of assistance (section "Those Who Help"), or negative evolution – towards acts of treachery and violence (section "Those Who Harm"). The negative extreme of the behavior of Poles, copious evidence of which may be found in many texts, is the matter of looting Jewish property. The Jews see and describe how their Polish neighbors covet their things, which were about to inevitably become – or have become

already – "formerly Jewish", how they desire the mythical "Jewish gold" (section "Those Who Rob"). The last installment shall be the darkest area of Polish-Jewish relations during the last war: violence and rape committed by Poles against Jews and recorded by Jewish testimonies of that time (section "Those Who Murder").

An abridged version of this article does not cover the first two subsections "Hardened 'anti-Semites' and 'converted' anti-Semites" and "The Indifferent").

Those Who Help

Helping Jews was punishable by death. On 15 October 1941 a regulation of the General Governor, Hans Frank, was issued, announcing the death penalty for any Jews leaving the ghetto and any Poles providing help for the Jews, known as the "Third regulation on the restrictions of domicile in the General Government". Item one states that the death penalty shall be imposed on persons, who "knowingly provide shelter to the Jews," item two threatens "instigators and helpers" with the death penalty and warns that any "attempted act will be punished as one that has been completed."[8] In the wake of this regulation others followed, issued by the local administrators and police chiefs. And so in Warsaw the "Announcement" was posted dated 10 November 1941 and signed by the Governor of the Warsaw district, Ludwig Fischer informing of "death penalty for unauthorized exit from Jewish residential areas," which states inter alia that the death penalty "is to be applied to anyone who knowingly provides shelter to the Jews or otherwise helps them (for example by providing accommodation, subsistence, by taking in any vehicle, etc.)."[9] Less than a year later, on 5 September 1942, during the last stage of the great campaign to deport the Jews from the Warsaw ghetto to the Treblinka death camp, the head of the SS and the Police in the district of Warsaw issued a separate "Announcement." Citing the fact that "in recent years many Jews escaped without permission from the district assigned for them" and reminding of Frank's existing Regulation as of 15 October 1941, he states that "not only Jews will be sentenced to death for crossing the border of the Jewish Quarter, but anyone who in any way assists them in hiding."[10]

Collective responsibility was used; entire families were facing the threat of death, even entire communities of neighbors. For example, in Ciepielów in the Radom district, on 6 December 1942 33 Poles were burned alive by the German gendarmes for harboring and feeding Jews, and on 28 June 1943, in Cegłów in the Warsaw district, where a group of Jews was hiding, the Germans killed 25 villagers.[11] As historians emphasize – in no other country in occupied Europe

[8] See the facsimile of the document in *Polacy–Żydzi 1939–1945. Wybór źródeł*, 485.

[9] See Wacław Bielawski, *Zbrodnie na Polakach dokonane przez hitlerowców*, 111.

[10] Ibidem, 115.

[11] See ibidem, 8, 12, 40–41. Testimony of Maria Bielecka, née Mirowska, "Trzydziestu trzech żywcem spalonych w Ciepielowie," in *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej*, 862–865.

or in the satellite countries of the Third Reich were the penalties as draconian, nor is there anything known about execution for helping Jews.[12]

The different, that is worse, situation in occupied Poland compared to the occupied countries of Western Europe and the particularly brutal repressions against the Poles had an effect on Polish attitudes towards the Holocaust of the Jews and contributed to the fact that aid proved to be insufficient. It remains, however, uncertain whether in such circumstances more could have been done. There is no way to answer clearly, as it relates not so much to historical facts as to human conscience. Władysław Bartoszewski said that "the fact that the Nazi authorities in Poland created a formal basis for capital punishment meted out even for giving a glass of water to someone in hiding, and deportation to a concentration camp for failing to report a harbored Jew, and ruthless enforcement of these regulations could not be without effect on the scope of help brought to the persecuted. Despite this, Poland was the only country in Eastern Europe where – apart from individual activity – a major secret organization was created and expanded over more than two years dedicated to solely to helping the Jews."[13] In other words, the terror of the occupation and brutal repression targeting all attempts to save the Jews restricted the scope of help, which was in any way quite extensive and even took an institutionalized form (*Żegota*).

It should, however, be noted that the draconian laws of the German occupation authorities introducing the death penalty for an entire catalogue of transgressions that the Poles might commit began to appear even during the September 1939 campaign.[14] Shortly after the proclamation of the General Government, Hans Frank issued a decree dated 31 October 1939 "on the suppression of acts of violence in the General Government." Under this decree, the SS and police courts could judge Poles for everything that was considered hostile activity or an act of disobedience. Subsequent paragraphs listed those crimes. "Whoever commits an act of violence against the Third Reich […]. Whoever intentionally damages the facilities of the German authorities […]. Whoever incites or encourages disobedience […] Whoever commits an act of violence against a German […]. Whoever commits arson causing damage to German property […]." In all these cases, there was only one penalty – death[15]. Three weeks before Frank's decree on the death penalty for helping Jews, the governor of the Warsaw district Fischer issued his own "Announcement to the population of the Warsaw District," dated

[12] See *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej*, 73–74.

[13] Ibidem, 74.

[14] On 12 September 1939 the commander of the German land forces ordered the death penalty for possession of arms, ammunition, or military equipment, as well as for any acts directed against the German army. See Władysław Bartoszewski, *Warszawski pierścień śmierci 1939–1944* (Warszawa: Zachodnia Agencja Prasowa, 1967), 18.

[15] The text of the decree cited after: *Okupacja i ruch oporu w dziennikach Hansa Franka 1939–1945*, vol. 1: *1939–1942* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1972), 126–127.

26 September 1941, in which he threatens severe punishment, "by death or life imprisonment" for helping Soviet POWs escaped from the camps.[16]

The position represented by Bartoszewski (quoted above) seems to be located at the opposite extreme to that of Jan Tomasz Gross. He reminds one that in occupied Poland, torture, death and collective responsibility threatened for all involvement with the Underground, which did not prevent people from the joining conspiracy. "There is no doubt, after all – Gross writes – that far more people were killed in connection with Underground activity than for helping Jews! Why, then, did the underground attract so many people, while only a handful were helping the Jews?"[17] The author does not accept the argument that the threat of the most severe punishment effectively discouraged taking action, because it does not work in the case of conspiratorial activities of the Polish society. The issue of helping Jews cannot be entirely reduced to a "balance of costs and benefits;" it has a fundamental ethical dimension. His argument is: "it is because the Poles were not really ready to help the Jews that the Germans could impose brutal repressions for helping the Jews without any exception and effectively track Poles who broke the occupation laws concerning the Jews."[18] The key to understanding this problem is, according to Gross, an in-depth description of the attitudes of Polish society towards the Jews.

I do not wish to become involved in a long argument about whether more Poles helped the Jews, or denounced them. My objective in this section is to show how the Jews saw the Poles, who reached out a helping hand to them.

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The Jews were well aware of the terror directed against the Poles, who attempted to bring them help. They knew to what danger they were exposing friends or strangers who decided to take them into their homes and hide them for a longer time or even just overnight. Such awareness, already processed, synthesized and presented as a conclusion by a professional historian may be found in Ringelblum's notes. Writing about "idealists" who helped Jews, the author indicates the "mad terror" of the occupier, saying that "the most dedicated individuals [Germans – J.L.] deport people en masse to concentration camps or prisons," that "there are arrests and raids everywhere." On the other hand, he refers to a specifically internal threat "spying and denunciation flourishes in the country," "every day, people are being poisoned with anti-Semitism in the press, on the radio, etc." Taking all this into consideration, it becomes clear that a Jew hiding with Poles "is dynamite that can explode at any time and blow up the entire house." Ringelblum does acknowledge that money is an important factor in the help operation, but he immediately asks: "is there enough money in

[16] See ibidem, 426–427.

[17] Jan Tomasz Gross, "Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej…' ale go nie lubię," 35–36.

[18] Ibidem, 41.

the world that could compensate for living in constant fear?" [Ringelblum, *Stosunki*, pp. 156–157] His conclusion is – admittedly – ambivalent. Praising the nobility and heroism of Poles who saved Jews, he does not forget about the dark side of the issue, namely those who sabotaged these efforts. "The most beautiful novels will be written about the heroic Poles, noblest idealists who were afraid of neither the enemy's threats […], nor the evil stupidity and dullness of Polish fascists and anti-Semites who considered saving Jews to be an anti-patriotic act" [ibidem, p. 176]. A similar duality may be seen in the testimony by Rachela Auerbach printed in *Nowe Widnokręgi* in 1945. The author describes the fearless activity of Janina Bukolska, working with the Jewish National Committee and personally with Adolf and Basia Berman. In the conclusion, she mentions enigmatically "about facts grown on the ground of hatred, murderous instincts, and greed," emphasizing that "on such background, even more clearly outlined are actions of those Poles who, under the same conditions, did not give in to the poison, overcame fear of impending punishment, and managed to act in human solidarity and brotherhood" [Auerbach, p. 295].

The awareness of the mortal peril to which a hiding Jew exposes a Pole is also evident at the level of individual record and personal experience. Jews share the burden of fear overwhelming the Poles; they experience their anxiety as their own. Leokadia Schmidt, hiding near Wołomin, writes that in the late autumn of 1942, "in Zagościniec, three kilometers away, someone denounced a gamekeeper – that he was hiding Jews at his home. The police shot the Jews on site, along with the gamekeeper and his entire family. News of this spread through the whole countryside, causing fear and terror in the hearts of the people and my own" [Schmidt, p. 174]. Brandla Siekierka, hidden in a village near Mińsk Mazowiecki, mentions rumors about capturing Jews. "Not far away, in the house of a rich farmer, a Jewish boy was caught. So both were killed. Our host, after hearing such news, would come to see us upstairs, green in the face, with fear twisting his guts." [Siekierka, D, p. 22] In turn, the Holcman sisters who escaped from the Łomża ghetto and stayed in Ostrołęka with a Pole called Przechodzień, saw "the man's fear" because "announcements were posted all over the town, in which the Germans threaten Christians that for hiding a single Jew they would kill their entire family. However, anyone who reported a Jew would get three kilograms of sugar and one kilogram of salt. We keep quiet, not knowing what Przechodzień is going to do with us, but he reassures us and promises to recommend us to his friend – a peasant in a village" [*Księga Żydów Ostrołęckich*, p. 243].

A basic form of help was to warn of danger. It could be a single, irregular act often associated with a privileged position of someone holding a certain function. Sometimes the Jews were warned by "blue" policemen, who – as a resident of Jeziorna deported to the Warsaw ghetto stresses – "have shown [us] a lot of kindness" [ARG I 780 (Ring. I/821)]. Just before the liquidation of the ghetto in Wołomin in early October 1942, a "blue" policeman "kind to the Jews warned them the day before. At night, many fled to the forest" [Schmidt, p. 157]. A warn-

ing could also be one of the manifestations of a longer care of a hiding Jew, as in the case of Jan Szneider, who in April 1943 in Świder for several weeks was hiding Michał Świeca, who had escaped from a transport to Majdanek, "warning him of the danger" and "supporting him materially." Any such behavior is carefully noted by the authors of testimonies; each brings them a measurable value: the chance to escape from their dire situation, another chance for survival.

The Jews, depicting their benefactors sometimes, wonder about the motives, which guided the helping Poles. They usually saw a combination of the most diverse motivations. If material motivation comes to the foreground, it is often accompanied by higher causes. Most Jews observe an internal conflict that consumes their rescuers: those providing aid do not wish to give up a new source of income, while they fear punishment; they become attached to the money they earn, but they also feel sympathy for the persecuted Jews; they are often exasperated with their dangerous charges and intend to dispose of them, and yet they keep them not only for financial reasons, but also out of simple human decency.

Sometimes the motivations of Poles are actually seen by the Jews as clear. These can be, for example, the ethics of duty, mercy, or pure selflessness. Brandla Siekierka noted a conversation between a mother and a daughter in front of a house near Mińsk Mazowiecki. The author, wandering with her two children, is crying and begging for help, the mother explains that there is nothing she can do, because she has people displaced from Poznań living with her and they "hate the Jews." At which point the daughter says, "We must help them, it is our duty" [Siekierka, D, p. 12]. Leokadia Schmidt has to leave her previous place with a young baby because of blackmail. Homeless, tired, hungry, and cold, she approaches the porch of a house in Sławek near Wołomin. "A young pretty girl came out. She looked at me intently, then at the child. I saw pity in her face. When in a choked voice I asked if she would let me rest on the porch, she invited me to the apartment. There, I could change the baby into dry diapers and feed him with the remaining milk, which the kind-hearted girl warmed" [Schmidt, p. 170]. Calek Perechodnik writes "there were Poles willing to help the Jews as much as possible, some were even completely selfless. […] The best proof of this is the fact that I'm still alive" [Perechodnik, p. 126].

Perechodnik spares the Poles no harsh words, yet he knows perfectly well to whom he owes his life and he states it openly. Other authors also remember this. An important element of the Jewish records of Polish help is the theme of gratitude. The authors do not hide their emotions and do not hesitate to speak lofty words. It does not detract from the sincerity of their declarations, on the contrary – it shows what an enormous experience it was to receive help from the Poles, and how strongly it is etched in their memory. Michał Świeca, relating his escape from the transport to Majdanek and help given to him by the people near Otwock and Świder, writes, "I have kept in my mind this fact as one of the symptoms of a human and understanding approach to the issues that were so very painful to us at the time" [Świeca]. Help offered in need became a gift of

life. "I will never forget the woman who reached out to me with a helping hand in such a tragic time in my life. If not for her, I'm sure I'd be dead, along with the child. God bless her for that" [Schmidt, p. 170].

Such recorded expressions of gratitude reveal another aspect: longing for the human instinct of sympathy, for the warmth of another human being, for a mother's kiss. Deprived of all rights, deprived of their loved ones, chased, hunted and killed; the Jews yearned for such warmth and understanding. Lejb Rochman, who was hiding in a village near Mińsk Mazowiecki, talks about a certain situation, unique and unrepeatable, that moved him to tears. Auntie, who was taking care of a group of Jews, a good woman, but austere and unbalanced, came one day to the shelter in a barn and began simply to talk with the author. "We talked about life. The conversation had been going on for a long time. Auntie saddened, moved closer to me, and kissed me on the forehead. In an instant, I felt as if a wave of maternal warmth swept over me" [Rochman, p. 47].

* * *

Poles helping Jews are portrayed differently in the pages of Jewish testimonies. In fragmentary notes, short and hastily written, their presence is obscured by impersonal information about the event itself. There is no space here for details, reflection, and evaluation. Another crucial factor in such cases is the need for secrecy. It may be said that people disappear completely in the description of their actions and their consequences. Such records do not reveal the image of a Pole; they do not say anything about who he is, what he feels, and what drives him. They only bring a picture of the situation created by his behavior.

There are also more extensive excerpts from testimonies of help, in which an outline of actual persons can be traced. The attention of writers is directed at the person, often a last name or just a first name is given, scraps of remembered dialogue, or even details of appearance. These may be considered as preliminary sketches for a fuller portrait. In the analyzed testimonies one finds both silhouettes of rescuers sketched with a few lines and full portraits, rich in detail and observations, with in-depth psychological analyses.

In his autobiography, in the part written in 1943 while hiding in Stara Miłosna near Warsaw, Ludwik Hirszfeld devotes a lot of attention to the people who helped him. I would like take a closer look at the outlines of two figures representing two layers of the Polish society: the "gentry" and "the people," to use somewhat outdated terminology.

The first depiction is that of Mrs. Laura Kenig. She had a small house in Stara Miłosna, with a garden and a small pine grove, a total of twelve acres. Described by Hirszfeld, Mrs. Kenig becomes an ideal of a Polish woman, guarding singlehandedly (her husband was a POW captured by the Germans) and boldly the noblest national and Christian values. She was characterized by her fervent faith, boundless devotion to her neighbor, and selflessness. "Good and deeply religious,

extremely hard working, she loved her piece of land, which she cultivated, scraping by while her husband was in German captivity. There is much talk about the greed of people who hid the condemned. We have been with quite different people. Ms. Laura had to be asked and urged to take a fee for the apartment. Noble and selfless was also her sister, Irena Przedpełska, in whose house nearby we spent summer, while in autumn and winter we stayed with the hospitable Mrs. Laura. We were not the only ones she was hiding. Before we came to live with her, there were three ladies who moved out and were later identified as non-Aryan and killed by the Germans.[19] Often in the evening we heard a knock on the window. Mrs. Laura and her daughters, who were by no means wealthy, would bring out hot food or cigarettes. The person knocking was a Jewish butcher hiding in the woods, whose entire family was murdered. Mrs. Laura did not hesitate to bring him help. In the end, he even hid on her property. In our distress we were apparently lucky: we met only good people" [Hirszfeld, pp. 383–384].

The second portrait shows a man of the people – Stanisław Kaflik, a long time caretaker of the Ministry of the State Treasury, who had managed to scrape enough money to build a modest house in the village of Klembów near Tłuszcz. It was with him that Hirszfeld stayed with his wife for a time. Kaflik embodies the best qualities of the Polish people, love of work and nature, wisdom and generosity, sensitivity to injustice and moral purity. "I remember that man with utmost respect," Hirszfeld wrote. "He deserved admiration not only for his sound judgment and sharp intelligence, but because of his humane attitude to the world and completely unique nobility and lack of awe of rules and regulations. There was not a trace of the so-called peasant greed in that man. There was love for work and family; there was subtlety and delicacy of feelings worthy of social elites. Utterly upset, the Kafliks were telling me about the murder of the Jews: 'they were people, and often good people. We used to go to them as to our own. Often, they would let us pay later, or they would lend us some money. And their children were sometimes like little angels. And to think that these little children were killed like ducks. And where is their culture now?' It was in this spirit that those honorable people spoke, not knowing how my heart swelled from inner warmth that this was the voice of the Polish people" [Hirszfeld, p. 416]. Delighted and grateful, Hirszfeld paints an idealized, almost pastoral image, reminiscent in some ways of the monologues of the advocates of rural life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, captured brilliantly by Wyspiański in *Wesele* [The Wedding].[20]

[19] Elsewhere in his autobiography Hirszfeld has a slightly different take on the deaths of three Jewish women, pointing clearly to the person of the denouncer: "Three ladies who had lived with Mrs. Kenig before us were denounced by a seventeen-year-old boy, the son of a judge, and they were killed" [p. 405].

[20] Such as Bridegroom: "now I try to look my fill/at the people colorful and bright,/so brisk they are, and so healthy –/even if a touch too rough" (Act I, Scene 19). Host: "The peasant has

Another portrait, sketched in different circumstances and by someone else, is that of Father Ludwik Wolski, vicar of St. Vincent de Paul parish, who issued false baptismal certificates for the Jews of Otwock. Along with Aleksandra Szpakowska, he rescued 7-year-old Marysia Ossowiecka. The cousin of the rescued, Hanna Kamińska, in a letter to Father Wolski, dated "Otwock, 12 September 1945," wrote: "In the period of the most intense terror of the Nazi brutes, in August 1942 in Otwock, when the liquidation of the ghetto started on 19 August and continued over the next days, one did not hesitate to risk one's own life to save a Jewish child that one had not met before. Compared to violent German and Nazi gangs, to the behavior of local villagers, who like hyenas looted the property left by the Jews, your Christian attitude is all the more striking, as together with engineer Szpakowska and Mr. Marchlewicz, the then chief of the ["blue"] police, you were not afraid of anything to save a helpless Jewish child" [Kamińska]. Significant and worth re-emphasizing is this duality revealed in a description of the heroic priest. His generosity is contrasted with the contemptible behavior of the neighbors of the Otwock Jews, even more so – against the black backdrop of the German atrocities and the attitude of "local villagers" it may shine radiantly. While in Hirszfeld's testimony a certain idealization of the people is found, echoing the sentiments of the Young Poland movement, Kamińska paints a harsher image. Similarly, in *Wesele* idealization turns into brutalization.[21]

Another portrait drawn with a few sentences is reminiscent of modest pencil drawings sketched from nature. This description is unpretentious, far from idealizing, devoid of pathos, but extremely moving; it shuns excessive adjectives, and yet it manages to communicate perfectly the atmosphere of unselfish kindness and sympathy for the unfortunate fate of orphans. The person thus portrayed is a servant, Frania, from the town of Sławek near Wołomin. Naomi Szac-Wajnkranc was hiding there and it was she who sketched this "pencil portrait." "In the vicinity of Sławek, two Jewish children from Jadów are wandering in the nearby villages. Their parents, siblings and family were murdered in the

some Piast in him,/much of the Piast kings – in him!/[…] When he ploughs, and sows, and reaps,/so much dignity in him, such zest;/everything he does is blessed; such dignity, such sense and skill./and when he prays in the church, / so much dignity in him, such zest/so much, so much of a Piast;/there is power in him, and that is a fact." (Act I, Scene 24). Quoted after Stanisław Wyspiański, "Wesele," in idem, *Dramaty wybrane*, vol. 1 (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Liiterackie, 1972), 163; 173 [trans. K.G.].

[21] The idyllic vision of a peasant – Piast will soon be disturbed, long before the advent of the Wraith, that is the specter of Jakub Szela, leader of a bloody peasant revolt in Galicia in 1846. Scenes of the Galicia massacre are recalled by the Bridegroom: "We've forgotten everything;/my grandfather was sawn in half…" and the Host: "They stabbed my father,/pushed and clubbed;/with sticks and hoes/bleeding through the town they drove him…/we've forgotten everything." (Act I, Scene 30). Quoted after ibidem, 185. The quoted passage from Kamińska's letter to the Otwock priest only foreshadows the theme of the dark side of the "Polish people" found in the Jewish testimonies, which I shall discuss in more detail later.

ghetto. A fourteen-year-old girl with an eight-year-old brother managed to hide and then escaped to the forest. Dressed in rags, the poor things were wandering in the forest, in the fields and meadows, they timidly knocked on hut doors, asking farmers for whatever they could spare, keeping off the main roads. They walked on, not knowing when and by whom they will be killed. Someone set dogs on them, someone beat them, but sometimes, a merciful hand gave them a slice of bread or some hot soup, they were allowed to wash their rags. But no one agreed to let the children stay overnight, to let them in the house – people were afraid." One day, the children came to the house where the author was staying. Frania immediately saw to them, "she warmed up some soup, she gave them thick slices of bread, poured water for washing. The children sat in a corner, huddling like frightened animals, greedily eating porridge from their bowls and looking around warily. 'Eat up, eat up,' Frania encouraged. 'There is still half a pot for you.' […] After the meal, the girl scrubbed herself and her brother in Frania's basin, and then, when she washed their rags, the washed and shorn boy stood by the stove, warming up and staring into the fire. […] No, the little boy did not live to enjoy freedom. Two months later, Polish policemen caught the unfortunate children in a village and brought them to the gendarmerie where they were murdered" [Szac-Wajnkranc, pp. 60–63].

In some testimonies – extensive memoirs of a few dozen up to several hundred pages, elaborate portraits of Poles can be distinguished as separate threads. Notes, reflections, scenes from life, and short stories are scattered throughout the text. If one were to take them out of the context of autobiographical narrative and merge them, one would obtain a type of series of short stories, sometimes even exciting and surprising with acute observations, penetrating psychological analyses, or a humorous perspective. Such fully developed portraits of Poles helping Jews, drawn by the Jews themselves, seem to refer to the nineteenth-century prose tradition still practiced by contemporary realists and naturalists. I am thinking especially of the so-called physiological sketch, narrative prose genre including "short descriptive texts, essentially devoid of plot elements, essentially presenting some socio-moral peculiarities, professional groups, localities, landmarks, scenes from everyday life, portraits of people, often saturated with comically satirical or didactic elements."[22]

Brandla Siekierka writes warmly about Bronisław Bylicki, who had known and admired her mother, and agreed to take her with her two children under his roof in a village near Mińsk Mazowiecki: "I was not to know, the poor man, that he would be keeping me for two years" [Siekierka, D, p. 12]. The author calls Bylicki her "benefactor," while she writes about his wife with undisguised malice, calling her a "she-cat" not only because of her unique physiognomy, but

[22] Michał Głowiński, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, Janusz Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. Janusz Sławiński (3rd edition, expanded and amended, Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1998), 556.

also character traits. "She-cat" is stingy with food for those hiding ("a real shrew, just put her on a broom and she's off to hell" [Siekierka, D, p. 7]), and is greedy for all kinds of things that the Jews use to pay for they stay. She is particularly interested in clothes. She provokes fights with her husband; blaming him that by taking in Jews he has put them all in mortal danger and did not even ask her opinion. But also in her, the author notes human instincts of compassion, mixed with a very human fear and very human desire to have nice "apparel."

In a style worthy of an experienced psychologist, Lejb Rochman portrays three peasants from the area of Mińsk Mazowiecki: Felek – noble rural thief, who decided to hide the author; Auntie – Felek's sister, a woman with a good heart, but mentally unbalanced; Felek's wife – simplistic to the point of stupidity, pathologically greedy, distrustful, jealous and vindictive, in constant conflict with her husband's sister. The fates of these three peasant characters caught up in a great war, placed in the face of mortal danger, tortured and endured beyond measure, are worthy of a great psychological novel. Rochman collected excellent observations; he recorded and captured characteristic behavior and penetrated complex relationships and pathological relations. We read these pages holding our breath.

In his *Spowiedź* [Confession], Calek Perechodnik left the portrayal of Magister. It was an alias of Władysław Błażewski, an official of the District Cooperative of Agriculture and Commerce in Otwock. During the war, the Cooperative warehouse was located in the "Oaza" cinema, whose owner was Perechodnik's wife[23]. Magister kept three notebooks which form the first part of the diary[24]. He also kept some of his things rescued from the ravages of the Otwock ghetto liquidation. These things helped Perechodnik survive in hiding. The author describes him as "a man of endearing manners, honorable, honest, dedicated patriot, a man of whom one may, if necessary, certain that he will help, and that he will do it selflessly" [Perechodnik, p. 41].

Writing about the portraits of Poles, which take the form of "physiological sketches" we must mention two more texts. I am referring to them, although they are not within the chronological and territorial range chosen for this study. The diary of Marian Berland was indeed written in hiding in 1943 and 1944 (and therefore "there and then"), but on the Aryan side of Warsaw, and I was primarily interested in the Warsaw district countryside. Nechama Tec began to write down her memories in 1975 (first edition *Dry Tears* in 1982, Polish translation in 2005), and excerpts quoted here relate to Kielce. For a researcher of everyday life in occupied Poland, for sociologists and psychologists studying psychopathology of social groups in extreme situations, for historians documenting the peripheral zones of society, and finally, for all those passionate about the civil

[23] Błażewski was described by Paweł Szapiro footnotes to the edition of Perechodnik's diary, which he edited, entitled *Czy ja jestem mordercą?* (Warsaw: Ośrodek Karta, 1993), 259.

[24] David Engel, "Afterword," in Calek Perechodnik, *Spowiedź* (Warsaw: Ośrodek Karta, 2004), 283.

history as opposed to the official one, who crave juicy historical anecdotes – for them, the writings of Berland and Tec provide priceless, fantastic material.

Zdzisio and Halina Krzyczkowski, Warsaw *lumpenproletarians* from a backhouse on Sienna Street, become guardians of a group of Jews, and it is on them that "to be or not to be" of those in hiding depends. The contrast between "hosts" and "guests" could not be greater: their intellectual level, mentality and their position in the social hierarchy that war had completely destroyed. "Zdzisio is a young man of about thirty, tall, handsome, and slim. Light blond hair, blue eyes. […] Halina, several years younger than Zdzisio, platinum blonde, much shorter than him, with a common appearance. […] Both Zdzisio and Halina were born in Nasielsk, several dozen kilometers north of Warsaw. […] Neither Zdzisio nor Halina have spent even one day in any school. We do not know whose fault it was, but the fact is that both are almost illiterate and can only read a sentence in the newspaper with great difficulty or scribble their signature in block letters. […] Even before the war Zdzisio was many times listed in police reports on numerous occasions. […]The periods when he was out of prison could easily be compared to short-term holidays. […] In nearby towns, at a fair or on other such occasion, Zdzisio would lure the naive to play three-card or thimbles, and sometimes 'red wins, black loses.' […] But in the end he managed to get himself a longer prison term. At the end of this state vacation, which coincided with the outbreak of war. […] Zdzisio returned to Warsaw and decided to permanently lead a decent life. […] Usually, he traded in the Praga district, at the Różycki bazaar. He had his base there" [Berland, pp. 304–306]. After the sealing of the ghetto, Zdzisio tried his luck at smuggling. Several times a week, he would sneak into the ghetto and bring food, taking out clothes, shoes, and other goods. Completing his profile, Berland says: "Zdzisio had his honor, the honor of a thief, but honor nonetheless, and that is a lot to say. […] Zdzisio strongly, emphatically states: 'I have never been a rat [*kapuś*] and I will never be. You can cut me into pieces, he says, and no one's going to get anything from me'" [ibidem, p. 307]. How important such a declaration was to the Jews hiding with him. Looking at him with the eye of a psychologist and a comedian at the same time, Berland observes their hosts' metamorphoses. Regularly coming money enables a gradual but systematic improvement of living standards. More and better food, more and more elegant clothes, growing aspirations, increasing temptation of more income, increasingly fantastical plans to start new businesses. And at the same time more and more vodka drunk, violent marital fights, and passionate reconciliation's. And so, playing their daily deadly game, the hosts and their wards lasted until the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising. After the war, Halina and Zdzisio returned to their hometown of Nasielsk, and lived there for many years, succumbing to poverty and alcoholism. The Berlands supported them financially from Israel.

The Homar family lived in Kielce. At some point of the war, 13-year-old Nechama came to live with them with her parents and sister. "In exchange for giving us shelter, we had to cover the cost of food for the entire family and pay the rent.

The family was very large, with four generations" [Tec, p. 121]. Grandmother Helena, the eldest of the family, was begging on the street. Stefa, Helena's widowed daughter-in-law, had three children. The youngest child was sixteen-year-old Basia, of whom Nechama very fond. The middle brother, Wojtek, organized the arrival of those hiding in Kielce. The oldest Tadek and his wife Ziutka had two children. Their marriage "was a tumultuous one, violence came as easily as love" [ibidem, p. 129]. There were fights, during which "Tadek, pale with rage, began to throw fast and powerful punches. Ziutka never defended herself. She shielded her face and head with her hands. In between blows, she called him a slacker, a bully, a worthless sluggard" [ibidem, p. 130]. The lives of two families, the one that was hiding and the one who gave them shelter, were interlinked. Nechama's mother looked after Tadek and Ziuta's young children, Nechama and Barbara became friends. Above all, taking the Jews under their roof, even if it did entail an obvious danger, significantly raised the standard of living of the Polish family. "The Homars, like most Poles, approach anti-Semitism as something natural. […] The needs of the Homars were very modest, yet still the income of all working family members combined was not sufficient to meet them. So they decided to use the opportunity created by the German occupation and keep 'cats,' as they called Jews in hiding. Hiding Jews, who were able to support them financially, seemed like a perfect way to solve their problems. Thus, they never claimed that our agreement was anything other than business. By helping us, they defended themselves against hunger and uncertainty of life. In this sense, we were only a means to achieve an important objective for them, a measure justified by this purpose" [ibidem, pp. 120–121].

* * *

Jews hidden by Poles carefully watch their benefactors. They can be extremely perceptive, they recognize both their virtues and vices. With ruthless candor, they sometimes expose a shameful weakness, succumbing to addiction, or questionable motives. However, all these observations, made over months or even years of very close contact, do not lead to condemnation and harsh judgments. On the contrary, they are often commented on humorously and ironically, perhaps with a touch of bitterness. One thing, however, arouses amazement and sometimes pain and sorrow. There were also Poles, who risked their own lives and the lives of their entire families to rescue Jews, but they did not want anyone to know about it, ever. It was not even during the occupation, when certain death awaited rescuers who were breaking the German law. This is about Poles who, though they hid Jews, felt that their behavior was inappropriate and did not want anyone to find out about it after the war. Above all else, they wanted to keep it secret from their nearest neighbors.

Felek – a thief hiding Lejb Rochman and his family, is not afraid of death, he is afraid of something else instead. "The problem is a disgrace that will taint

his family forever. If he is killed as a thief or a murderer – so what? But if he is said to have been killed for hiding Jews, his family will never forgive him, for all eternity" [Rochman, p. 63]. In July 1944, the village where Brandla Siekierka was hiding, sees the approach of the Soviet army. The Germans retreat, the day of liberation from every day oppression and fear is near. The author sees the nervousness of her host. "The poor man regrets what he has done, he's afraid that after the war he'll be condemned for keeping us. […] Our host did not allow us to communicate with the Soviets, nor with anyone else for that matter. He did not want to be ridiculed for harboring Jews" [Siekierka, D, p. 30]. The Chorążkiewiczs, hiding Maria Koper near Biała Rawska, were of a similar opinion. Years later, Maria's daughter, who lives in Toronto, wrote: "Mr. and Mrs. Chorążkiewicz did not want people around to know that they had been hiding a Jewess at home all that time. They feared that it would not be considered as a commendable deed. Even many years after the war they asked my mother to not broadcast it. My mother did not blame them. She was always grateful to them for saving her life" [Grynberg–Koper, p. 103].

Why did such things happen? What forced those brave people who could hide the Jews during the Nazi occupation, opposing the German terror and risking death, to feel so ashamed later? What made them hide themselves from people after the war – paradoxically – and keep such acts secret? Leokadia Schmidt seems to suggest that some religious motives (singularly interpreted) might have been involved. "Marysia Michalska, a person rather well-mannered but overly pious, always felt guilty for having helped us. […] When talking to me, Marysia repeatedly stressed that she was praying to God not to punish her for helping us. She was afraid that after the war people would mock her for it" [Schmidt, p. 160]. She changed her mind after the Warsaw ghetto uprising and the appeals of the Underground to help the hunted Jews.

Nechama Tec reflects on this issue in more depth in her memoirs written thirty years after the war. She notes that as the Red Army approached the attitude of the Homar family towards the hiding Jews changed. "In their behavior towards us there was something akin to embarrassment and duress […]. Was it so difficult for them to accept us as a free people, whose fate did not depend on them? We still considered them our benefactors, knowing that we survived because of them" [Tec, p. 202]. The problem was quickly solved. The Homars were simply afraid of the consequences that could fall on them after the war, when people might find out that they were hiding Jews. So they asked Nechama's family not to betray them under any circumstances and to leave their home still "on Aryan papers," that is pretending to be Poles. "They did not want anyone to know that they had helped a Jewish family to survive. […] Perhaps they did not regret it nor were they ashamed that they rescued us, but no doubt they felt that neither their friends, nor neighbors would approve of them for what they did" [ibidem, p. 203].

To understand this fear, it would require an in-depth and unrestricted analysis of the attitudes of Poles towards Jews before, during, and after the war. This

is beyond the scope of this study. It may be concluded by stating only that sixty years after the war this fear has not been dispelled. This is evidenced by the story of granting the Medal of the Righteous among the Nations to three families from Podkarpacie region, and their pleas that the whole ceremony be carried out in a clandestine manner. In order not to reveal their names.[25]

Those Who Betray

Officers of the 101 Police Reserve Battalion active in the Lublin district since mid-1942 were ordered to ensure that their area of operation is *judenfrei*. In addition to executions, the tasks of the Battalion included sending out "forest patrols" that hunted the Jews in hiding. Policemen dubbed those operations *Judenjagd*, or "hunting the Jews."[26] The hunting metaphor is also frequent in Jewish testimonies. Their authors felt like hunted wild game. They heard the sound of approaching battue, so they tried to hide but the ring of pursuit tightened. Chased, hunted, and cornered, they finally fell prey to hunters. The manhunt was an anachronism compared to the industrial machinery of mass murder set in motion. Its initiators, organizers, and merciless executioners were the Germans. But it was not only from them that the victims were hiding, there was another mortal danger. Jewish notes and testimonies make it clear that the threat came from the neighbors, residents of the same city, or tenants in the same building, passengers on a tram or railway compartment, or passers-by on the street. The countryside was not safe either – in the open space of fields, meadows, or rural roads, a man visible from afar attracted unwanted glances. Where everyone knows one another, a stranger is immediately noticed and draws attention. The authors of analyzed testimonies use the hunting metaphor to describe what Poles did to the Jews.

In countless Jewish testimonies, we encounter a recurrent theme: the story of repeated blackmail, buyouts, changing apartments, changing documents, and new arrests. For Jews, the rhythm of life in hiding is marked by a succession of exposures. Once a house is "burnt," one must run away at once. One must seek new accommodation when the caretaker begins to inquire insistently about one's registration, neighbors give an ultimatum, one's hosts tell one to move out. A Jew lands in the street, homeless, just before curfew, not knowing where to go. Or he leaves a cottage onto the road, with an empty field before him or a forest looming in the distance. The variety of specific situations can be reduced to a common narrative pattern: there are those who are sniffing around, setting a trap, chasing; others are running away from the pursuit, trying at all costs to cover their tracks and hide from stalkers. Only one testimony shall be quoted.

[25] See Paweł P. Reszka, "Lęk 'Sprawiedliwych,'" *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13 February 2006.

[26] Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

Extremely expressive, showing the culmination of the hunt in all its realism: sudden escape, pursuit and capture of the victim, then desperate, one might say – animal struggle for life, to bite "hunter" and break out into the wild. "I grabbed my children's hands and we began to run toward the field. However, one of the peasants caught me and started to drag me back to the house. Unexpectedly, my ten-year son came running and bit the peasant in his hand so viciously, that he let me go for a moment. I started running with all my might, and the children with me. The tall peasant gave up the pursuit and returned to his companions" [Hopfeld, p. 19].

The hunt affects not just the structure of the narrative, but also the language itself. Victims talk of their fate using expressions related in one way or another to hunting, stalking, cornering, and chasing. Here are several examples. In his testimony, Stefan Ernest refers to the great liquidation operation in the Warsaw ghetto and the 'hunting' metaphor includes the German deportation mechanism: roundup, enclosure, pulling people out of their hiding places, and rushing them to the Umschlagplatz. Ernest says that at the time the operation started "in spite of everything, we *were* human beings. Soon, however, we were turned into cornered animals, chased, caught, and hunted" [Ernest, p. 356]. The following examples illustrate the behavior of the Polish neighbors. "The Poles are searching their yards for hidden Jews. They find them in piles of debris, in sheds, or in pigsties," Lejb Rochman notes [p. 57], quoting a story of a peasant named Kuczak from the village of Stare Budki near Mińsk Mazowiecki. Kuczak tells of the capture of fugitives found in the area: Jewish parents with two children. "The whole village had been hunting them for hours," Kuczak chuckled, "until they got caught" [ibidem, p. 64]. It is not surprising that village children play a game of "hunting the Jews. Some of them are 'the Jews' others play the part of 'the peasants' who capture 'the Jews', and the rest are 'the Germans' who arrive summoned by 'the peasants'" [ibidem, p. 231]. In Otwock, after the liquidation of the ghetto, Perechodnik's father and mother witnessed "as the Polish mob organized a hunt for the Jews" [Perechodnik, p. 105]. The author, writing his confession in secret, also noted: "There is a new profession in Warsaw: Jew trackers" [ibidem, p. 124]. A woman who escaped from the ghetto in Otwock, and later lived in Warsaw on Aryan papers notes in her testimony: "I was like a hunted dog. I was not so much afraid of the Germans, as the Poles" [Biederman-Orzechowska]. Ringelblum writes: "Staying on the Aryan side for a Jew means living in constant fear, day and night. […] Blackmailers have sophisticated methods of operation, specific ways to trap the Jews" [Ringelblum, *Stosunki*, pp. 92, 98] Ludwik Hirszfeld, so kind and forgiving towards Poles, admits: "When it was announced that whoever kills a Jew would be allowed to keep his clothes, there were those among the mob who started hunting the Jews. In particular, they were interested in trains to Treblinka and Majdanek" [Hirszfeld, p. 387]. In a memoir written in 1946, the author, who jumped out of a death transport with her baby and was hiding in Warsaw, admits: "Among other heinous acts, we must note the hunt for

the Jews. […] ["blue" policemen – J.L.] on the Aryan side became unparalleled and unfailing Jew hunters, they were a hundred times more dangerous than the Germans" [Altbeker-Cyprys, p. 159].

Recording the Jewish experience during the Holocaust, and thus the experience of the victim, is impossible without the metaphor of the hunt. It seems that it belongs to the darkest formulae that we find in the Jewish Holocaust testimonies. It lacks rapidly conventionalized pathos, there are no cries of terror, no desperate curses, and no pain that cannot be soothed. The metaphor of the hunt is extremely trivial, so rooted in everyday language that it has become almost completely obliterated, transparent. Therein lies, I think, its strength. Here, the hunt for the Jews becomes so ordinary and natural that it escapes notice at first. The logic of exclusion, dehumanization, and objectification triumphs here. The metaphor of the hunt is associated with yet another aspect: its traumatic dimension. It exposes an extreme situation, when a man is reduced to a wild animal, which is hunted and killed. It is, therefore, undoubtedly an image of pain for the authors. For a Polish reader, it has additional dimension – it hurts painfully. Many Jewish testimonies emphasize that the hunt was carried out by the "mob." The question remains to what an extent it can relieve our pain?

* * *

Let us carefully read two testimonies that depict a model situation tracking, capturing, and blackmailing Jews in a condensed form. Focused here are characteristic motivations that drive the actions of denouncers, revealing their attitude to the victims, as well as to what they are doing, one might say – to their own profession. It was also possible to reconstruct the *modus operandi*. One shall need extensive quotations, which shall then enable one to interpret the cited texts and present the portraits of the main characters sketched therein.

First testimony. The action takes place on Good Friday 1943 in Otwock. Under the porch floor of an empty house at Żeromskiego 26 Street, two brothers, Chaim and Simcha Grinbaum, are hiding, with a10-year-old boy and a 15-year-old girl. The house belongs to 75-year-old Franciszka Zawadka and her three sons. "Zawadka has just come back from church […]. Suddenly, at this point, a neighbor came running to the fence, Tola Walicki, crying out alarmed, 'You don't know but there are some Jews under your house' […] they caught Simcha and Chaim Cymajers (their father, Icchak Meir Grinbaum, used to run a dairy store on that street for a long time, and in spite of the sign, many thought that the name 'Cimejers' was the proper name of a family), 'I'll go get Szlicht.' Startled, barely breathing from the terrible news, Franciszka caught her breath, not wanting to waste a minute and spoke in a hectic whisper: 'Tola, don't go! There's no need! Think a moment, hold on, after all they are our Jews, our neighbors… you played with them as a child… tell them to leave the house and go to the market…' 'It's none of your business, grandma; stop sticking your nose every-

where. You're already too old for that now... Better think about yourself,' Walicki said ignorantly and quickly walked down Asfaltowa Street in the direction of the railway line. When Zawadka reached her house, staggering, the brothers Chaim and Simcha were brought forth from under the floor to the surface, firmly held by three other neighbors: Jan Wróbel, Trajda, and Mazur. The Grinbaums were constantly begging their catchers to let them go. But all their lamentations and complaints fell on deaf ears. They waited for the police chief, Szlicht, a man thin and short, but very cruel. 'Tell them to go away now and never come back,' Franciszka tried to appeal to her neighbors. 'Don't try to fool us, you're stupid yourself, you idiot, that's a nasty habit sticking your nose where it doesn't belong. Once Schlicht comes, you will all have a chance to talk to him as long you want,' neighbor Trajda said ironically. [...] Finally Szlicht came in a taxi accompanied by two Germans and slowly, with a big gun in his hand, he approached his victims. The Grinbaum brothers were policemen in the Otwock ghetto. They were often (illegally) smuggling food to the Jews, which they secretly purchased in the surrounding villages. After the liquidation of the ghetto on 19 August 1942, the Jewish police (*Ordnungdienst*) stayed in order to clean up the Jewish homes [...]. For a while, they were hiding in and around Otwock. No longer able to remain in their own area, together with Simcha and a fifteen-year-old girl, they left for the Warsaw Ghetto (they are said to have left), where they stayed until the uprising on 19 April 1943. Escaping from the fire and further on, on Wednesday night they returned to their hometown of Otwock and knowing that the house was empty and has an entrance under the porch, the three of them got into the house that night, where they unexpectedly found a 10–12-year-old boy, who was saved from the 'Centr' colony in Otwock. That fateful Friday evening, the Grinbaums sent the boy to bring a pot of hot water to a Christian, with whom they had arranged it beforehand. Walking down Gliniecka Street, the boy stumbled upon Mazur, a night watchman, who was on night duty along with three neighbors (their trademark – a white-red armband) in that section of the city. It was already after eight in the evening and it was prohibited for the civilian population to be out in the street at the time. The boy was afraid of the caretaker and told him where he was going and where he was supposed to bring the water. The watchman allowed him to go to fetch the water and reported the sensation to his colleagues. The guards took a good look at the house from all sides, and finally found the secret entrance. They immediately brought fire and, having removed sand at the entrance into the porch, they found the hiding place and brought everyone into the yard. The girl (perhaps prompted by the brothers) ran away before Szlicht arrived, unhindered by anyone, and later went crazy. The boy, coming back with tea and hearing what was going on, turned on his heel and just ran away. [...] Szlicht, expert in execution and hecatomb, told the brothers to strip down to their underwear and face the house. One by one, just nine paces away, he shot them hitting the back of the head... The executioner only took their chrome shoes, brand new. He said that the other things were to be divided

between the four criminals and the dead should be buried where they fell, six paces away from the streets. For those hyenas, those robbers, digging a hole was long work because of tangled, branched roots of trees underground. The jackals remembered that there was an old ruined shelter a little way from the yard, so they approached their victims to drag them to the shelter. But they suddenly noticed that Simcha was still alive, and even tried to sit up. He started begging them to let him live. He told them all that he forgave them all that had happened before, and that he could still live with his wounds. Those who heard such an eccentric request to leave the victim in middle of the work, took it as a real 'chutzpah.' The main 'activist' Walicki ran back to get Szlicht. The executioner, annoyed that he wasted his time, that he had to come at night because of the stubbornness of the victim, fired several more shots at the sitting – then lying – martyr. 'I hope the scoundrel is happy now,' said the vampire cynically to his companions while walking back to the taxi. These four bandits were alive. Their former neighbors… The monsters threw the two dead bodies into the shelter and kicked some dirt on top. They were very anxious and hurried, the killers, before the sunrise. […] They also decided that they must carry out a meticulous inspection of the whole house, as the [Jewish – J.L.] policemen or other Jews might have hidden some money, gold or other valuable things there […]. The next day, those very same criminals took a pillow filled with chicken feathers (with a dirty pillowcase) that they found under the floor and also threw it into the shelter on top of the bodies and buried them, this time properly. In 1946, the Grinbaums' sister arrived; she had her brothers exhumed and had their remains buried at the Jewish cemetery in Otwock. After the Red Army and the Polish Army entered Otwock in September 1944, those four criminals were arrested and brought to justice. Trajda, the oldest among them, who sent Walicki for Szlicht twice, and who mocked the pleas and appeals of the poor wretches, was sentenced to death by hanging. His three companions were sentenced to four to ten years in prison. Mazur, who received four years in prison, was released years ago and returned home. […] There were much 'better' scenes in Otwock, and this case was only one drop in the bucket, and people don't remember it as much, they are convinced that there are no more Jews in Otwock, there are no Jews anywhere else either, so there is no one with whom to talk about it, whom to tell" [Goldin].

Second testimony. The village of Sławek near Wołomin, early 1943. In a wooden house with a porch there are Jews living on Aryan papers. Suddenly, two "blue" policemen run in with guns at the ready. They want to bring those hiding to the German gendarmerie station. Negotiations commence.

"– 'We won't go, you can kill us here, why bother us more.'

– 'I have to take you to the Germans,' he replies, 'and what they'll do with you, that's their business.'

– 'But you know what they'll do to us. They'll kill us on the spot. Do you really want us dead so much, don't you feel sorry for two young lives? Imagine yourself in our position.'

The policeman flinches involuntarily. Just you wait, you bastard, I think your turn will come, you German lackey, you traitor!
– 'Why should I care about you,' he says through his teeth. 'What do I care about your life. Anyway, you killed my family in Russia.'
– 'We killed them?'
– 'Yes, you, your brothers in Russia murdered our people.' […]

The conversation continues. At times it seems that the officer grows silent and is willing to arrange something, sometimes again I think it's all lost.
– 'I'm here with my colleagues, we had orders from the station, we need people to deliver.'

Finally, praising his own generosity, he agrees to accept money and demands a sum so exorbitant that we do not even have a tenth of what he wants.

We bargain. It seems to me all is lost. Everything we have is ridiculously little compared to what he demands. Bargaining continues.
– 'Give me gold!, he calls.
– 'Where are we supposed to take it from, do you think that every Jew is stuffed with gold, that he has a dollar minting machine.' […]

In the end I feel so tired of bargaining for life that I sit in a chair with Jurek next to me. Ala is working on the commissioner. She tells him jokes, she pulls on his jacket. She persuades, begs, pleads. In the room where they are talking there is a gramophone. The commissioner plays a record, some oberek. […]

At that point I hear the commissioner say:
– 'Oh, you must be joking, don't insult us. For these pennies we are to leave them be? No, no! Who do you think we are? We are people of some standing, not some amateurs that take twenty dollars for such things.'

Now Ala once again tries to give vodka to the people of some standing and this time she succeeds. After a few rounds the policemen are more cheerful and talkative. They play records. Every now and then a different tune, a loud, cheerful polka, kujawiak, or oberek.
– 'Our wake,' I tell Jurek. […]

The policeman guarding us, with a nasty and pockmarked mug of a common criminal, pities us.
– 'Sure, death is not a happy thing, god damn it, but what can you do, you do what you have to.'

He repeats it over and over. That is his motto. If you have to, you have to serve the Germans, if you have to, you have to kill the Jews, if you have to, you have to rob, and if we have to, we have to die because of the callousness, malice, because of such criminal-faced scoundrels. […]
– 'I like this gramophone! I'll take it and the money, only you need to add some more.'

Bargaining resumes. We add one more thousand in cash, which we have been saving to give to Ala for the month.

We say goodbye. We have to shake that bastard's hand, as if nothing happened.
– 'You can stay now'" [Szac-Wajnkranc, pp. 64–67].

The situations presented in both testimonies occurred in the vicinity of Warsaw, on the east side of the River Vistula. The first one takes place outside, in the streets of Otwock. The setting of the second one is the interior of a wooden house in the village of Sławek. The events that took place in Sławek occurred after a large-scale liquidation operation in the Warsaw ghetto, but before the uprising, in early 1943. The Otwock testimony concerns a very particular day – Good Friday 1943. The middle day of the Easter Triduum was on 23 April, the fifth day of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. It was on that day that the Jewish Combat Organization issued an appeal to the Poles, which read: "Among the smoke of fires and dust of blood of the murdered Warsaw ghetto – we – prisoners of the ghetto – send you a fraternal, cordial greeting. We know that with heartfelt pain and in tears of compassion, with admiration and fear about the outcome of this fight, you are looking at the war that we have been waging for several days against the cruel enemy. […] It is a fight for your freedom and ours."[27]

In Otwock, the tragedy was a matter of blind chance, the carelessness of those in hiding and the attentiveness of the vigilantes (red and white armbands on their sleeves!) patrolling the streets that night. Facing each other are neighbors from the same town: Poles and Jews (in the quoted passage the word "neighbors" is used precisely seven times). The watchmen allow the boy to go back to the hideout, and thus expose it. Someone else immediately notifies Otto Schlicht – commander of the German criminal police in Otwock. Before the German arrived, the Jews had already been brought out into the yard. Here one is dealing with a certain pattern of operation: vigilantes recruiting from the residents of Otwock catch the hiding Jews and deliver them to the German authorities. Perechodnik describes a similar situation: "After half an hour two Polish caretakers appear, escorting Mrs. Krochmalnik between them. They caught her at the ghetto border and fulfilled their 'patriotic duty.' As soon as he noticed Mrs. Krochmalnik, Sołowiejczyk grabbed her, started cursing her and hitting her in the face again and again" [Perechodnik, p. 95].

The old woman was the only one to oppose the entire action, trying to stop the excited men, pleading for the captured and appealing to neighborly solidarity, "after all they are our Jews, our neighbors… you played with them as a child… "She is brutally insulted and pushed away. The "Catchers" are deaf to the appeals of the women and the pleas of the Jews. They behave as if in a trance. What drives them, what makes them violate the bonds of not only neighborly but simply human solidarity? Obedience to even the most stringent regulations of the occupation authorities, or perhaps an irresistible desire to become rich? One learns from the testimony how they cannot wait to plunder the empty house under the cover of night in search of money, gold, and jewelry. However, the motive of robbery shall be addressed separately elsewhere.

[27] See the facsimile of the document in *Polacy–Żydzi 1939–1945. Wybór źródeł*, 425.

Poles are only observers of the act of execution. Their task shall be to bury the body, their reward – being allowed to keep the belongings of the dead, but only those that the German leaves behind because he has the privilege of priority in robbery. This pattern is repeated in other places. In the "Oneg Shabbat" bulletin of 11 June 1942, Eliasz Gutkowski describes the deportation of Jews from Tłuszcz. They were rounded up and taken to Radzymin. "On both sides of the road there were Poles with red armbands that were assigned to bury the Jews shot by the German oppressors if they were too weak. And so it happened. Due to weakness, disease, or some other causes, a great many people stopped on the way and were shot dead on the spot. The Poles immediately buried them on the sides of the road" [ARG I 29 (Ring. I/1062)].

After the execution, the German brute leaves and Polish gravediggers do their job. The work is hard; the roots of trees grow shallow under the ground. And then a gruesome scene ensues. One of the shot Jews turns out to have been only wounded; he sits up and begs for his life. It only makes the gravediggers angry and they call commander Schlicht back. This time, the shots are lethal. Such a relentless consistency is astonishing. The Jews, who were brought into the authorities, must die. There is no place for them, they shall have no mercy, even the ancient custom of letting the convict who survived his execution live does not apply to them. Also twice, but successfully, local peasants denounce the Jews hiding in the forests near Mińsk Mazowiecki. "They had a bunker dug in the ground and they lived there. It was well hidden because of bushes growing on top, I am sure they would have survived had they not been denounced. The local peasants reported to the gendarmes that there were some Jews in the area. It was not long before the result. The following day, we saw through a window, as carts with gendarmes were driving past. […] The Germans could not find a bunker, however. The Jews thought that if the Germans had left and had not found them, they were safe. So they did not run away. But people could not bear the thought that the Jews were alive, and once again went to the gendarmes. This time, the bunker was discovered and everyone was shot" [Siekierka, D, pp. 25–26].

The testimony from Otwock concludes with an epilogue. The blackmailers were arrested in September 1944, after Soviet and Polish troops entered Otwock, they were tried and convicted. The one who called Schlicht was twice sentenced to death. This is an extremely important, yet rare component of the Jewish testimonies about blackmailers and *szmalcowniks*. Post-war trials usually take place after the death of the victims of those who were tried for their crimes of treason, denunciation, and murder.

The Sławek testimony demonstrates the role of the "blue" police in blackmailing Jews[28]. The situation evolves according to a scenario found in other

[28] See Andrzej Żbikowski, "Antysemityzm, szmalcownictwo, współpraca z Niemcami a stosunki polsko-żydowskie pod okupacją niemiecką," in *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką*, particularly pages 455–464.

testimonies. Invading the house, probably preceded by an earlier denunciation, checking the false documents, and threatening the Jews with delivery to the German police station. It is all just a prelude to the start of negotiations. Bargaining for life begins. The theme of bargaining and the imagery of trade are very specific to the narrative of blackmail. After all, everything revolves around money. A novelty here lies in one officer's weakness for the gramophone. A weakness that is a blessing, because in the end it saves the lives of the exposed Jews. But in addition to blackmail carried out on their own initiative, the "blue" police also fulfilled tasks assigned them by the Germans as part of the extermination operation.[29]

Worthy of note is the peculiar sense of being of "some standing." The policemen regard themselves as true professionals, and, as befits experts, they set their rate accordingly, thus ensuring that the standards of the profession are maintained. Too low a ransom degrades the blackmailer, insulting his professional pride. It is known, however, that negotiations often ended with lowering, sometimes significantly, the amount originally requested. The "blue" police were not only professionals, but also realists. Leokadia Schmidt tells the story of her husband being blackmailed solely by the Polish policemen on the basis of denunciation. The author's husband is handcuffed, led out from his hiding place, and taken into custody at the "blue" police station. Bargaining lasts for several days. From a hundred thousand, which the blackmailers demanded at the beginning, the sum is lowered to thirty thousand zlotys for the officers directly involved, and fifty dollars for the "head agent of the station." This way, the matter was settled. "The protocol specified suspicion of handling stolen goods as a reason for arrest. In the absence of evidence, the suspect is released. […] At the farewell [the blackmailer – J.L.] advised my husband to get out of the neighborhood" [Schmidt, pp. 210–212].

Also interesting is the theme of "revenge" which introduces an "ideological" justification for blackmail. "You killed my family in Russia," says the policeman, thus repeating rumors of betrayal by the Jews after the 17 September 1939 and the terrible wrongs they did to the Poles, which were circulating in the Nazi-occupied Poland. The same author gives yet another example of "ideological and patriotic" motivations of extortionists in blue police uniforms. One day policemen stop Jews returning from Warsaw to Sławek and lead them to a house where "a clandestine meeting of a Polish underground organization" is held. Examination of "Aryanism" and inspection of documents takes place in front of the conspirators, who presented their own weapons, or simply "pulled out their guns ready to fire." Seeing this, "the policemen grunt. 'We have not come after

[29] For more on the involvement of the "blue" police in extermination operations in the Lublin district see: Dariusz Libionka, "Polska ludność chrześcijańska wobec eksterminacji Żydów – dystrykt lubelski," in *Akcja Reinhardt. Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie*, ed. Dariusz Libionka (Warsaw: IPN, 2004), 316–319.

you now, [...] it was just about your race, but I can see you're Poles.' The Underground members sitting at the table do not respond to the blackmail of the Jews. The policemen threaten the arrested and scream, 'We'll kill you like dogs, we'll avenge our wrongs [...], the wrongs against our brothers!' [...] Several hours later, all policemen are appeased and agree to a ransom in money" [Szac-Wajkranc, pp. 70–72].

Finally, an issue of paramount importance for the understanding of the mechanisms of human activity in a totalitarian system. The story relates that: a policeman with the "mug of a common criminal" pities the people he is blackmailing: "'Sure, death is not a happy thing, God damn it, but what can you do, you do what you have to.' He repeats it over and over. That is his motto. If you have to, so you have to serve the Germans, if you have to, you have to kill the Jews, if you have to, you have to rob, and if we have to, we have to die [...]" [Szac-Wajnkranc, p. 66]. Here one deals with a theory of the determinism of human action, expressed in the language of an uneducated man, explaining subservience and submission to any authority. This caricature of ethical tautology ("if you have to, you have to") removes from the frail shoulders of the provincial policeman the unbearable burden of individual judgment of his own actions according to the criterion of conscience.

Here, two brief philosophical comments are of the essence. One type of "the fear of freedom" is automation of an individual prompted by an authoritarian mechanism. Under such circumstances, a particular form of loyalty and subordination develops, which drowns out individual doubts and relieves one of having to make choices on one's own, giving a sense of power derived from belonging to a powerful and victorious group. This authoritarian mechanism was the most characteristic feature of the Nazi movement – Erich Fromm says[30]. For Emmanuel Levinas, the primary attribute of human existence is responsibility for the Other, which is the cornerstone of moral behavior and results from the fundamental act of kinship, or "being for the Other." "Kinship means responsibility, and responsibility is kinship," writes Zygmunt Bauman, who states that the implementation of the Holocaust required not only mobilization of some particularly hostile attitudes toward Jews, but also neutralization of that kinship, the destruction of a sense of responsibility for the Other[31].

* * *

The Jewish testimonies provide various examples of blackmail, betrayal, and delivery into the hands of torturers. There is, however, a unique theme and a specific "character" in these testimonies – namely children acting against the

[30] Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (Routledge Classics, 2001; see in particular chapters: "Mechanisms of Escape" and "Psychology of Nazism").

[31] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust (*Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989; chapter "Towards A Sociological Theory of Morality").

Jews. The cultural opposition between "child" and "adult" is undermined here in a very particular way. The ability to do evil, attributed to adults, is suddenly manifested in children in an incomprehensible way. Under the occupation, in the context of hunting the Jews and draconian penalties for helping them, some children's games and pranks take on a sinister character. Children imitate adults; they ape their behavior and gestures. But is making fun of Jews, humiliating them, threatening denunciation, finally taking part in the pursuit of the fleeing – is all that merely the result of wartime savagery, corruption, carelessness and imitating bad models?

In the analyzed texts, children play the role of beaters, to use the hunting allegory again, or trackers sensing the Jews with a sixth sense. Once they capture their victim, they are relentless – they bully and threaten. Lejb Rochman tells a story of such episode. A Jewish boy, hiding in the vicinity of Mińsk Mazowiecki, helped by a number of peasants; one day encountered a bunch of teenagers on his way. They rushed after him. "He ran to our house. The boys wanted to drag him out, but Auntie stood in the doorway, and Felek's wife [*Felkowa*] chased them away with a broom. They surrounded the house, however, demanding the boy; and if she agreed, they would take Konyak to the police, but they would not tell anyone that she was hiding him. Were she to refuse, they would summon the police and it would be worse. The gang stood by the door and windows, making such a noise that within half an hour dozens of boys and girls of all ages crowded in the yard, shouting: 'Give us the Jews! The police are already coming! Felkowa is hiding Jews! The police are coming! Give us the Jews!' When it got dark, the kids went away and Konyak escaped" [Rochman, p. 133]. The cries of "Jew! Jew!" were not at that time a manifestation of ordinary rudeness or pranks. They could be lethal. One woman, who had lived in Vienna before the war and who spoke excellent German, pretended to be a Viennese citizen with a Jewish husband. The children of Otwock harassed her relentlessly. "I couldn't walk down the street because Polish teenagers were shouting 'Jude!' after me" [Biederman-Orzechowska].

Are children more easily tricked by the Jews who hide their identity? In other words, are they more likely to "buy the tale," to believe in a made up story? Perhaps they are more naïve and gullible. Gitla Hopfeld managed to fool a crowd of teenagers, who pestered her on a country road near Lublin. "On the road leading to the village we encountered a group of Polish teenagers. One of them cried out: 'Hey, it's a Jewess with two bastards!' I walked a few steps toward him and roared: 'Shut your mouth, you brat! Don't you dare to insult a Polish woman and her children!' It worked. They apologized to me, saying that they thought we were Jews fleeing from Markuszów" [Hopfeld, p. 21].

The woman stopped by Polish teenagers and exposed as a Jew defends herself by denying and trying to convince the denouncers that they have falsely accused an "innocent" Pole. Thus, she silently accepts the wolf's head law of the Holocaust. A Jew is guilty *ex definicione*, and as a Jew is doomed by principle.

In the world where the scene takes place, there is a fundamental difference between a Jew – subject to that wolf's head law unconditionally and without exception an outcast, prosecuted, denounced, and killed, and a Pole – immune from that law. The woman caught by the children does not appeal to their conscience, nor to the Christian commandment to love one's neighbor, nor even refers to the principles of good conduct and respect for elders. She defends herself by maintaining her false identity. It is as if a Pole and a Jew belong to separate worlds. As if the fact that it is the Jew who is condemned, outlawed, sent to the Holocaust was for both sides – the persecuted and the persecuting – obvious and understandable by itself.

Children are particularly ruthless against other children. Alicja Prechner was five years old when the war broke out. She hides in Włochy at her Polish uncle's home, who married her aunt, a Jewish convert, before the war. She really wants to play with her peers, but she cannot. It is too dangerous. "A couple of times I went out into the yard, but the kids immediately recognized me and all they ever said was: 'Jew! Jew!' Once a German was passing by, and one girl said to me, 'Tell me, you're a Jew, right?' I said no. And she said, 'I'm going to tell the German!' I begged her: 'Don't tell him, don't tell him!' And she said, 'What are you afraid of, as you aren't?' Then I ran away, because she certainly would have told the German. I did not go out anymore because the kids would tell the police"[32] [Prechner]. In Bełżyce near Lublin the son of the author of yet another testimony was attacked by children on Sunday at the church, after the Holy Mass. They started screaming that he is a Jew. "In despair, Stasiek fled to the church to seek help from the priest, who had prepared him for his first communion. The priest came out and yelled at the boys, confirming that Staś was a Pole, an orphan, and that it was a great sin to attack him" [Hopfeld, p. 87]. In Wieliczka, shortly after the beginning of the liquidation, the Schönker family managed to hide in a field. Little Henryk goes to get some bread in the town. Then some boy leans out of the window on the ground floor and starts shouting at passers-by: "'That's a Jew! Catch him! Catch him!' […] Several passers-by looked at me, but no one responded. […] No one tried to stop me. Someone even smiled at me" [Schönker, p. 135]. In the end, it was not "the Jew" who was caught by passers-by, but his little denouncer. The last example is from Turkowice where nuns ran an orphanage. Among their Polish charges, the sisters hid Jewish children. There was also Michał. One day, the Z. brothers surrounded him in the courtyard of the orphanage in such a way as to prevent his escape. The elder one said: "We know you're a Jew, tomorrow the Germans will be here, we will tell them about it and they'll deal with you" [Głowiński, p. 113].

A little boy was sitting in the closet, and when he could get out and walk around the room, under no circumstances was he allowed to approach the win-

[32] Characteristic difference between the manuscript of the account ("because the kids would tell the police") and the typewritten copy ("because I was afraid of the kids").

dow. "My uncle said that if he would look out of the window, the Germans would shoot him." The boy sat in the closet, scared. He could hear some rustle and clatter. As if someone was tapping on the window. "He opened the closet and ran on tiptoe to the window. Opposite, by a red wall, boys were playing a game of buttons. A tree branch hit the window. […] One boy was kneeling over a puddle and playing with a small white ship. In the sky, there was no sun. The boy with the small ship raised his head, suddenly grabbed the ship and ran to the window. His face was glued to the window […]. The boy from the closet stood at the window, petrified […]. Boy with the ship had motionless eyes of yellow glass. Suddenly, he blinked and shouted something. A cluster of boys ran from the red wall to the window. […] 'Jew! The boys started to jump and chant:' Jew, Jew, Jew!' and then again stuck their faces, lips, noses, eyes, and tongues to the glass pane […]. The boys scattered in all directions, crying 'Jew, Jew, Jew!," it is a story narrated by Tadeusz Różewicz, and thus a literary testimony, this time from the Polish perspective. "The Branch"[33] is one of those few works that, while very modest in size, are truly remarkable, conveying the incomprehensible experience of the Holocaust. Różewicz speaks to us in a low voice, almost a whisper. It is not easy to forget the crossing glances of the boys from two sides of the window, and children's cries of "Jew, Jew, Jew!"

Ten years after the war, William Golding, who was later awarded the Nobel Prize, published his *Lord of the Flies*. This novel may be read as a parable of human history. A group of boys are stranded on a desert island and the group passes, in a sense, through different stages of development of human society. Some perceive the message of Golding's masterpiece in unveiling the truth that the tendency to totalitarianism is an inherent quality of human nature, others – that man naturally secretes evils, like a bee makes honey[34]. *Lord of the Flies* helps one to understand the testimonies concerning children who persecuted Jews during the Holocaust. One scene is particularly striking – beating little Simon to death with sticks. The boys are dancing around a fire, entranced, and shout repeatedly: "Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!"[35] Children's play turns into a real murder.

[33] Tadeusz Różewicz, "Gałąź," in *Męczeństwo i zagłada Żydów w zapisach literatury polskiej*, selected, edited, and introduced by Irena Maciejewska (Warsaw: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1988), 382–383.

[34] See notes by Małgorzata Czermińska and Maria Janion in a discussion on *Lord of the Flies* entitled "Dzieci na bezludnej wyspie," in *Dzieci*, selected and edited Maria Janion and Stefan Chwin (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1988), vol. 1, 229–302.

[35] William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1954).

Those Who Rob

Every war opens the door to robbery. In war, people lose their health and lives; they lose their loved ones and their possessions. But war also helps people to enrich themselves, some even make fortunes. Heavy industry giants, suppliers of raw materials and fuel, arms dealers – they all do excellent business and earn great income. For a simple man functioning in the world of inverted wartime morality, war creates different opportunities for robbery. In the world of war there are different laws, rules of "peaceful coexistence" become eroded, even destroyed, everything is overturned or reversed: one may do what was formerly forbidden, there is a sharp polarization: the enemy – the friend; the other – the familiar; the oppressor – the victim. War brings destruction, but also tempts with a chance of a quick revenge, compensation of losses. War stirs the passion for possession because it creates many opportunities to satiate – taking a shortcut – material appetites. In a situation of occupation, when the country and the society are conquered and enslaved, deprived of their representatives and public institutions, very specific relationships develop between people. The occupation authorities are playing different social groups against one another in order to manage and consequently destroy them. They divide and rule, they terrorize and distribute privileges, they bring out the worst instincts in people, they appeal to the basest motives. In the world of occupation laws and customs, there will always be the weak, the defenseless, and the incapacitated, which can be robbed with impunity. There are always individuals and groups excluded from the law (be it that of the war or the occupation). Finally – there are always the dead, who in no way can defend themselves against robbery.

The Germans, as the organizers and executors of the Holocaust, carried out seizures of Jewish property on a gigantic scale.[36] Everyone else who wanted and dared to take advantage of the "opportunity" created by the Germans (segregation and separation of the Jews; depriving them of their rights, especially the right to life; persecution, prosecution, and killing), could take part in the robbery. The realities of the "final solution" brought a unique opportunity to employ the age-old thieving instincts, they also enabled new forms of robbery to arise. Certain situations were related both with subsequent phases of the Holocaust process, and the specifically understood "effects" or "outcomes" of these processes. It is about the property that the Jews deported to ghettos or staying on the Aryan side wanted to place in a safe place in order to secure the material means to fight for survival. Thus hidden, the property is under the care of their Polish neighbors, or closer and more distant acquaintances. It is about money and valuables that people jumping out of death transports, abandoning com-

[36] See Götz Aly, *Państwo Hitlera*, trans. Wojciech Łygaś (Gdańsk: Finna, 2007) [original edition: *Hitlers Volkstaat. Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005)].

promised hideout, or fleeing from their pursuers may have with them. It is also about clothes and linen that they are wearing. It is also about the already "formerly Jewish" property, that is all that remains of the deported and murdered Jews. The German have the privilege of priority in the robbery, jealously guarded and often brutally enforced; hence the severe punishment for unwary thieves. It was the Germans who set the rules and organized the dealings themselves. For example, they arranged a public sale for a song, or simply allowed appropriation of the property, be it in the form of reward, or to show kindness and generosity. The analyzed testimonies make it clear that the German rules were routinely violated, and the robbers carried out "expropriation" on their own, sometimes risking their lives.

The subject of robbery is by far the most discussed in the Jewish testimonies concerning relations with the Poles. The image of the Poles as seen through the eyes of the Jews is in this very context particularly expressive. From the perspective of the authors of these testimonies, Polish neighbors are in various ways involved in everything that can be described briefly by the formula of "(formerly) Jewish [*pożydowskie*] things." Before analyzing the specific relationships and attempts to capture the image of Poles emerging from them, one may first focus on two specific types of testimonies. I am referring to the poems by Władysław Szlengel *Things*, and Zuzanna Ginczanka *Non omnis moriar*. The authors did not survive the war. Szlengel was killed during the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. Ginczanka, hiding from the time the Germans invaded Lwów, plagued by subsequent blackmailers and running from extortionists, eventually fell victim to denunciation in the autumn of 1944. In December 1944, just before the liberation of Krakow, where she had been hiding, she was shot in Płaszów. The two poems not only provide a poetic framework for the discussion undertaken in this part of the work, but also – and perhaps primarily – an unparalleled testimony of existential experience. They give the issue of (formerly) Jewish things and their robbing, seizing, or settlement, their ostentatious presence in the post-Holocaust landscape devoid of the Jews – a higher, even metaphysical dimension.

The epic tale of Jews deported to the Warsaw ghetto, then moving from place to place within the walls of the still declining closed neighborhood, until finally coming to the Umschlagsplatz, is told by Szlengel as the story about things. During the final journey, this whole microcosm of things: "furniture, tables, stools,/ suitcases, bundles,/trunks, boxes, and shoes,/suits, portraits/bedding, pots, carpets,/and drapes from the wall./cherry vodka, jars large and small,/glasses, platters, kettles,/books, ornaments, and everything" – gradually dissipates at the subsequent stops. One eventually must leave the furniture, carpets and platters somewhere; one can no longer drag books, jars and pots with one. Your backpack will fit only "a water bottle," perhaps even "a warm scarf," and for the lucky few "a strong pill" of poison. The train departs, but houses and apartments remain, as well as bundles and suitcases abandoned on the street.

The wind through the window
Stirs the sleeve of a cold shirt,
The quilt is dented
As if someone was burrowed in it,
Things lie about awry,
The apartment is dead,
Until the rooms are filled
With new people: Aryans…
They will close the open windows,
They will start a life free of worries,
And they'll make the beds,
And they'll get under the Jewish quilts
And put on the shirt,
They'll put books on bookshelves,
They'll empty the coffee cup,
They'll finish the game of cards together.[37]

Things left by the exterminated quickly changed their owners; the empty space left by the Jews is swiftly filled. Life abhors a vacuum. Calek Perechodnik makes a similar painful observation, mixed with his characteristic bitter irony. Writing down his confession in Warsaw after Szlengel's death, he recalls the liquidation of the ghetto in Otwock. "Part of the ghetto was already little by little inhabited by Poles. Polish women calmly bustled around in houses where warm bodies still lay, they were peeling potatoes outside; the Jews saw it all. It was the last image they registered before they died. Their fellow Polish citizens started new, carefree lives, occupied their dwellings, inherited their property, and the Jews, seeing this beautiful new world developing, had to die (after all, they are Jewish, aren't they?), they had to lay down on their bellies on the ground and wait for the 'saving ball' in the neck to sooth their aching heart" [Perechodnik, p. 91].

[37] I am quoting the lines of the poem after Władysław Szlengel *Co czytałem umarłym. Wiersze z getta warszawskiego*, collected and edited by Irena Maciejewska (Warsaw: PIW, 1977), 125–128. Szlengels poem was published in the underground magazine *Kultura Jutra* 8/9 (1943). The magazine, edited by Jerzy Turowicz et al., was one of the press organs of "Unia" and came out in Warsaw in the years 1943–1944. The editors wrote a commentary for the text, which not so much proves the confusion of the publishers as confirms the specific character of the reception of Szlengel's poems, circulating from hand to hand in handwritten copies and treated as elusive poetry, anonymous in the noblest sense of the word, that is being the voice of the collective: "During the competition for a poem about Warsaw, I accidentally got my hands on a poem abandoned in the street by a young Jewish woman, led by the Germans from the small ghetto to the large one where the Jews were massacred. We print this poem as a curiosity and a document of sorts of recent events." I would like to thank Dr. Dariusz Libionka for directing this document to me.

In *Non omnis moriar*, undoubtedly one of the darkest Polish poems, Ginczanka evokes the great Horatian tradition and the masterpiece of Polish romanticism, to make their devastating reversal. In the style of perverse persiflage, using language dripping with sarcasm and sophisticated mockery, she leaves, in a way from beyond her grave, her horrific will. Let us quote the poem in its entirety.

Non omnis moriar – my proud estate,
of table linen fields and wardrobes staunch
like fortresses, with precious bedclothes, sheets,
bright dresses – all remain behind me now.
And as I did not leave here any heir
You, Chomin's wife, the snitch's daring wife,
Volksdeutcher's mother, swift informant, please
Allow your hand to dig up Jewish things.
May they serve you and yours, and not some strangers.
"My dear ones" – it's no song, nor empty name.
do remember you, and when the Schupo came,
You did remember me. Reminded them of me.
So let my friends all sit with goblets raised
To toast my memory and their own wealth,
their drapes and kilims, candlesticks and bowls.
And may they drink all night, till break of dawn,
And then begin to search for jewels and gold
In mattresses and sofas, quilts and rugs.
Oh, and what quick work they'll make of it
Thick clumps of horsehair, sea grass stuffing, clouds
of cushions torn and puffs of eiderdown
Will coat their hands and turn their arms to wings
My blood will bind these fibres with fresh down,
And thus transform these winged ones to angels.[38]
[*Poem translated by Aniela Pramik and Geoffrey Cebula*].

In the ode opening with the words *Exegi monumentum aere perennius*, Horace proudly proclaimed that with his works he erected a monument more lasting than bronze, and that *non omnis moriar*, as long as there is Rome, read: the world, it will, he continued, take his immortal songs. Ginczanka leaves a legacy to the world, read: for Chomin's wife and other extortionists, your things so much desire and that will feed them for a long time after the murder. Juliusz Słowacki in his famous poem *Testament mój* [My Testament] beseeches "may the living never lose hope/and carry the light of knowledge before the people;/and when need be, to go to their death one after the other,/like the stones God hurls at the

[38] Quoted in *Męczeństwo i zagłada Żydów*, 147.

tops of ramparts!" and leaves behind this "fatal force" that "shall turn ordinary people into angels."[39] Ginczanka does not have even the smallest circle of friends who would – as in Słowacki's case – gather at night to burn the heart of the poet wrapped in aloe, and give the ashes to the mother. The only people who take interest in her are spies, informers and denouncers. It is they who gather for the wake, which turns into a thieving orgy of searching, rummaging, digging, and sniffing for gold. These "inheritors" of the poet, completely absorbed in their "godly" effort of robbing, become angels *à rebours*. These "angels" were found here and there in occupied Poland. It is not the "fatal force," nor the greatness of spirit and power of poetry that transforms man into an angel, it is just feathers from torn bedding and tow from a ripped mattress mixed with the blood of the victims that stick to the arms of the robbers suggesting angelic wings.

* * *

One must distinguish between robbing through violence or deceit, and moving into former Jewish homes, taking possession of movable and immovable property left behind by the murdered Jews. This distinction is reflected in the examined testimonies. The scenes of filling the void left by the Jews, as in the quoted passage from Perechodnik, do not appear too often. These are crowd scenes, included in the general plan; the faces of individual people are not visible. This is not a portrait, but rather a landscape. Adam Kamienny, along with other Jews detained in a labor camp, comes to Kałuszyn in the winter of 1942 after the liquidation of the ghetto there. In the distance he sees the transformed city and the hectic bustle of neighbors. "Just as after the burning of our city during the war, so now I did not recognize the streets. Almost all houses were demolished. Here and there, some skeletons are protruding, and the Poles tear down the remains, loading carts and driving them elsewhere" [Kamienny, p. 34].

Other testimonies depict Poles attacking and robbing the Jews. Not only did they take money and valuables, they also stole clothes. They acted as a group, like the band described by Hirszfeld. "The Klembów forest is the first woodland area outside of Warsaw in the direction of Treblinka. [...] Those who chose to jump from the train sometimes received the property of their fellows in misery. [...] Those wretches were wandering in the forest, where the wounded often died. Some of them asked the local population for help. It was not a trivial matter: hiding or helping was punishable by death. And yet some of them hid the Jews or offered them some food. But such manifestations of generosity cannot mask another image: escapees were also the prey for many local residents. They went after them as on a hunt, to rob them of dollars and valuables" [Hirszfeld, pp. 416–417]. They also acted alone. One such accident was described by an escapee from Treblinka. "The peasant with whom we wanted to spend the night,

[39] Quoted in Juliusz Słowacki, *Utwory wybrane* (Warsaw: PIW, 1965), vol. 1, 41–42 [trans. K.G.].

having realized that we had money, separated us deceitfully claiming that he was afraid and so he had to take us to his home individually. I went first. In the forest, he robbed me and I lost about 50,000 zlotys I took from the camp. He left me the securities which he did not recognize (I also managed to save precious stones hidden in a matchbox), and let me go, to walk the road I did not know" [ARG II 378 (Ring. II/295)].

In the Jewish testimonies, a particularly clear mark is left by the deeply hurtful experience of being robbed by fraud, deceit, and exploitation of the hopeless situation of victims and their absolute dependence on false friends. Authors record more such duplicitous thefts than open acts of aggression or robbery. They lament the loss of their possessions, but it seems that they are more hurt by the betrayal of trust, loss of hope for a sincere impulse of help, and destruction of bonds of human solidarity. The mechanism of insidious theft is simple and repeated almost unchanged in many relationships. Jewish things left for safekeeping are simply appropriated, contrary to earlier arrangements and solemn promises, they are not returned at the request of their owners.

The perpetrators seem to be oblivious to the fact that their actions constitute robbery; instead they think they are clever to make use of such opportunity; they exact the costs of high risk, avenge long-standing grievances and take what is their due. Some were truly extreme in their sophisticated cynicism and treachery. Perechodnik mentions such people. Owners asking for the return of their things would hear: "The gendarmerie took them, don't ever come here again'. There were those who even demanded the return of one thousand Polish zlotys, which they had to give to the gendarmes to bribe them because of the Jewish things. After a month or two, the Jew died and everything was still fine" [Perechodnik, p. 125]. Maria Koper in her testimony about the loss of things left with an acquaintance of hers focuses on the feeling of disappointment. A respected and trusted person betrays that trust, lying and playing for time. All this in order to obtain a few dresses, blouses, a coupon of fabric. "And Mrs. Bazylik always told me that if something were to happen, I was to go to her and leave my things safe with her. I was so terribly disappointed in her, which I never would have believed because I used to think she was a very respectable woman […]. I go to Mrs. Bazylik, she was not at home, and [the husband] threatens me with gendarmerie. I think to myself, they were supposed to be decent people, and it turns out they are not" [Grynberg–Koper, pp. 17, 22–23].

* * *

A thief is driven by the desire to get rich, to gain tangible material benefits. It is, one might say, a pragmatic motivation for theft. In the analyzed records one finds that another motivation is also revealed, an irrational one, which has its source in some atavistic hunger for things, an untamed and unquenchable desire to possess. After the liquidation of the ghetto in Otwock, the author of

one testimony sees "the local villagers who fell on the goods left by the Jews like hyenas" [Kamiński]. In Kałuszyn "peasants from the entire area came in hordes, as if it was some great holiday […]. Just like crows fall on carrion, so they flocked to the scene of bloodshed, soaked with the blood of 1,200 innocent men, women, children, and the elderly, fighting and trampling one another in the struggle for a better piece" [Stone, p. 18]. In another testimony concerning Otwock one reads of local peasants looting abandoned Jewish houses and dragging out everything they could carry, and hordes of Polish teenagers attacking the Jews and taking everything they find on them, even shoes, which they forcibly pull off the refugees' feet [see Hopfeld, pp. 53–54]. In Kałuszyn, one of the peasants could not pass through the frantic crowd looting former Jewish houses, and when he finally arrived there only scraps were left. "All he managed to grab was a few pieces of pipe, a metal milk can, and two tablespoons. Now he shall be able to eat with silver spoons, like an aristocrat" [Rochman, p. 23]. In Wołomin, following the deportation of Jews at the beginning of October 1942, a thieving madness broke out. Leokadia Schmidt describes the scene of robbery in terms of collective insanity: frantic people fighting over things, they are insatiable. "After completing the work of destruction, the ghetto was empty, and the people rushed to the apartments, pillaging and plundering everything. Zosia said it was not without fighting. Who had stronger fists, took the best things. Throughout Sunday, people brought all sorts of furniture, linens, and much, much more" [Schmidt, pp. 156–157].

In the villages, the trade in Jewish possessions is thriving, says Lejb Rochman, hiding in a peasant's house near Mińsk Mazowiecki. The image of a Mazovian village during the occupation, which he depicts, is both dark and laughable. It is difficult to shed an impression that the author condenses the colors and shapes of his depiction, that he makes it grotesque and distorted. Triviality coincides here with profanity, objects of religious devotions are used for everyday farm activities or for decoration, peasants wear elegant Jewish clothes, rooms are filled with Jewish linens, and the wind carries torn Torah scrolls to the fields. All this creates frightening and surreal scenery. "Every house is loaded with items looted during the liquidation of ghettos. As soon as the Jews were deported from the ghetto and murdered, thousands of peasants immediately swarmed there, even old women and children. People dragged out everything they could fit on their wagons filled up to the brim. What they could not take right away, they later bought from the Germans for a song at 'sales of used Jewish things.' […] Houses are full of furniture, dishes and pans, clothes and linen. There is not enough space for it all. People are looking for buyers, but it is difficult to find customers for everything. So the best furniture is chopped for firewood. Clothes are refitted; there are three quilts on each bed, six pillows, and four mattresses. Old women put on in girls' flowery dresses. Men parade in Hasidic coats, the everyday ones and the satin ones for the Sabbath. Peasant linen caps peek from behind decorated silk-upholstered prams. Rural girls wear elegant blouses and

dresses made from tallit's, berets made from black velvet hats worn by the Hasidim, and fur shawls made from Hasidic *shtreimels*[40]. On peasants' tables, there are spice dishes and silver wine goblets for saying *Kiddush*[41], and cupboards and drawers are decorated with silver tablets adorning the Torah, instructions for reading the Torah, and Sabbath candelabra. The wind scatters thousands of pages from the Torah, Talmud, commentaries, ethical and Hasidic writings, religious treaties, classical and contemporary Jewish literature, scientific and philosophical texts. Heaps of such pages pile up in peasant sheds, later sold by pounds or kilograms as packaging paper, used for wrapping ham, herring and so on. The leather binding of the books is converted into a variety of useful items, such as bags and wallets" [Rochman, pp. 24–25].

In addition to the atavistic hunger for things, traces of another passion to which Poles succumb is found in the Jewish testimonies. I would call it a childlike joy of having trinkets. It is impossible to resist, even at the cost of exposure to mortal danger. If someone has suffered poverty all his life and now boasts of "pretty," expensive trinkets, he is immediately compromised. It is clear that he has Jewish money and Jewish things, which brings upon him suspicion of committing the felony of helping Jews. But Felek goes to church on Sundays in an elegant suit and a silk shirt that he got from Lejb Rochman, although it could betray him to his neighbors who have long suspected him of harboring Jews. In his elegant clothes, he parades through the village, "happy as a child. He knows he could be killed because of it" [Rochman, p. 74].

* * *

Jewish testimonies do not stop at the story of robbery. The image of those who rob is often deepened with the dimension of interpretation. This is due to the inquisitiveness of the authors themselves, who go beyond a basic testimony and try to understand the motivations of the people described. Often, the described are themselves glad to do a self-presentation, carefully recorded by the Jewish witness. What emerges is an entire structure of thought, which was built for the use of the occupation-time thieves, who – partly consciously, partly unconsciously – justify their deeds. One may deconstruct the argument used here to indicate the type and the strategy of defense. To this end, one may use this method of paraphrase.

The starting point of the line of thought reconstructed here is a chronic state of insatiability, the state of constant deprivation. The Poles still have too little, and the Jews always have more. Regardless of whether the cause of this is actual poverty, or resentment, the observation which is derived from the problem and which is axiomatic, reads: "I (Pole) do not have – you (Jew) have."

[40] A hat made of fox or sable fur, worn by Hasidim on Shabbat and holidays.

[41] A prayer recited by the head of the family over a cup of wine, starting the Sabbath or any other holiday.

A key theme of the next argumentative link is the appeal to the "common sense" and the "rational" – in the ordinary sense of the word – calculation. "If I am going to live, and you as a Jew have no chance of survival, actually, you're already dead, why leave your things for the Germans, since I cannot have them. You won't need them anymore, so it'd be a shame to waste them. Let someone else benefit from them. Let it be not a German, but a Pole, not the 'other' but the 'familiar.' The Germans are your enemies; they chase you and want to kill you. You don't want your belongings go to hands so unworthy. It'd be better if it falls to me, your neighbor. We have known each other for years. I'm appealing to your sense of neighborly solidarity."

Now comes the climax of the act of persuasion. You have to finally convince the Jew, but you should also once again to convince yourself. "Be wise, be mature, be brave and practical at the same time. Demonstrate the courage to recognize your own situation that is accept the message of the inevitable. Accept the irrevocable sentence of death and its inevitable execution, and thus be both heroic (go to death consciously), and practical (make your own death useful, let it bring tangible benefits). After all, you have to die anyway, so show some understanding for your neighbor and his needs. Come now, when it's not too late. Give of your own free will, do not 'make me' rob you with violence, do not hurt me like that. I'm appealing to your common sense."

Let us illustrate this argument with several examples. Perechodnik tells the story of a certain Bujalski, "who considers himself a pure patriot and a good man," and who made the following comment regarding the behavior of a Jew: "So many years I have been trading with that Jew, and just you think, he didn't leave anything with me for safekeeping. They took him to Treblinka and what did he get from that? He could've left his goods with me, we'd known each other for so many years after all" [Perechodnik, p. 126]. Hanna Najwer from Falenica describes the behavior of Polish acquaintances who came to her just before the liquidation of the ghetto in hopes that "maybe they'll get or buy something, because after all you won't take everything with you" [Najwer]. During the liquidation of the ghetto in Mińsk Mazowiecki, Lejb Rochman with his wife and sister in law hid in the grass in the Szczepaniak family garden. Mr. Szczepaniak comes up to them and says, "You have to leave. But if you have gold, I can bribe the Germans before they come here. You'd better give it to me. If they shoot you, the gold won't do you much good" [Rochman, p. 56]. A Pole from Kałuszyn to whom Adam Kamienny entrusted his things, does not wish to return anything except a broken stool and a leaky mug. "He explained that he wouldn't give us the rest because they'd probably finish us off soon, so why should it fall into other hands?" [Kamienny, p. 43].

* * *

A Jew who lived in hiding, evading, misleading and avoiding pursuit, was still a potential source of income. A dead Jew also had a great value. The cus-

tom of preying on corpses, the key quality of scavengers, it is commonly found also in human civilization. From ancient tomb robbers to their modern followers, from ancient battlefields to contemporary trenches, one observes the constant bustle around dead bodies: taking weapons, plundering pockets, removing clothes.

One may recall a certain scene. The story takes place eighty years before the Holocaust. The setting, however, is familiar: the area of Nasielsk, which lies outside the Warsaw district during the occupation, in the *Regierungsbezirk Zichenau* (Ciechanów district). An insurgent of the January uprising, Szymon Winrych, is carrying guns for the insurgent party through the Mazovian bog. Hungry, shivering, and wet, he is moving cautiously so as not to fall into a trap. The Muscovites notice his gun-filled wagon in the open field. Winrych has no chance of escape. Soldiers capture him, kill him brutally and leave, having turned out his pockets first. Crows flock to the corpse lying in the field. Also, crawling on all fours, there is "a poor man, a peasant from a village nearby […] A desire to cut the straps was burning within him, so excited he was by a sweet hope that, despite the soldiers' inspection, he might still find some scraps of metal, strings, or clothing on the corpse". Before setting to work, the peasant "took off his cap, crossed himself, and said a prayer out loud. As soon as he said the last amen, with lust already gleaming in his eyes, he lunged for the pockets and began to look for the purse. It was no longer there. Then he stripped the corpse of the overcoat, thick linen rags and boots, he even took the muddied footcloth, wrapped some weapons in these rags, and quickly departed". The peasant returned to Winrych's corpse and the dead horse several times. He did not kill the other horse, struggling in a harness with a broken leg. "Ah, stay here… By tomorrow morning you'll have kicked the bucket anyway. I'm worn out from all that work. Merciful Jesus has blessed me, a sinner…" The scene of stripping of the body of an insurgent from a short story by Stefan Żeromski *Rozdziobią us kruki i wrony* [Ravens and Crows Will Peck Us to Pieces] became a harrowing picture of the Polish trauma and embedded itself for good in the national imagination. The story, first published in *Słowo Polskie* in 1894, fits within the canon of heroic patriotism. Who is the peasant who in such a way, "without knowledge and will," takes revenge for the "age-long slavery, for spreading ignorance, for exploitation, for shame and suffering of the people"? Do such great ideological reasons justify what he did? Was Winrych's dead body the setting for an act of historical justice? Żeromski leaves us with the peasant who "went to homewards with his head uncovered and a prayer on his lips. […] Deeply, truly, with all his soul he praised God that in his infinite mercy he sent him so much scrap metal and leather straps." But the last act of the story is different: it is the terrible neighing of the dying horse and the falling darkness. "From beyond the world came night, despair, and death…"[42]

[42] Quoted in Stefan Żeromski, "Rozdziobią nas kruki, wrony…," in idem, *Opowiadania* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1964), 17–27.

Let us return to the Holocaust, in the vicinity of Mińsk Mazowiecki, where on 21 August 1942 the liquidation of the ghetto took place. The Germans were shooting Jews in the city, shooting at people who tried to escape and hide outside the city. During the operation, about a thousand people were killed on the spot[43]. The Pole who wanted Lejb Rochman's family to surrender their gold, says: "Hordes of our boys are roaming the city and stripping the corpses" [Rochman, p. 56]. The same author cites the story of a local peasant called "Alleluja" about how the Germans set fire to a school building where Jews remained after the liquidation of the ghetto. "Many Poles stood by, at a distance, and watched." The victims burn alive or jump out of windows and fall under bullets. The peasants, encouraged by the Germans, start robbing the corpses lying in the street. "The Jews were well-dressed. So all those who were standing by took something. Someone took boots or shoes; someone else took a coat, a pair of undergarments, or long winter underwear. He was unable to reach the vicinity soon enough, so he was left with a bizarre boot, a good one though, he will be able to use it to repair his own shoes. The leather is of good quality. […] When we were stripping the dead of their clothes, a German still pressed a button on some device he was holding, laughing all the time and saying in Polish, '*Dziękuję*' [Thank you]. Cereniak could not stand it: 'They were taking photos of it all!,' he shouted" [Rochman, pp. 18–19]. Considering theft from people jumping out of death transports, Hirszfeld notes that many fugitives were killed on the spot or were dying next to the railway. "In the biting cold, they were stripped naked, coats and clothes were ripped from the dying. I know of a case where a man of good heart turned to the hyenas telling them to wait with taking clothes at least until the dying expire. I was told of a young woman both of whose legs were cut off by the train. She was dying on the railroad of blood loss and cold, when the 'hyenas' arrived and stripped her naked" [Hirszdeld, p. 417].

In Rochman's notes, there is a particularly gruesome scene. Peasants denounced a group of Jews hiding in a forest dugout. Before the arrival of the German gendarmerie, they all managed to escape, but Mrs. Moszko, who was hiding in a potato field, was discovered and shot. The Germans left, leaving orders to bury the body. A Jew who managed to escape the pursuit, watched as "peasants dragged Mrs. Moszko out of the patch of potatoes. Her limbs were stiff. A thin stream of blood flowed from the wet red hair, through her glazed eyes, into the open mouth. Two peasants grabbed her hands and dragged the body to the side. Quickly, a crowd of villagers gathered around – farmers and their wives, girls and young children – and began to dig a hole. One teenager stripped Mrs. Moszko of her clothes and began to hurl them over the crowd. People started to press and push. Women fought fiercely, pulling at each piece of clothing. The boy watched the spectacle, throwing more things into the crowd. […] Next came

[43] See Tatiana Brustin-Berenstein, "Deportacje i zagłada skupisk żydowskich w dystrykcie warszawskim," *Biuletyn ŻIH* 1 (3) (1952), 121.

the undershirt, then underwear. The crowd burst into hysterical laughter. The women, squealing, almost in a fit of rage, lunged at the bloody slip and shorts. 'Hey!' a tall young man shouted. He took the body by the feet and flipped it in one motion. Now it hung, head and hands to the ground, feet in the air. It seemed as if she was standing on her head. 'Hey there!' he screamed again, spreading the legs of the corpse. The crowd fell about laughing. The women shrieked and laughed until tears ran down their cheeks" [Rochman, p. 104]. The peasant in the story by Żeromski approached the insurgent's corpse with awe, and said a prayer before robbing him. The peasants described by Rochman are robbing corpses only to the accompaniment of carnival laughter. Robbing is not enough for them. They desecrate the bodies as well.

And yet another example from Warsaw itself, it shows that not only peasants took part in the shameful robbing of corpses. After the suppression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, Leon Najberg was hiding in the ruins until October. The scene he observed took place on 27 May 1943. "Officers from the seventeenth and eighteenth City Police stations in Warsaw arrived today at four o'clock in the morning to the courtyard of a house at 4 Wałowa Street, and stripped the still warm bodies of Jews from the bunker of their clothing, underwear, and shoes, leaving the 'carrion' naked. They did the same with the corpses of women at 2 Wałowa" [Najberg, p. 93].

Those Who Murder

Since Jedwabne, it is known that during the war there were some Poles who killed Jews. Not by accident, not as a result of unspecified military operations, not in self-defense, but deliberately, methodically, and often cruelly. It is the knowledge that penetrated the darkness of historians' offices and archives and escaped into the light of day, becoming a part of the collective consciousness; it is confirmed by sources; it has been and still is the subject of public debate. The term "neighbors" which is used herein many times ceased to be neutral; it is saturated with that knowledge, as it brings to mind the title of the film by Agnieszka Arnold and the book by Jan Tomasz Gross.

In conclusion, therefore, one descends to the very bottom and looks through the eyes of the Jewish witnesses at the black chapter of occupation history. The problem of crimes against the Jews committed by the Poles shall not be analyzed; the interest is only in how this experience was recorded by the Jews. Thus, a fragmentary perspective is consciously adopted, a subjective point of view is reconstructed. That is why the study is limited to autobiographical sources, memoirs, and testimonies of the victims. Abundant material on this subject can be found in the records of criminal cases investigated after the war on the basis of the August Decree announced by the Polish Committee of National Liberation (*Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego*, PKWN] on 31 August 1944 (known as *sierpniówki* [August cases]), under which persons were tried for war crimes,

crimes of collaboration, crimes against humanity, and involvement in criminal organization[44]. Sources documenting such crimes are also to be found in the archival documentation of the German Special Courts.[45]

Violence begins with beating and physical abuse. An testimony by an anonymous author covers incidents in September 1939. The Germans chased the Jews expelled from Tarczyn to Sieradz and pushed them into the yard of a local jail. There, a German officer "spoke to the Poles in immaculate Polish. He said that all the misery that the Poles are suffering is the Jews' fault. It was because of the Jewish belligerence that Poland lost its independence. The Germans did not have anything against the Poles; were it not for the Jews there would be no war with the Poles. Relations with Poland were excellent until the Jews spoilt them, so they need to be dealt with. The speech had fatal consequences. Enraged Poles rushed to the Jews and beat them badly. It was just simply a pogrom. There was not one Jew who would be uninjured, who would not be covered in blood." Some Polish prisoners cheered the beating; some condemned the perpetrators and demanded that the pogrom stop. The situation calmed down and the Germans began to escort the beaten Jews to the prison. "From the prison yard to the building, the Germans and the Poles lined up in two rows. Every Jew had to go that way, getting terribly beaten by the Germans and the Poles alike. The Jews were hiding in the backyard, so as not to pass through the line. The Poles in the courtyard and the officers pointed through the prison windows to where the Jews were hiding, and the same situation was repeated, other officers shouted at the Poles that they were criminals, that it was a disgrace" [ARG I 1024 (Ring. I/920)].

Crimes were preceded by threats. The widow of a shopkeeper Pesach of Kałuszyn was hiding in the vicinity of Mińsk Mazowiecki. She walked from village to village, asking for help, trying to recover old debts from the peasants. Staszko Kuczak threatened that if that "whore" was to come to him, to Budki, she would not come back. "Everyone in the countryside owes her money. He also owes her a few zlotys. 'We've talked about it among ourselves. Let her show herself here. We'll «pay» her, we will. First, we're going to line up for her, ha, ha, ha, just as we stood in line in front of her shop on a market day. But she won't live to bear any brats, oh no! The police will finish the game'" [Rochman, pp. 102–103]. The theme is old: kill the creditor, ultimately appropriating his belongings or money. For this reason, Henryk Grynberg's father was killed.[46]

[44] See Alina Skibińska, Jakub Petelewicz, "Udział Polaków w zbrodniach na Żydach na prowincji regionu świętokrzyskiego," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 1 (2005).

[45] See Jan Grabowski, *"Ja tego Żyda znam." Szantażowanie Żydów w Warszawie 1939–1943* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2004). The author cites a case file against Czesław Rabański, a farmer from the vincinity of Siedlce, accused of murdering and robbing three Jewish women (pp. 119–122).

[46] See documentary *Miejsce urodzenia* directed by Paweł Łoziński (1992), and book with dialogues from the film: Henryk Grynberg, *Dziedzictwo* (London: Aneks, 1993).

In the examined material, there are records stating that the "blue" police fired at the Jews. Eliasz Gutkowski writes in the "Oneg Shabbat" bulletin that in the spring of 1942 "the Germans expelled the entire Jewish population of the town [most likely Dęblin, but the name is barely legible – J.L.]. Along the way, 42 Jews were shot dead by the Polish police" [ARG I 29 (Ring. I/1062)]. The situation in the remaining ghetto in Kałuszyn, created on 1 December 1942 is presented by Adam Kamienny: "life went on as normal, people were still standing in long lines waiting for bread, they were still working at fencing off the area, gendarmes came to rob, Mr. Zakrzewski (a Polish police officer) killed a boy for stealing one piece of wood from a house, quite normally, as on any other day" [Kamienny, p. 45].

Murder can be committed out of base motives, such as greed or the lust for profit. Murder in order to rob has a "rational" motivation. Crime chronicles are filled with such stories. One of such would-be murders is described by Halina Zawadzka. It took place in Czarniecka Góra in the Radom district. The author with a friend and her baby arrived there at dusk. They stopped at the organist's house, on their way to Radom by train the next day. In the middle of the night they were awakened by noises coming from behind the wall. "Strange men in the next room were drawing up a scheme of murder the victims, which were to be the three of us. The organist was to lead us in the morning through the fields in the direction of the station. Along the way, under a certain tree, the other plotters were to be waiting. Each of the murderers has already chosen one of us for their victim. Murder weapons were to be axes. The plotters hoped to find riches on us that they decided to divide equally among themselves" [Zawadzka, p. 17]. The terrified women dressed in silence and leaving all their belongings with the organist, slipped out of the house, saving their lives.

Murder for no apparent reason, out of sheer aggression, reveals dark instincts inherent in human nature. During the liquidation of the ghetto in Tłuste, on 27 May 1943, "a young Jewish woman fleeing fell into the swamp and was submerged in the quagmire, with only her head sticking out. She stayed there for the whole operation. Just before evening, after the main murdering, an elderly peasant was passing that way, owner of a 70-acre farm. He hit her several times on the head and shamelessly killed her" [Milch, p. 176].

Murder accompanied by particularly brutal torture, preceded by a collective rape is sickening and leaves us with a sense of intolerable impotence in the face of the violence of evil. Especially when the victim is alone, abandoned, vulnerable, and given to the preying criminals. A scene noted by Lejb Rochman is told with a cynical sense of complacency by one of the young Poles involved in the crime. The author hidden in a haystack overheard some farmhands who lay in the hay relaxing after working in the field. "They talked about the hunt for Jews, enthusiastically exchanging the latest news of newly captured Jews and mass executions. […] They talked about Poles who knew how to take advantage of the situation. 'They were doing well, and even prospered.' One man talked about a bunch of teenagers from the surrounding villages who once captured a beauti-

ful young Jewess. She fought like a wild cat, almost clawed their eyes out, she was kicking and biting. They stabbed her with a knife, but nothing helped. What a fool! What was all that fuss for? Anyway, it was the end of her. Only when she lay unconscious from the beating could the boys rape her" [Rochman, p. 154]. The reasoning presented here is another example of common sense logic that the perpetrators use to explain their actions. "Since she is doomed anyway, since she is as good as dead, then why waste such a beautiful, young body still full of life? Let this body will be useful to the end." There is a call for a singular act of altruism in this kind of reasoning, "beautiful Jewess, give yourself to me, show some common sense and generosity, have some understanding for my practical sense."

Epilogue

What can one learn about ourselves from texts written in the face of extreme danger, reporting an unprecedented crime against the Jews, a crime that took place on Polish soil and in the Polish presence?

One find the truth that is, in fact, trivial: there Poles that were good, but there were also Poles that were bad; that there were both types, that nobility and heroism shone bright against the dark background of malice and treachery. Many authors emphasize in the testimonies such a mixture of good and evil. As Hirszfeld accurately puts it, "And again, this mixture of nobility and malice so typical of modern society: children chasing a young Jewish child with cries of 'Jew', and a strange woman who takes the child by the hand and rescues him. I know about incidents of denouncing Jewish patients, who were in a hospital for treatment. To name all cases of this incredible mixture of the most noble of deeds with wickedness would take volumes" [Hirszfeld, p. 412].

Less obvious and more difficult to accept is another truth: that there were Poles who were good and bad at the same time; that the Jews came face to face with the ambivalence of human nature, and that such existential ambiguity adds an extra dimension to the image of a Pole. In the analyzed testimonies such ambivalence is particularly characteristic of peasants, capable of kindness and generosity straight out of the gospel, but also of brutality and cruelty. Greed coincided with compassion, animal fear with toughness and courage. These contradictions were often found in one person.

It should be appreciated that these testimonies were written by people who were stigmatized, condemned, and methodically destroyed. As victim, they were writing in their own blood, hence so much blackness in the image of Poles, so much pain. But they were also writing with their hearts, and so one finds there gratitude, admiration, and justice given to brave and noble people and their and heroic acts.

Translated by *Katarzyna Gucio*

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Abstract
This text analyzes personal documents, with emphasis laid on how certain Jews, authors of the works discussed, perceived Poles. It contains testimonies on the various aspects of Polish-Jewish relations during the occupation. In particular in focuses on: Anti-Jewish prejudice and stereotypes, the indifference of Poles toward the persecuted Jews, the actions of helpers and those aimed at offering aid to Jews, on acts of treason and violence, robbery and theft of Jewish property, as well as on acts of violence by Poles on Jews.

Key words
Polish-Jewish relations, Holocaust, Jews, testimonies