Envisioning Poles
Polish-Jewish Relations at the Beginning of the German Occupation

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Introduction

This article is a discussion of the results of the author's research of personal diaries and memoirs in the collection of the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH; Żydowski Instytut Historyczny) in Warsaw. From these sources, it is possible to reconstruct, analyze, and understand Jewish perceptions of their Polish surroundings at the beginning of World War II. The source base of the research consists of over 330 diaries and memoirs that constitute the entire ŻIH Collection 302.

Thematically the article focuses on the process of the "parting of the ways" that transpired between Poles and Jews as the terror of the Nazi occupier increased during the first few months after the German invasion. This coincided with the first indications that a ghetto would be soon created, or with the actual creation of the first ghettos. The important methodological premise of the research is *not* the investigation of *what actually happened* to the beleaguered Jewish community from their perspective of Polish-Jewish relations, but what their *perceptions* and *memories* were of such relations as recorded in written documents. Hence, I analyze Jewish interpretations of such interactions according to the anthropological category of emic, subjective perspectives of the authors, in contrast to an etic approach, which seeks verification and objectivity in authors' accounts.

The Jewish perspective of the beginning of the war has been analyzed in most comprehensive general studies on the development of the "Final Solution." Recent "victim-centered" Holocaust historiography — in particular works by Saul Friedländer and Christopher Browning — devote a significant number of pages to highlighting the Jewish

experience of the initial Nazi persecutions during the first months of the war. [1]

Following the "earthshaking" event of the publication of Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors*, which describes the Polish murder of the Jewish inhabitants of the town of Jedwabne in July 1941,[2] and the subsequent public debate (the greatest in post-communist Poland) on Polish-Jewish relations, Polish historiography during nearly the last two decades has been "making up" for the lack of focus on the Jewish experience of the war under Communism and during the first decade of post-communist Poland. However, even before the "Jedwabne controversy," Tomasz Szarota dealt with the subject of the beginning of the war from the perspective of the first anti-Jewish persecutions.[3] Following Gross's revelations, Andrzej Żbikowski researched Polish violence against Jews in the eastern Polish provinces, which contextualized the Jedwabne massacre;[4] studies by Barbara Engelking, Jacek Leociak, and Dariusz Libionka analyzed the Jewish experience in the Warsaw region, also devoting significant space to the initial war period.[5] There is, likewise, a growing body of regional studies that discusses the war from the perspective of the Jewish victims.[6]

1 Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945* (New York and Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2008); Christopher R. Browning, with Jürgen Matthäus, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939—March 1942* (Lincoln and Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

2 Jan Tomasz Gross, *Sąsiedzi: historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2000); published in English as *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

3 Tomasz Szarota, *U progu Zagłady: Zajścia antyżydowskie w okupowanej Europie: Warszawa, Paryż, Amsterdam, Antwerpia, Kowno* (Warsaw: Sic!, 2000) available in English as Tomasz Szarota, *On the Threshold of the Holocaust: Anti-Jewish Riots and Pogroms in Occupied Europe: Warsaw, Paris, the Hague, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Kaunas* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015).

4 Andrzej Żbikowski, *U genezy Jedwabnego. Żydzi na kresach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej, wrzesień 1939—lipiec 1941* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2006).

5 Barbara Engelking, Jacek Leociak, and Dariusz Libionka, eds., *Prowincja noc: życie i zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 2007); Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, *Getto warszawskie: przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2001); published in English as *The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the Perished City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

6 For example, Aleksandra Namysło, *Zanim nadeszła Zagłada: Żydzi w Zagłębiu Dąbrowskim w okresie okupacji niemieckiej* (Sosnowiec: Muzeum w Sosnowcu,

On the topic of Polish-Jewish relations, however, until recently there has been rather a bifurcation of perspective: Polish historiography that focused on Polish efforts to rescue the Jews; and — mostly — Israeli historiography that centered on analyzing Polish hostility and collaboration in the Nazi persecutions of the Jews. That division now seems to be in the process of evolving toward a more unified scholarship, particularly in Poland, following, again, the debate in the wake of Gross's books. Engelking and Jan Grabowski, for example, in their separate works, address the issue of Jewish experiences at the hands of their Polish neighbors.[7]

Havi Dreifuss, who undertook a similar project in an important work, explicitly focused on Jewish attitudes toward the Poles during the war.[8] Her nuanced analysis of contemporary personal narratives (diaries and testimonies), enriched by a variety of other documents (contemporary historical analyses from the "Oneg Shabbat" Archives, for example, and literary works from the period) delivers a first postwar in-depth interpretation of complex Jewish attitudes toward their Polish co-citizens. Concerning the early war period, Dreifuss contends that Polish Jews initially clung to the vision of Polish solidarity even in face of the subsequent evidence of attitudes to the contrary; they remained loyal to this interpretation for too long, especially when considering the manifest evidence of many Poles' collaboration in — or, merely, satisfaction with — public violence and discrimination against their Jewish co-citizens.

Before analyzing the sources, a brief outline of prewar Polish attitudes toward their Jewish neighbors is necessary. The death of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, in May 1935, is frequently suggested as a caesura of a

2008); Adam Kopciowski, *Zagłada Żydów w Zamościu* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2005); Anna Rzędowska, Dina Feldman, and Dariusz Dekiert, *Getto żydowskie w okupowanym Piotrkowie* (Piotrków Trybunalski: Urząd Miasta Piotrkowa Trybunalskiego, 2014).

7 Engelking, *Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień ... Losy Żydów szukających ratunku na wsi polskiej 1942–1945* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011); published in English as *Such a Beautiful Sunny Day ...: Jews Seeking Refuge in the Polish Countryside, 1942–1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2016). Jan Grabowski, *Judenjagd: polowanie na Żydów, 1942–1945: studium dziejów pewnego powiatu* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011); a revised edition was published in English as *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-occupied Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

8 Havi Dreifuss, *Relations Between Jews and Poles during the Holocaust: The Jewish Perspective* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2016).

more conciliatory Polish attitude toward the Jews, and the onset of the period of economic boycotts, educational discrimination, and press-inspired, as well as Church-supported, verbal harassment.[9] Clearly, the most extreme expression of Polish anti-Jewish interwar hostility was violence, which resulted in pogroms as well as individual attacks. During the first two post-Piłsudski years, over 2,000 people were injured, while about a dozen lost their lives in pogroms in Poland.[10]

The Polish economic crisis, which resulted in vast unemployment, was not directly or sufficiently addressed by the so-called "government of the colonels" that was formed after Piłsudski's death. Rather, the government, as well as other powers, including representatives of the Church, press, and major political parties, diverted the much-needed attention for considering the true reasons behind the crisis, and focused instead on scapegoating the Polish Jewish minority, 10 percent of the population, as the main cause of Poland's failure to rebuild its economic potential. This strategy resulted in the infamous "*owszem*" policy of sanctioning boycott as a legitimate means of struggle against the alleged Jewish takeover of Polish businesses.[11] Barring Jewish workers and professionals from employment in government, military, or professional associations was a visible sign of de facto exclusion of the Jews from nominal Polish equal rights in citizenship.[12] The same rationale advocated for the unofficial policy of *numerus clausus* and "ghetto benches," which motivated periodic violence against Jewish students at Polish universities.[13] The virulent antisemitism of political parties and organizations (Endecja, O.N.R.), in addition to many Church officials who unabashedly made antisemitic pronouncements that influenced the overwhelmingly Catholic Polish society to consider their Jewish

9 Ronald E. Modras, *The Catholic Church and Antisemitism: Poland, 1933–1939* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publ., 1984); Monika Natkowska, *Numerus clausus, getto ławkowe, numerus nullus, "paragraf aryjski": antysemityzm na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim 1931–1939* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1999).

10 Joanna Żyndul, *Zajścia antyżydowskie w Polsce w latach 1935–1937* (Warsaw: Fundacja im. K. Kelles-Krauza, 1994), pp. 42, 54.

11 The expression comes from Prime Minister Składkowski's inaugural speech to the Sejm in June 1936, concerning the "acceptable" behavior of Poles versus Jews: "Economic struggle — yes (*owszem*); but no harm!"; Joseph Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland, 1919–1939* (Berlin: Mouton, 1983), p. 366.

12 Emanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations During the Second World War* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1974), pp. 15–16.

13 Natkowska, *Numerus clausus.*

compatriots in an inferior, spiteful way created a general consensus to reject any notion of peaceful coexistence with the Jewish minority.[14]

This brief enumeration of major symptoms of prewar antisemitic tendencies and actions in Poland is meant simply to highlight the extremely contentious state of Polish-Jewish relations immediately preceding the war.

Findings

Considering the content of the source material, I distinguished three categories that characterize three different experiences of the Polish Jews at the beginning of the war in the context of Polish-Jewish interactions. These categories are not exclusive; the diarists and memoirists often present a complex picture in which one phenomenon of Polish-Jewish dynamics is contradicted by certain exceptions. In many documents, two or three of these categories may develop as different stages, testifying to a chronological progression of the most typical Polish attitudes. It is important, therefore, to emphasize that these categories are not "ideal types," static and complete, but rather predominant behaviors observed and interpreted by Polish Jews among their Gentile neighbors.

These categories are:

1. The "honeymoon," or the experience of initial goodwill between the Polish and Jewish populations, which started immediately before the war and continued through the September campaign. The mutual solidarity and suspension of Polish hostilities were an expression of mobilization against a greater enemy, as well as a result of unprecedented German terror against the Polish civilian population, which exposed the total insignificance of Poland's inter-ethnic squabbles.

2. The experience of "disenchantment," or ceasing to belong to the community of Poles.

During the months that followed, the German authorities created

14 Celia Heller, *On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland Between the Two World Wars* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993); Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Emanuel Melzer, *No Way Out: The Politics of Polish Jewry, 1935–1939* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1965); Modras, *The Catholic Church.*

an effective legal seclusion of Poles and Jews, excluded Jews from legal protection, deprived them of their civil rights and property, and singled them out for public humiliation and a display of unmitigated public violence. The Polish population witnessed all these and was encouraged to participate in these acts. Sociologically the estrangement and targeting of the Jews for discrimination and violence effectively communicated to the Poles that the Jews were now "free game." This experience was described as a steady disappearance of the initial solidarity and a return to the prewar estrangement and hostility. The Jews then realized that the rapprochement had been only a temporary emotional collateral of Polish mobilization during the national emergency against a mortal enemy, and not a true reconsideration of prewar antisemitism.

3. The experience of separateness that preceded the war and then grew as the war progressed.

This alternative assessment of the Polish-Jewish dynamic in the Jewish sources that were researched was described as the continuous decline in Polish attitudes toward the Jews, without even a short respite from hostility. In such narratives the vision and interpretation of the Jewish place in Polish society was, on the one hand, deprived of the excitement and enthusiasm that accompanied the experience of honeymoon, while, on the other hand, was free of hopeful illusions that might have bred unrealistic expectations from the Polish population. The latter might eventually have been crushed by the reality of further interactions.

1. The "Honeymoon"

The initial brotherhood between Poles and Jews immediately preceding Germany's attack on Poland and continuing through the September campaign has been discussed in classic historical accounts, such as by Emmanuel Ringelblum, who noted that when the war with Germany became a realistic certainty

> anti-Semitism disappeared as if at the touch of a magic wand. Even the most ardent anti-Semites grasped that at this time Jews and Poles had a common enemy and that the Jews were excellent allies who would do all they possibly could to bring destruction on the Jews' greatest enemies. The easing of tension could be felt at every step: in the streets, trams and offices a spirit of harmony

> and cooperation prevailed everywhere. The Jew, who before the war felt himself to be a second- or third-class citizen, a pariah to be beaten, kicked and insulted at every turn, eliminated from all office or public position, etc., became a citizen with equal rights, asked to render help to the common fatherland.[15]

The newly-established solidarity referred to the enthusiasm with which Polish Jews welcomed the defense efforts during the September campaign, took care of and hosted Polish troops passing through their localities, and participated personally in the civilian struggle against the common enemy.

Israel Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski in *Unequal Victims* also note the initial change in the relationship between Poles and Jews at the beginning of the war. However, they do not consider the phenomenon to be as representative or having such a significant impact as Ringelblum expresses: "During the fighting, the Poles and the Jews shared the status of compatriots, defending their homeland against the German conqueror."[16]

The "honeymoon" appears to be a very common motif present in the diaries and memoirs of the Polish Jews. According to the sources, prewar antisemitic attitudes of a vocal part of the Polish population were temporarily silenced as citizens of all backgrounds worked side by side to stop the German invasion. This experience was especially strong and prevalent in Warsaw (probably because of the size of the Jewish community there, and the extent and concentration of defense efforts in the Polish capital), however the phenomenon is also well attested in other localities.

For example, in a memoir written in 1954, by Celina Grunszpan (married name, Kurcbart) — a document written with a certain literary flair and poetic expressions — the first moments of terror as civilians were ruthlessly and methodically targeted in air raids in Sandomierz are described in short repetitive sentences invoking the initial chaos. They are also interspersed with reverberating incantations of communal Catholic prayers:

> A string of carriages is pulling women and children with belongings... Plenty of soldiers on horses, carriages, on foot. They are

15 Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations*, pp. 24–25.

16 Israel Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski, *Unequal Victims: Poles and Jews During World War Two* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1986), p. 28.

> going to the train station. Many acquaintances. Parting tears, quavering smiles. The atmosphere becomes more serious. Anxiety increases. In the evening airplanes arrive. Please do not be afraid, a Polish officer says. Trrrrach, trrrrrach, boom boom boom: German bombs reply. We are escaping to houses that shiver fantastically. Hail Mary, full of grace...We fly to thy protection...Who suffered for our sins, Jesus Christ have mercy on us… — comes out from shivering lips. We hug each other. We press our eyes closed. Finally, mister Lieutenant, are these [the bombs] ours? Ours, not ours, passed without damage. This repeated itself for several days. The Germans wanted to bombard bridges. They failed. There were a few casualties from splinters. In town, people went crazy; terror was pushing them from cellar to cellar. During the nights, hundreds of ragged people, barefoot, hungry, thirsty, were asking for water, bread. During an air raid, all were running away in panic, leaving furs, jewelry, bed sheets in carriages, good prey for a plundering population. In this chaos, we were consoled that England and France are going with us to break the broken pagan cross. Enormous enthusiasm! People kiss one another. Enormous brotherhood. Yesterday was a Jew and a Pole. Today it is one family, with one enemy... Willingly one went to dig trenches. Arms ached, but nothing of it. For a common cause.[17]

In another example, Calel Perechodnik describes in his famous diary the common enthusiasm that united Poles and Jews on their evacuation (following the government order on September 7). Perechodnik, together with his brother, father, and uncle, all left Otwock and evacuated eastward. The journey, as Perechodnik narrates it,

> lasting over eight days, will forever remain in my memories. What ideal brotherhood was there between Poles and Jews, how safely one walked at night on roads, how sacrificially and hospitably would a Polish peasant receive refugees. All were then tied with one brotherly knot, a knot of love for the country and hate for the common enemy.[18]

17 Memoir of Celina Grunszpan, AŻIH (Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute), 302.54, pp. 2–3.

18 Diary of Calel Perechodnik, AŻIH 302.55, p. 9. I have used the version of Perechodnik's diary as found in the archive. The first published edition in Polish (Calel Perechodnik, *Czy ja jestem mordercą?*[Warsaw: Karta, 1993]), and later translated

It seems that during the September campaign the experience of the sheer brutality of the bombardments and pacification of civilians mitigated Polish-Jewish animosities. Binem Motyl's diary presents a powerful example of an equalizing effect of suffering experienced by Poles of all origins during the evacuation to the East:

> Behind the Anin forest the first forced stop in our journey happened: air raid. Enemy airplanes arrived and started to drop bombs around. We were lying under the trees, face up, observing death-bringing machines that were flying over our heads. I breathed a sigh of relief when each of the machines flew past the area behind me. The road, cleared of the crowd, filled again. There was horrific chaos on the road. In the middle — cannons, wagons, horses with or without riders, infantry, motorbikes, bicycles, in one word — all vehicles, and among them all the civilian population was pushing through with swags over their shoulders. Some of the people were pushing children's strollers, filled up to the top high with some comforters, and on it — a child or children... During that time, one might make new acquaintances with the journey companions. In the evening, a group of us stopped by some farmer, to sleep. We washed our legs; I noticed that some had already blisters on their legs; we ate supper prepared by our farmer: noodles with milk, and went to the stable on the hay... On the way, I talked to soldiers, who were roaming individually or in groups, on foot or on wagons, "looking for their troops." These were, simply, deserters, who — as they told me — have not yet seen any German with their own eyes, but were running away just hearing that Germans might be near... I also need to mention the bombardment of a certain village we passed by. The airplanes came suddenly, we did not manage to clear off the road, when the bombing started, and, in a few minutes, the whole village was in flames... Before Kałuszyn, I came across a few fresh corpses, victims of some air raid. The pilots would lower themselves and hit

into French, Italian, and English is controversial. Problems with this version have been astutely analyzed by David Engel in "On the Bowdlerization of a Holocaust Testimony: The Wartime Journal of Calek Perechodnik," *Polin*, 12 (1999), pp. 316–329. Engel also confirms that the version of the diary found in ŻIH, produced by Perechodnik's brother, Pesach, is "for the most part a full and accurate rendering of the original manuscript" (Engel, "On the Bowdlerization," p. 319).

> us with machine guns; hiding in potato bushes in the fields was pointless.[19]

Motyl and his group were eventually caught by Germans while trying to hide in a peasant's hut. One German threatened to kill Motyl after identifying him as a *Jude*, but, fortuitously, the potential killer became distracted by something else. Finally, the whole group was freed by Polish soldiers who attacked the German division and began a regular battle, during which the captured group attempted to run away. Having decided to return to Warsaw, Motyl experienced frequent hospitality among the nearby population, although also the occasional refusal to give or sell food. This, however, does not seem to point to any discrimination, but rather to people's fear and preoccupation with their own survival. Continuing the account of his journey back to the capital, Motyl's narrative contains gruesome and graphic descriptions of human body parts scattered on a side of a road among corpses of horses, with horse blood barely hardening, and preying ravens already contemplating a meal.[20] His account testifies to a sort of limit-experience that rejects unnecessary differentiation: Poles and Jews were so radically terrorized and traumatized by the Germans' ferocious onslaught that an attempt to exacerbate ethnic divisions was a luxury no one could afford. Nazi terror was simply too universal, and therefore just witnessing and experiencing this horror brought about a temporary unity.

The memoir of Mojsze Ajzenberg also contains descriptions of the Polish population being equally helpful to Polish and Jewish refugees fleeing toward the Soviet border. Ajzenberg was a young student from Szydłowiec who, in July 1939, returned from his studies in France to enjoy the summer vacation at home. In a very detailed, quite literary account, Ajzenberg, who came from an assimilated family, depicts an arduous flight with a group of male relatives. Encountering hordes of refugees everywhere who were only trying to stay ahead of the fast-approaching Germans, but were frequently under mortal danger of air raids, Ajzenberg tended to be welcomed and hosted mostly by local Jews. This is partly ~~explicable~~ by the *shtetl* character of the localities through which he traveled (Lipsko had over a 55 percent Jewish

19 Diary of Binem Motyl, AŻIH 302.206, pp. 4–6.
20 Ibid., pp. 9–17.

population, Solec over 40 percent, Bychawa over 70 percent, Iłża 37 percent).[21]

While Ajzenberg and his companions often lodged or dined with Jewish inhabitants, they also asked for and received help from Polish peasants or soldiers, who, as in Binem's account, do not appear in his rendition to manifest any anti-Jewish prejudice. The first part of his memoir ends abruptly when Ajzenberg reaches the Bug River, and then resumes when he returns from Lwow (Lviv) to Szydłowiec under German occupation. To put this document in context, Ajzenberg is not one to present an idealized picture: in his reminiscences of the prewar years, he writes openly about being regularly beaten, together with another Jewish student, by Gentile Polish boys on the way to their high school.[22] On a train from France back to Poland, he describes one of the Polish passengers who "enlightens" the rest of the company on the destructiveness of the "Jewish element" on Polish economic life.[23] Later, during his flight eastward, Ajzenberg mentions another local antisemite, encountered in a Polish barbershop, who blamed the Jews for the war.[24] Next to such condemnatory statements, the neutral attitude of Polish soldiers and peasants who provided help to refugees irrespective of their ethnicity comes across as a positive attitude of a general — though not total — suspension of prejudice.

Nevertheless, the initial honeymoon is not always depicted in an idyllic, uncritical manner. Occasionally, even contrary to the intention of an author who assures us of the unique Polish-Jewish "brotherhood," the described events seem to paint a somewhat less romantic image. In a memoir signed by H. S. L. from Warsaw, for example, a group of diggers of anti-tank ditches (90 percent of them Jewish, many of whom were elderly men in traditional garb), brought in without any food provisions, is said to have been fed from the resources for refugees of the *Stołeczny Komitet Samopomocy Społecznej* (The Capital Social Self-Aid Committee).[25] That is, naturally, a positive fact; however, the need to make a special arrangement for this particular group of diggers seems to betray that, initially, they might not have been treated

21 Memoir of Mojsze Ajzenberg, AŻIH 302.6, pp. 7–16.
22 Ibid., p. 18.
23 Ibid., p. 1.
24 Ibid., p. 19.
25 Memoir of NN (possibly written by a famous Modernist architect, Helena Syrkus), AŻIH 302.184, p. 2.

as "ordinary" Poles, for whom "special" accommodations were not a question of debate. Mrs. Stefa, an employee of the Committee that distributed the food, had to resort on occasion to somebody else's help in order to procure the provisions by encouraging that person with this patriotic reminder: "These people are also standing under the bare sky, like us, and are digging. A common goal unites us. We need to give them food."[26]

Mrs. Stefa appears to have been a guardian angel of the Jews in another matter, too. At about 4 P.M., she intervened at the Polish command to allow the Jewish diggers to go home, as they had been working since 8 A.M., but the commandant insisted that first another group of workers must replace them: "You have to stay here until they send a new shift," he explained. "The work cannot be interrupted."[27]

Mrs. Stefa defended them again: "Let these people go," she asked. "They have been working really long. Today it is their holiday — the New Year. There are some old Jews among them who did not want to eat our food [because it was not kosher]. They did not eat anything else."[28]

After a while and an intervention with another Polish lieutenant, the Jews were released to go home and celebrate. While the outcome demonstrates the ultimate understanding and acceptance of Jewish diggers among the group of non-Jewish Poles, and while the arguments of the Polish commandant need to be interpreted in light of his defense responsibilities rather than prejudice, still, it was thanks to one Polish woman's intervention and reminder of the "common goal" that the Jews were finally treated with a fair dose of understanding. In this narrative, therefore, while we see Poles and Jews collaborating peacefully and without tensions, an additional encouragement is required to accept Jews qua Jews (understanding the consequences of their special dietary needs) as equal members of the civilian defense force.

In order to put some of the honeymoon narratives in context, it appears that the uniting aspect of anti-German defense efforts withered away on the Polish side as soon as the Nazis established their occupation administration. In Warsaw, when the first Germans entered the capital on September 28 and began distributing food provisions to

26 Ibid., p. 3.
27 Ibid., p. 4.
28 Ibid., p. 3.

the Polish population, Jews were emphatically and explicitly excluded from this aid by German orders. Nevertheless, the Polish reactions proved that this exclusion was widely applauded and made easily practicable for the occupier. In a German account quoted by Szarota, the *Nationalsozialistische Volkswolhlfahrt* — NSV (National Socialist Social Welfare) crew was reported to have instructed a troop of "blue police." When one of the Germans "was giving them some directions, and remarks that by no means shall the Jews be taken into account in the welfare actions, they [the Polish policemen] accept this with great applause, and from then on are badmouthing the Jews terribly."[29]

While the Germans might have had difficulty in figuring out who in the soup lines was Jewish and who was not, "helpful" Polish elements quickly offered their expertise, as Ringelblum also noted: "The anti-Semitic mob would pick out the hungry Jews standing in line before the NSV trucks and would point out who was a *Jude* — the one German word the hooligans learned at once."[30]

It seems, in conclusion, that the honeymoon period lasted for about five to six weeks, immediately preceding Germany's attack on Poland, and continued through the September campaign. The authors of diaries and memoirs experienced it as a time of exciting unity between Poles and Jews who were collaborating against the German destroyer of the Polish state. While the enthusiasm evident in the sources, stemming from the unexpected, seemingly gratuitous nature of this rapprochement, appears to be the most frequent assessment of the Polish-Jewish dynamics at the beginning of the war, there also emerge subtle voices that testify to a less idealized image of Polish-Jewish interactions at this time.

2. The "Disenchantment"

In many accounts the honeymoon lasted until the Germans arrived and introduced their anti-Jewish policies. Motyl represents it in the following way:

> In Warsaw, in the meantime, German rule started. After creating the *Generalgouvernement* and having shot to death several

29 Szarota, *On the Threshold of the Holocaust*, p. 20.
30 Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations*, p. 37.

> hundred Poles to frighten the population and to create order, as well as having taken several dozen of the city's most important inhabitants as hostages, they took to regulating the Jewish question in Warsaw.[31]

In Motyl's diary it was the order to form the Judenrat that introduced the first division in German treatment of the conquered population. Through the mediation of the Judenrat, the Germans then introduced a series of limitations on the Jews: forming separate lines in shops; forbidding them to attend theaters, cinemas, and public locales; and requiring them to register their property. At the end of October, the Judenrat was enlisted to register all Jewish inhabitants of Warsaw, and Motyl was assigned to be one of the registering commissioners. From then on, the experiences of Poles and Jews as reflected in his diary run separately. While the Germans were the external force that introduced divisions between Poles and Jews, the shift in the attitude of the Polish population toward Jews seems to have developed somewhat parallel to the German orders. When Motyl decided to quit his post in the Judenrat and escape to the East, he observed Jewish crowds on the Warsaw East Train Station being harassed by German police and *Volksdeutsche* civilians. The first encounter with Polish renewed hostility against the Jews took place, in Motyl's account, when he attempted to walk toward the border with the Soviet Union:

> As we were approaching the German-Soviet border, we were attacked by local peasants who were blackmailing us in various ways, threatening us with Germans more and more often. We arrived at the last border village late in the evening and found shelter at a guide recommended to us in Warsaw. There were many people waiting in his hut, among whom moved dead-drunk, bribed border patrol. From time to time, they got into the hut demanding vodka or money. Some gave them jewelry, in order to secure for themselves a peaceful passage across the border.[32]

Motyl's disenchantment with Polish solidarity is reported matter-of-factly, as an unquestionable switch in the Polish attitude from helpful, or at least neutral, to exploitative. It seems to have been triggered by

31 Diary of Binem Motyl, AŻIH 302.206, p. 27.
32 Ibid., p. 30.

the occupier's persecutions, which put the Jews beyond what Helen Fein called "the Universe of Obligation."[33]

According to Perechodnik's diary, the initial honeymoon disappeared very quickly during the September campaign, while some manifestations of fairness toward the Jews remained:

> The period of brotherhood from before the war and the beginning of it disappeared completely. Nevertheless, I cannot say that it [Polish attitudes toward the Jews] became hostile; on the contrary: when my brother-in-law was killed, Dr. Mierosławski [the city physician] was crying like a little kid, he even managed to arrange for the exhumation of the corpse. There were quite sporadic cases when the mob shouted: Jude, Jude, pointing out Jews to Germans, but, on the contrary, the [general] attitudes were correct. What Poles demanded..., what they proposed to Jews was to sign off their businesses to them [to Poles], to give them their apartments with furniture, to place with them their estates. Although not all at the beginning intended to take it, but as far as Otwock is concerned, from almost 99% of businesses that were signed off to Poles, a Jew would not see a penny after a month; the same was true in general with apartments, furniture etc.... Indeed, there were cases such as Kalinowski, who threw out the Jewish baker Kirszenbaum from his own bakery in order to take it over, yet he [Kalinowski] was condemned for it by almost all Poles... But, in principle, abstracting from sporadic cases, in general the relationship was correct, protectionist, which assured the other about one's patriotism.[34]

Perechodnik emphasizes that greed was the most common emotion that motivated Polish attitudes toward the Jews — greed that coexisted, somehow, with Polish assurances of compassion for Jewish suffering, and a hope for a future common military struggle. At the same time, he acknowledges that the Polish family to whom he had rented (for free) one of his furnished apartments, returned everything as had been agreed upon (only by an oral understanding). While, in his opinion,

33 "The Universe of Obligation" is "the circle of individuals and groups toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends." Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization During the Holocaust* (New York: Free Press, 1979), p. 4.

34 Diary of Calel Perechodnik, AŻIH 302.55, pp. 17–18.

all Polish positive gestures to Jews were a plot to convince them to sign off their property, in extreme cases, when certain Poles behaved particularly unfairly toward Jews, they were met with general Polish condemnation.

In Herta Lustiger's narrative, the moment of disenchantment was also brought on by Polish greed; she left a poignant description of looting made possible by a Pole. The Pole brings with him a German, points him to Lustiger's grandmother ("*Hier ist Jude*"), and proceeds to remove all the goods from the shop and put them outside. The surrounding crowd swiftly grabbed everything. While Lustiger's mother tried to save some of the food by taking it out through the back door, her grandmother stood paralyzed, unable to process the perversity of losing all her life's fortune to a whim of a compatriot. The whole operation — which was particularly dramatic because nobody even addressed the owners of the store — lasted an hour and left the grandmother in stupefying shock.[35]

Lustiger, who was from Częstochowa and only fifteen years old in 1939, provides a telling symbolic image of how the Jewish illusion of brotherhood with the Poles was brutally shattered by the reality on the very first day of the war. Early morning on September 1, as most inhabitants of her town, she and her family stood in their windows and cheered the Polish army passing through the streets. "Long live the Polish army!" they shouted together with the crowd. An elderly Jew, Landau, owner of a little grocery store, stood on a street corner and threw candies to the soldiers. Suddenly a Polish higher-rank soldier on a horse approached Landau and the soldiers around him and shouted: "How aren't you ashamed to take Jewish candies?" Lustiger comments:

> Landau, now pale-faced, retreated to the sidewalk, the soldiers were passing farther, among them many Jews who were difficult to recognize in ranks, besides they had their hair cut, the same uniform... Our enthusiasm was suddenly completely gone. Saying nothing we returned to our beds having swallowed a bitter drop of humiliation already connected forever with our memories of the first war hours.[36]

35 Memoir of Herta Lustiger, AŻIH 302.216, pp. 117–118.
36 Ibid., p. 110.

Without intending to be apologetic, one should point out that, like in H. S. L.'s account of a single woman's intervention that resulted in Jews being released early from work so that they could celebrate *Rosh Hashanah*, in the examples above it was sometimes one mean individual who either took advantage of the situation to rob Jews publicly, or to shame others into shunning the Jews.

In Grunszpan's memoir quoted above, there is a harsh switch from the civil treatment of Jews to brutal exclusion from coexistence with them, and then to derision: after acknowledging the enthusiasm of the September defense, Grunszpan narrated how a common lot seemed to bind Jews and Poles only until the Jews became targeted by the German authorities. All of a sudden the Jews could hear: "Hitler came for you!"; all of a sudden the bread in bakeries was "for Poles only," and the Jews were supposed to go to their own. "Pain gnawed at us and burned. Double bitterness. All of a sudden, we became unnecessary people. A ball one can throw and kick. We also stopped being Jews. We became transformed into *Jude*."[37]

Similar to Grunszpan's perspective, the above-quoted author of an anonymous memoir (H. S. L.),[38] describing a later period, which immediately preceded the closing of the Warsaw ghetto, testifies to the division ~~and separation~~ that seems to have settled between Polish and Jewish inhabitants once the plans for irreversible geographic separation became final.

In September and October 1940, after the announcement of the creation of the Jewish District and the first delineation of its borders, chaos erupted. Jews were franticly running around ~~in order to try~~ to switch their apartments with those of Poles located in the area that would become part of the ghetto. Although financial transactions were strictly forbidden, that did not stop many Poles from demanding steep prices for accepting Jewish apartments on the soon-to-be "Aryan" side, or renting out those that belonged to Poles within the future ghetto borders. Later, in order to acquire apartments, Jews had to enroll in proper housing associations, which intended to treat them fairly, in accordance with the associations' rules. Nevertheless, some Polish contractors who belonged to these associations began to demand excessive sums for living quarters that Jews might be acquiring, and

37 Memoir of Celina Grunszpan, AŻIH 302.54, p. 17.
38 Memoir of NN, AŻIH 302.184, p. 6.

demonstrated impatience with the fairness applied by the Polish administrators. To a complaint uttered sotto voce: "Why are you defending Jews so much?" one such administrator replied: "There are no Jews and Poles here; there are only members of our Housing Association. No cheating of any members of the Association is permitted."[39]

The Polish officials from the Housing Association mentioned in this document appear to have acted extremely fairly and propitiously toward the Jewish community. They tried to arrange for Polish houses in the Jewish District even in face of the difficulties raised by the Polish owners; they also sent Jews money long after the ghetto was closed and when housing needs had come under the Judenrat's jurisdiction.[40]

The economic exploitation highlighted in this memoir was probably just that — economic exploitation, which Polish (and Jewish) people also committed toward "their own." Nevertheless, such actions also testify to the greater exclusion of the Jews from the Polish community, and the ease with which people turned against the others' welfare in accordance with the irrational lines of separation that were imposed.

The author of this short memoir, working for Jewish Coordinating Committee, struggled to save a large building for Jewish refugees when it was designated by the Polish administration for Poles. Working with several positively-inclined Polish officials, she was ultimately able to save the building for Jewish refugees.[41] In the end, therefore, her narrative reflects examples of a fair Polish administrative treatment that might even be seen as having gone against "ethnic" Polish interests. "H. S. L." also depicts a few institutions and brave individuals (such as the above-mentioned Mrs. Stefa, or Mr. W., who tried against all odds to allow Polish food to be provided to the ghetto)[42] who fought against the new status quo.

In the areas that were annexed by the Soviet Union on September 17, 1939 — if even only temporarily — the issue of the Jewish "welcome" extended to the Soviets became a factor in the deterioration of Polish-Jewish relations. In Polish public memory, the Jews figured prominently as those who "betrayed" Poland, as they allegedly openly rejoiced at "the fourth partition of Poland," and cheered the invading,

39 Ibid., p. 8.
40 Ibid., p. 10.
41 Ibid., pp. 13–14.
42 Ibid., p. 11.

brutal Russian occupier. In later years that memory was intensified by the collective trauma of deportations into the Soviet interior (of at least 320,000 Polish citizens), as well as the massacres of over 21,000 Polish officers and other groups of intelligentsia in the camps of Katyń, Smoleńsk, and others.

Jan Karski's report, which compared the situation of the Jews under the German and Soviet occupations of Poland, included an assessment of Jewish behavior that seems contextualized and nuanced:

> The attitude of Jews towards the Bolsheviks is regarded among the Polish populace as quite positive. It is generally believed that the Jews betrayed Poland and the Poles, that they are basically communists, that they crossed over to the Bolsheviks with banners waving. Indeed, in most cities, Jews greeted the Bolsheviks with baskets of red roses, with submissive declarations and speeches, etc. etc.
>
> However, one needs to insert here certain reservations. Certainly it is true that Jewish communists regardless of the social class from which they came adopted an enthusiastic stance towards the Bolsheviks. The Jewish proletariat, small merchants, artisans, and all those whose position has at present been improved structurally, and who had formerly been exposed primarily to oppression, indignities, excesses, etc., from the Polish element — all of these responded positively, if not enthusiastically, to the new regime. Their attitude seems to me quite understandable.
>
> However, there are worse cases, where they [the Jews] denounce the Poles, Polish nationalist students, and Polish political figures, when they direct the work of the Bolshevik police force from behind their desks or are members of the police force, when they falsely defame the relations [between Poles and Jews] in former Poland. Unfortunately, it is necessary to state that such incidents are quite common, more common than incidents which reveal loyalty towards Poles or sentiment toward Poland.[43]

In the ŻIH Collection 302, there are a few diaries and memoirs that

43 Jan Karski, "The Jewish Problem in the Homeland," Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA, reprinted with introduction by David Engel, in Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky, eds., *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), pp. 264–267.

discuss either Jewish behavior toward the occupying Soviets, or the changing Polish-Jewish relations in its wake. Dr. Markus Willbach, for example, whose narrative attempts an objective description of historical events, describes the fear that paralyzed the Jews of Obertyń on September 1, as they realized that their future, due to Hitler's obsession with the Jewish race, could only mean doom. Therefore, on September 17, when the first Soviet scouts entered the town:

> Jews, exhausted from recent experiences, received the troops of the Red Army with great joy, especially that the first speaker announced in the main square right away, in the morning, that in the Soviet Union all citizens are equal and full citizens, without distinction of origin, race, and nationality.[44]

While Willbach does not comment on Polish-Jewish relations, his observation provides implicit confirmation of the worsening dynamics between the two communities once the Soviets were at the helm.

A more explicit example of the perception of Jews as Soviet collaborators and its impact on Polish-Jewish relations can be found in the testimony of Mieczysław Garfinkel, a member of the Zamość Judenrat. His town experienced the entrance of the Germans twice in 1939: first on September 13, at which time they remained for two weeks and managed to arrest about 1,500 Polish and Jewish hostages, after which they beat and tortured them. The Soviets then entered Zamość as the Germans withdrew. This was the time of German-Soviet decision-making about their borders in occupied Poland, and their conclusion resulted in the Soviets moving east of the Bug River. The Germans returned on October 7. Apparently, the short, two-week Soviet stay, which was followed by a flight of many Jews from the town, provided sufficient time for the Poles to form an impression that the Jews had supported the regime:

> Around one-third of the Jewish population that remained in town was very much afraid of excesses by riffraff, which might possibly occur during the time of so-called transition. Voices were heard that came from certain circles, which threatened the Jews with revenge for escaping with the "Soviets." The situation was so much worse that the town administration categorically

44 Memoir of Markus Willbach, AŻIH 302.105, p. 18.

> rejected a proposal of some Jewish circles to create, during the transitional period, a mixed Polish-Jewish citizens' militia. The given argument was an expected dissatisfaction of the Germans, who were to take over the town. Fortunately, those fears were not confirmed, and taking over from Soviet to German hands took place peacefully, yet, this time, the Jews felt from the very first moment who the Germans are... It began with breaking into the Jewish shops. German soldiers were doing it, [while] young Polish striplings were indicating the shops, taking advantage of the robberies at the same time.[45]

3. The Experience of Consistent Separation Between Jews and Poles

Certain sources offer a more critical approach to the issue of the short-lived manifestation of brotherhood. While acknowledging its existence, they rather emphasize that the relations between Poles and Jews before, during, and after the September campaign were fundamentally set apart, and the communities remained alienated from each other. The classic works by Ringelblum or Gutman and Krakowski cited above, while noting the period of rapprochement, also analyzed the persistence of anti-Jewish Polish hostilities in detail, quoting multiple sources. In *Unequal Victims*, for example, the authors claim:

> Discriminatory measures against the Jews were by an overwhelming majority of the Poles deemed to be the former's own problem, not affecting the interest of the latter... Soon after the arrival of German troops, in many localities of the occupied territories the Jewish population encountered anti-Semitic acts on the part of some of their Polish neighbors. There were instances of Polish participation in anti-Jewish violence organized by the Germans.[46]

What appears to be the most characteristic feature of the Polish-Jewish dynamics of that early war period, therefore, is the coexistence — perhaps even the preponderance — of the experience of a short-lived solidarity, with exceptions that demonstrate the complexity and individuality of each Jewish experience within this dynamic.

45 Memoir of Mieczysław Garfinkiel, AŻIH 302.122, pp. 2–3.
46 Krakowski and Gutman, *Unequal Victims*, p. 32.

The focus on a continuation of prewar anti-Jewish hostilities among Poles during the war is especially prevalent in dairies written by Jewish intelligentsia. In the well-known diaries of Perechodnik, Baruch Milch, and Chaim Kaplan, for example, there is no common lot between Polish Jews and Polish Catholics (even as Perechodnik also notices the brief respite of hostilities during the September campaign). These writers (with the exception of Kaplan) before the war experienced treatment as second-class citizens when they were refused access to higher education. When they consequently studied abroad and were treated there on an equal basis, they gained a broader, more cosmopolitan perspective on the Polish-Jewish situation.

That perspective, for example, moved Perechodnik to mention with biting sarcasm the 1939 "self-defense calendar" that focused on a "Jew" as "the mortal enemy of the Church and Great Poland," while ignoring obvious threats from Germany as well as disastrous insufficiencies of the Polish army; such was the prewar obsession with the alleged "enmity" of the Jewish people toward Poland. In spite of this "stepmotherly" treatment, many Jews subscribed to the Polish defense programs and made immense sacrifices during the September campaign, sharing in the general, if brief, elation that these sacrifices generated.

Ida Gliksztejn's memoir also displays a cynicism concerning the weakness of the Polish government, which did not pay enough attention to the German plans, while "the youth of Endecja was busy with giving out leaflets that preyed on Jews, and keeping guard in front of Jewish stores, so that no Pole would shop there."[47]

She describes the short honeymoon experience during the horrific bombing of Lublin, when she had to hide with her children and other Poles in open fields (which was safer for the civilians than staying home). She confesses to a general sigh of relief when the Germans eventually entered Lublin (September 18), as the people were hoping for an end to the bombing. The Germans' first act, once they established their occupation authority in Lublin, was to arrest several thousand hostages — Poles and Jews. The Jews were eventually further separated from the rest of the arrestees.

It is at this point that Gliksztejn's narrative begins to concern itself uniquely with German persecutions of the Jews. There was no longer a common lot with Gentile Poles, and Gliksztejn, like the rest of the Jews

47 Memoir of Ida Gliksztejn, AŻIH 302.91, p. 7.

in occupied Poland, had to fend for her own survival and that of her family. She describes with harrowing detail the successive anti-Jewish persecutions. Following the intervention of Lublin Mayor Moskalewski, the Polish and Jewish hostages were released after three days, but, after a short respite, German harassment of the Jews began: roundups for work, forcing them to load goods from vandalized shops, beatings, humiliations. A larger action took place on November 9, evicting Jews from their homes and apartments and often forcing them to leave on the spot, without being able to take even the most necessary belongings. Ordinances forbidding the Jews to own certain goods, or limiting the amounts of their cash were executed by humiliating procedures; for example, all female inhabitants of an apartment block were forced to fully undress and were then publicly "checked" for hidden objects. Random German robberies of apartments as well as open thievery on the streets intensified, and tortures, such as fake executions, were prevalent.

At the end of November, the newly established Judenrat announced the German order to wear an armband with a Star of David; other discriminatory measures followed. Throughout the description of German harassments until the end of the first winter of the war, Gliksztejn wrote only one sentence that referred to Poles: when street beatings and other humiliations of the Jews were going on, she noticed, "it was not [just] one antisemite that looked at it with satisfaction and rubbed his hands with joy."[48]

The definite separation of Jews and Poles in prewar Poland, most aggressively manifested in physical clashes accompanying economic boycotts or ghetto benches at universities, instigated by Endecja, continued and was aggravated during the war to the point that some Poles expressed open joy at Jewish humiliations and harassments.

Among those authors who were convinced of Polish-Jewish separateness and persistent anti-Jewish Polish attitudes, the disenchantment was often rendered in cynical language depicting growing Polish aggressiveness toward the increasingly oppressed Jews. Zenon Szpingarn, who attempted to escape eastward, but, on September 9, when the Germans entered Biłgoraj, decided to return to Kraków, writes (omitting important ethnic names, which I have reconstituted here):

48 Ibid., p. 39.

> After several days, anti-...[Jewish] actions began. In Rzeszów, Mielec, and other localities, hunts on...[the Jews] whom...[the German] regime placed outside the law, were organized, to give its nation at least "circenses" [circuses] if "panem" [bread] could not be given it.[49] People were being caught like dogs, for forced labor, on the roads to wash cars, and there was no shortage of harassment, beating, and humiliation of the unfortunate. Riffraff and dregs of society of any origin found themselves in their own element and started carousing on their own. In Mielec, soldiers loaded...[the Jews] onto trucks, were driving them all over town and forced them by beatings to publicly announce that...[the Jews] wanted and started the war. Such steps certainly affected the uncritical and unenlightened layer of the population, which could find in...[the Jews] the cause of their misfortune and give release to vengeance.[50]

After that, Szpingarn enumerates horrific murders of Jews as the Germans entered various towns (for example, burning Jews in the synagogue near Mielec; shooting 200 people in Wieliczka, etc.), and then reports on the legal steps taken by the Germans in occupied Kraków:

> The city looked dead. Only the scum and the military were ravaging. Here and there...[the Jews] were hunted for labor. Later, the Aryans, too, were being caught, who never missed on what happened to... [the Jews], the only difference was in degree.[51]

Another, perhaps more complex awareness of an unbridgeable gap between Poles and Jews, was expressed by certain fairly assimilated individuals — or even by those who had been baptized — as can be found in the memoir by Krystyna Modrzewska from Lublin. In her narrative, written immediately after the ~~War~~ (before 1947), Jews were reminded of the attitude of contempt even before the war actually began. When Modrzewska tried to register for voluntary service during the mobilization in August 1939, the commandant, who knew her from her high

49 *Panem et Circenses* — bread and circuses, or bread and games — is a Latin figure of speech introduced by the Roman poet Juvenal to connote a superficial means of generating public approval by offering a palliative as a distraction rather than by excellence in public service or policy.

50 Memoir of Zenon Szpingarn, AŻIH 302.8, pp. 4–5.

51 Ibid., p. 6.

school national defense course, told her she was sorry but she had to reject her. Modrzewska described her reaction to this slight:

> They didn't take applications from Jewesses [it was a female defense division].
> "And yet, you will register me, Mrs. Commandant," I said calmly. "I will turn up tomorrow again, and you will register me." The matter seemed too important to me, and the moment too dangerous to take offense at their stupid harassment."[52]

Nevertheless, Modrzewska later used a subterfuge in order to be able to defend Poland:

> I did not hesitate. At the bottom of my desk drawer was a baptismal certificate. It was issued several months back in Bologna, in Italy, where I realized my old intentions of making official the confession of faith I professed. I considered it, besides, a purely and deeply personal matter and nobody, not even in my family, knew about it. Yet now an hour of exception came, an hour that demanded the readiness to sacrifice not only life, but also personal ambition and the most intimate secrets.[53]

Modrzewska registered her baptism at a local parish, and with the new certificate was accepted to a voluntary division — however, it remained completely inactive throughout the September campaign. When she was later advised to apply for a student visa to Switzerland, she did not want to use her conversion to claim non-Jewish status: "For the price of convictions I did not want to buy a visa. It would be too high a price."[54]

Even though Modrzewska brought the baptismal certificate to the military commission and to a local priest, she declined an offer of "Aryan" papers, as she considered it a lie and a criminal act. She thus voluntarily placed herself between the two worlds, which she seemed to cross in a uniquely individual way, working at a Jewish hospital and caring very tenderly for her fellow Jewish victims, while also experiencing a Catholic network of rescuers (especially priests and nuns) who helped her and her mother survive. Probably this particular posi-

52 Memoir of Krystyna Modrzewska, AŻIH 302.88, p. 1.
53 Ibid., pp. 1–2.
54 Ibid., p. 13.

tion within both worlds, combined with her independent judgment, allowed Modrzewska not to lose her critical eye while observing the destruction happening in Poland that affected all its citizens. Thus, she did not shy away from describing Jewish collaborators, and, likewise, did not romanticize the Polish community, which became the community of her faith. When, in December, Modrzewska and her mother were forced to pack in fifteen minutes and leave their home, they were observed by a girl from a basement apartment who smiled happily. Modrzewska inquired: "'Why are you so happy, miss?' 'Because they are throwing away the Jews,' she answers truthfully."[55]

At the same time, Modrzewska also noticed former domestics who were willing to help rescue some treasures from Jewish homes. Nevertheless, the reactions supporting Jewish persecution deeply shook her rather naive conviction that she belonged to the Polish nation in the same way that any other ethnic Pole does.

When she heard some Poles making ruthless comments about Jews trying to cross the Soviet border and meeting their deaths, Modrzewska describes how she hid in a church and thought:

> I was sitting calmly on a bench and was wondering why in the hearts of all those people there is not a bit of pity for Jews, and so much hatred? Leaving, I felt I would not receive an answer to this question.[56]

A memoir of the first year of the war by a Warsaw Jewish teacher, Helena Gutman-Staszewska, includes reports of a mixture of Polish attitudes toward the Jews. For example, Warsaw Mayor Starzyński is mentioned as delivering strong addresses to the Jewish community, asking them to help put out fires after heavy bombings of the Jewish area. A city clerk responsible for food provisions to schools is described as a just individual who tries to help everyone irrespective of their origins. Nevertheless, although Gutman-Staszewska does not engage in longer explanations or analyses of this phenomenon, she describes enough anti-Jewish examples of Polish behavior in a routine, unsurprised style that seems to indicate that her perception of Polish-Jewish dynamics was a continuation of the prewar separateness of the two communities.

55 Ibid., p. 11.
56 Ibid., p. 30.

Even before the surrender of Warsaw on September 28, Gutman-Staszewska returned to her school, which had been turned into a shelter, in order to prepare a place for classes. Although it was a state school, most of the students came from Jewish homes. When a school principal from Łódź ("an Aryan," Gutman-Staszewska notices) arrived to help allocate the funds from *Rada Główna Opiekuńcza* — RGO ("Central Welfare Council"),[57] he quickly realized that "it is a Jewish school, and begins his campaign."[58] The man accused Gutman-Staszewska of appropriating RGO goods (which, as she claims, she had instead collected herself from her pupils' parents), made frequent accusatory phone calls against her to the RGO, tried to ban her from the school building, and so on. Although, in the end, the man was beaten by the refugees sheltered in the school for stealing the RGO goods, and he eventually fled, his vicious, personal, antisemitic "campaign" features as a typical extreme Polish behavior with which the narrator seems to have been well acquainted from before the war.

The image of the continuation of separate Polish and Jewish ways is confirmed when Gutman-Staszewska describes Jews moving together into one apartment building, where they "create as if a family, join together, render help to one another — first house committees are being created."[59] When the Germans entered the city, persecutions of the Jews began immediately. "Almost from the first days random catching [of Jews] on the streets begins, naturally thanks to 'the people of good will' who are making the Germans aware of who the Jews are."[60] In her school, it was a Polish janitor who pointed out Jewish teachers to a German officer searching for *Juden*.[61]

When the obligation to wear an armband was introduced, the Jews were even more exposed to the persecutory actions of antisemitic Poles:

> Walking with armbands on the streets, we are increasingly exposed to harassment; walking without the armbands is bad as well, because we are followed and might be stopped by an agent

57 RGO was a Polish welfare organization, one of the few organizations allowed to exist under German occupation from 1940 to 1945, which helped both Poles and Jews.

58 Memoir of Helena Gutman-Staszewska, AŻIH 302.168, p. 5.

59 Ibid., p. 6.

60 Ibid., p. 8.

61 Ibid.

> or blue policeman. Such a case happened to me when a blue policeman wanted to blackmail me, but my name somewhat confused him. There are plenty of such cases and their consequences are various.[62]

With the announcement of the creation of the Jewish District, the panic of a frantic search for an adequate exchange of apartments in the newly defined area began. Many Poles cheated Jews out of their property, sometimes asking the Gestapo to intervene in order to evict the helpless inhabitants from their apartments and forcing them to leave everything behind.[63]

Although occurring mostly after the first few months of the occupation, the anti-Jewish Polish pogroms (in particular during the spring of 1940) should be mentioned here as one of several climaxes of the antisemitic hostilities that were, as has been historically demonstrated, a continuation of the prewar "model" of anti-Jewish violence. In his study of the first wartime pogroms in several cities of occupied Europe, Szarota observes:

> if we take a closer look at the groups or formations organizing the anti-Jewish incidents, whose members were from the local population, we will easily notice that the origins of a definite majority of those formations dated back to the pre-war years, their background being the political activities of extreme rightist groups... The new situation offered them an opportunity to resume activity and implement their program, which was, in any case, close to the national socialist ideology of the German occupiers.[64]

Although it has been proven impossible to demonstrate a direct connection between the occupying Nazi authorities in Europe and groups that led anti-Jewish disturbances (written evidence might be missing or was destroyed), circumstantial evidence points to a connection with SiPO and SD. The violence of the local population against Jews was skillfully exploited by the Nazi Propaganda Ministry, which touted it as a demonstration of universal anti-Jewish enmity, as well as a justi-

62 Ibid., pp. 13–14.
63 Ibid., p. 17.
64 Szarota, *On the Threshold of the Holocaust*, p. 10.

fication for systematizing "order" by segregating the Jewish minority within the confines of the ghetto.[65]

Conclusions

In drawing conclusions from this research, it should be noted that diaries and memoirs represent the unique individual perspectives of their authors, and therefore universal generalizations about "Jewish memories" or "Jewish attitudes" could be excessively overarching.[66] At the same time, by understanding and accepting the scope of the source base, limited to the documents of the ŻIH Collection 302, it is legitimate and instructive to distinguish three motifs that emerge from the personal narratives concerning the process of differentiation in Polish attitudes against their Jewish neighbors. The most common motif among them is the experience of a brief honeymoon preceding the German invasion and lasting, in general, throughout the September campaign. The way that brief period is treated in the documents depends largely on the perspective on Polish-Jewish relations held by the author at the time of writing: writers who were convinced that these relations were determined by Polish hostility largely confirm Ringelblum's assessment that, "shortly before the war broke out, the Polish community came to its senses. Now it was understood that anti-Semitism in Poland was a weapon in Hitler's hand. Things were somewhat calmer."[67]

The experience of disenchantment following the honeymoon could flow from two different perspectives. First, it could be interpreted as a confirmation of a conviction that Poles and Jews led consistently separate lives, and mutual hostility was at the basis of their relations. In documents presenting such a perspective, the short cessation of spite or hate (the honeymoon) did not fundamentally change the quality of the relationship, which swiftly returned to its "hostile self" as soon as

65 Ibid., pp. 13–14.

66 As Alexandra Garbarini noticed in her important analysis of wartime Jewish diaries, "Jewish experiences of the Holocaust cannot be boiled down to a single narrative or conceptual framework." The various responses contained in personal writings of the Jews testify, rather, to "the heterogeneity of the victims, of their experiences, of their wartime perceptions and coping strategies." Garbarini, *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 3.

67 Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations*, p. 24.

the Germans introduced their discriminatory measures. Second, and conversely, it could denote a genuine disappointment that, in spite of hopes for a lasting Polish-Jewish solidarity, the Poles ultimately placed themselves on the side of the German treatment of the Jews, and abandoned their co-citizens of Jewish background.

As the subject of this research was not the assessment of actual Polish attitudes toward the Jews at the beginning of the war, but rather their representation in a particular collection of diaries and memoirs, it might be useful to note that historical assessments of the resumption of Polish anti-Jewish hostility of the period vary. For example, Gutman and Krakowski use very cautious language to describe Polish participation in violence against the Jews, yet they carefully note the effect such (infrequent) participation had on the perception of Poles in Jewish eyes:

> The fact that no more than a tiny fraction of Poles took part in the anti-Jewish violence of the first months of Nazi occupation is likewise stressed in numerous other accounts. Yet no matter how trivial the number of active Polish participants in anti-Jewish riots and pogroms might have been, the fact itself was resented by the Jews very bitterly. This was understandable, as anti-Jewish rioting occurred immediately after a period of fraternity between the Jews and the Poles in the struggle against their common enemy, and at the very beginning of an occupation which subjected both to persecution. *The rioting had the effect of making the Jews feel abandoned by the Poles and aggrieved by them* [emphasis added].[68]

It is also worth noting that my conclusion that the initial honeymoon could be seen in one of the two lines of interpretation present in the memoirs and diaries as an insignificant, temporary change in Polish attitudes is close to the assessment made by Dreifuss. She concludes that such rapprochement was an illusion to which Polish Jews clung for either a shorter or a longer period; however, it eventually was confronted with the much starker reality of Polish indifference, growing hostility, and satisfaction from the process of elimination of the Jews from the Polish landscape, or even a willful participation in that elimination.

68 Krakowski and Gutman, *Unequal Victims*, p. 35.