

The Unrighteous Righteous and the Righteous Unrighteous¹

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir

This analysis of several hundred accounts by Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in Poland and by Poles who helped them survive offers a nuanced picture of Jewish-Polish relations during and after World War II. The accounts consist of testimonies about events in the provinces of Kielce, Krakov, and Bialystok given before Polish historical commissions after World War II. These are supplemented by ethnographic interviews conducted in Kielce province between 2004-2008.

It is said that both Polish and Jewish memories are clouded by two forms of denial.² According to the self-exonerating version of their history, in which they present themselves as righteous, the Poles deny that any members of their nation murdered Jews during the period of German occupation. On the other hand, Jews, with their post-Holocaust anguish, reflexively deny that any Poles helped or saved Jews. Writing in Poland six decades after the Holocaust, I seek to explore these perceptions in a manner that steers clear of both forms of denial.

1 Heraclites: "Immortal mortals, mortal immortals," Section 62D, according to Diels.

2 I employ here terms coined by Dr. Katarzyna Prot-Klinger, who developed them during the course of her many years of involvement with Polish and Jewish traumas, partly through meetings between groups of Polish and Israeli psychiatrists. Both types of denial (I use the term in the sense of *Verleugnung*; see Jean Laplanche, J-B. Pontalis, *Słownik psychoanalizy [Dictionary of Psychoanalysis]*, trans. E. Modzelewska and E. Wojciechowska, [Warsaw: 1996], p. 376) are extremes, seldom portrayed by historians. But section 132a of the Polish criminal code, which prohibits "defamation of the Polish people," demonstrates the power of the first (Polish) type of denial. Such prevalent and widely held views, categorically denying any Polish culpability in the Holocaust, permeate all scholarly discourse. Over time, the danger of bias in this discourse grows proportionally with the refusal of its participants to recognize cultural context as an inseparable part of historical study. On the mutual tension between everyday and scientific categories, see Z. Bokszański, *Tożsamości zbiorowe (Shared Identities)* (Warsaw: 2005), pp. 17-18: "The reports of lay people pertaining to their problems of identity undergo theoretical 'processing,' following which they penetrate sociological discourse in the form of theoretical-methodological assertions.

The source material for this study comprises several hundred testimonies of Holocaust survivors, and in some cases also of people who assisted and saved Jews. The affidavits were collected by Committees for Historical Documentation which were established by Jews in Lodz and Krakow after the war and which also made visits to Przemyśl and Bialystok.³ The accounts come from Jews and Poles who survived the Holocaust and World War II, living together although now under different conditions. Here I focus on the material from the Kielce and Krakow regions, and to a lesser extent from the Bialystok region. Since this evidence is limited and in no way constitutes a scientific sample (but no such sample is possible given that most witnesses were murdered before they could testify), the conclusions can only be tentative, based on a presumption that these cases are typical of events in these regions. Yet conclusions based on local accounts that repeat themselves cannot be easily rejected.

The testimonies in the archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw were collected in two ways. In some cases, following liberation, witnesses arrived of their own volition in order to submit evidence to historical documentation committees. In

An alert reader of Giddens would furthermore add that, by virtue of the mechanism of reflexivity, certain categories derived from the world of social science discourse return to everyday discourse and become part of the construction of social meaning by individuals in their everyday lives, and are included in their strategies for dealing with life and in their modes of explaining phenomena that they encounter.” See also, A. Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. «Ja» i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności* (*Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*), trans. A. Sulżycka, (Warsaw: 2001), pp. 4, 29-30, 44, etc.

- 3 The Jewish Historical Institute Archive (hereafter: “Institute Archive”), File 301. See *Relacje z czasów Zagłady. Inwentarz, Archiwum ŻIH-INB, autorzy różni, tomy 1-5* (Holocaust Testimonies, various authors, vols. 1-5, Institute Archive), (Warsaw: 1998). Certain aspects of the testimonies may be complemented by means of personal diaries (file 302). An auxiliary source of testimonies is M. Hochberg-Mariańska and Noe Grüss eds., *Dzieci oskarżają* (*Children Accuse*), (Warsaw: 1947) (hereafter: *Children Accuse*), from which I examine primarily the testimonies from the regions of Kielce and Krakow, as well as selected testimonies from the collection Jerzy Ficowski, ed., *Dzieci Holokaustu mówią* (*Children of the Holocaust Talk*), vol. 1 (Warsaw: 1993) (hereafter: *Children of the Holocaust 1*; *ibid.*, vol. 2, Jacob Gutenbaum and Agnieszka Latała, eds. (Warsaw: 2001) (hereafter: *Children of the Holocaust 2*); *ibid.*, vol. 3, Katarzyna Meloch and Halina Szostkiewicz, eds. (Warsaw: 2008) (hereafter: *Children of the Holocaust 3*). I wish to thank all the employees of the Jewish Historical Institute for their help in locating this material, and in particular Mr. Michał Czajka, who made available to me the book by Maria Hochberg-Mariańska.

other cases, the committees sought out witnesses and asked them to submit evidence.⁴ The members of the committees also collected testimonies in places such as Jewish children's homes, as may be deduced from the many depositions of small, illiterate and sick children. Presumably, the people who submitted testimonies, Jews and non-Jews alike, were those who had some awareness that their testimonies were of historical value. They were also prepared to have their statements submitted to courts; they were told that, if their testimonies could serve as evidence in criminal proceedings, the committees would pass them on to the Polish authorities, who were obliged by law to initiate proceedings. It is also clear that most of those who testified subsequently left Poland.

To the best of our knowledge, the witnesses – at least the Jewish ones – received no compensation in exchange for their testimony. In some cases, Poles who testified indicated that they expected to be paid. Sometimes those expectations were met.

The question as to the proportion and composition of the set of Holocaust survivors that decided to testify before the committees, and how this affected the nature of the testimonies, remains unanswered.⁵ Were they people who wished to revert to their

4 I wish to thank Prof. Feliks Tych and Dr. Alina Skibińska for the conversations they held with me and from which I drew the ideas that guided me in the initial description of the nature of these sources.

5 These issues may be clarified through study of the methodology employed in collecting testimonies by the historical documentation committees in sources such as, “Instrukcja dla zbierania materiałów historycznych z okresu okupacji niemieckiej” (“Instructions for Collection of Historical Material from the Period of German Occupation”), (Lodz: 1945); “Instrukcja dla zbierania materiałów etnograficznych z okresu okupacji niemieckiej” (“Instructions for Collection of Ethnographic Materials from the Period of German Occupation”), (Lodz: 1945); “Instrukcja dla badania przeżyć dzieci żydowskich z okresu okupacji niemieckiej” (“Instructions for Study of the Experiences of Jewish Children from the Period of German Occupation”), (Lodz: 1945); “Inwentarz Centralnej żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej przy Centralnym Komitecie żydów w Polsce (1944-1947)” (“List of Documents of the Central Committee for Jewish Historical Documentation affiliated to the Central Committee of Polish Jews [1944-1947]”); “Instrukcja dla zbierania materiałów historycznych z okresu okupacji niemieckiej” (“The Archives of the Regional Committees for Historical Documentation from September 1947, branches of the Jewish Historical Institute in Katowice, Krakow, Warsaw, Wrocław [1945-1950]”), processed by Monika Natkowska, trans. from Yiddish by Martyna Rusiniak, and Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikow, published by the Central Jewish Council, edited by Urszula Grygier, Institute Archive, 303/XX.

Jewish identity and to rejoin Jewish society? Or did the witnesses include some who had experienced particularly severe trauma, on whose bodies and souls the Holocaust had left a wound deeper than that made on those who did not volunteer to give evidence? There are three arguments that run counter to such hypotheses. First of all, many of those who reported to the documentation committees did so not only to demand justice, but also to give the righteous their due. In other words, they were not necessarily intent on cutting all ties with Poles and Poland. Second, this group may well have included many Jews who, during the initial three years following the war, believed the slogans disseminated by the Polish leadership promising autonomy for national minorities. Such people would have resumed their Jewish identity in the hope of gaining true equality of rights in Poland. Third, another conjecture is equally credible: it could be that among those Jews who decided after the war not to reclaim their Jewish identities (and, therefore, not to submit testimony), were some who had been lucky and who were therefore optimistic about the prospects for life in a mixed society. Or the contrary might be true: among those who refrained from testifying were perhaps some whose experiences were particularly harsh. In sum, there seems to be no unequivocal reason to believe that the evidence on which this article is based is skewed because only some of the Holocaust survivors submitted testimony to the Jewish Historical Documentation Committees.

Before concluding this methodological introduction, I need to address the issue of the critical attitude that a scholar must take with regard to such testimonies. The question is which of the principles of skepticism the scholar is entitled to adopt, and which should be waived. The testimonies of three members of a Jewish family who survived by taking refuge with farmers in the Nowy Brzesk region, exemplify the problem. They asserted that the mother of the family was shot dead by “local [Polish] guerilla fighters [*jédrusie*, as the partisans were known].”⁶ What evidence could contradict their recollections, unverifiable as they are, six decades after the event? A memory may mislead not only when it is false or ignores facts; a tormented memory may simplify certain facts.

But this begs another question: what happens to a collective’s common memory – be it Polish or Jewish – when there is no way to confirm or to refute its version of history? Should historians refuse to write about events for which they have only a single source, when corroborating evidence is unavailable? In the debate between the historian and the philosopher, the philosopher demands that survivors’ testimony has truth and a reason for being only if it is completed by one who cannot bear

6 See Testimony of the Elbinger family from Nowy Brzesk, notes 39 and 40 below.

witness.⁷ And this is why these testimonies offer us information that is critical to the moral wellbeing of societies.

The Body of Sources – The Level of Discourse

The style of the testimonies adduced in this article is remote from the events that they relate. This is a consequence of the situation in which the testimonies were submitted and recorded. Apart from the children, the witnesses appear to be in control of themselves and to choose their words carefully. As part of the routine procedure of recording the testimonies, witnesses were warned that they bore personal responsibility for submitting false evidence. Yet despite all this, one can nevertheless sense the emotions at play beneath the formality of the structure required of them.

Like every body of sources, these testimonies have a distinct “level of discourse,”⁸ comprising material that is not explicitly manifested but which can be inferred from the depositions with a high degree of certainty. This content is related to the witnesses’ psychological state, and to the nature of the institution that gathers the testimonies and records them. Comparison of testimonies submitted on different occasions and in various periods, indicates that the historical moment exerts a less than fundamental but nevertheless considerable influence on the rhetoric and the prosody of expression.⁹ A Jew who in 1945 was as yet unaware of the extent of the destruction of the Jewish people in the Holocaust, and who still held out hope for a shared life with the Poles, observed the past in a manner different to that of a Jew rescued from the pogrom at Kielce. Factors such as the presence of the person to whom the testimonies were submitted and by whom they were recorded, the mode of recording, the language in which the conversation was held, and the objective of the testimony all had a real effect on the conditions under which the testimony was submitted.¹⁰ The element of language

7 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive*, trans. by Danel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002), pp. 11-39.

8 I link this issue with Michel Foucault’s concept of discourse, See also David Howarth, *Discourse* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000).

9 This issue warrants a separate discussion. It could be based on a comparison between the testimonies of these survivors themselves as recorded in three aggregations of sources: the collections of the Institute, the three volumes of *Children of the Holocaust 1-3* and Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna, eds., *He is a Compatriot: Poles Helping Jews 1939-1945* (in Polish) (Warsaw: 2007 [1967]) (hereafter: *He is a Compatriot*).

10 In recent collections of testimonies one can even discern the influence of such subtle factors of discursive framework as, for example, the lighting used during videotaping.

was by no means unequivocal, since a conversation conducted in Polish could have distanced the witness from Jewish experience, or alternatively could have confirmed his equal rights in a democratic postwar Polish society. Also, by abolishing or creating a distance to the witness's narrative, the recorder of the testimony could determine, in a subtle and non-explicit yet unavoidable manner, the discursive framework within which the narrative was related.

In the most precise sense, alongside testimonies the final form of which was determined by an intermediary – the recorder of the deposition – a collection also included direct testimonies in the handwriting of Jews who survived, and sometimes also of Poles who assisted Jews to survive. While the former type has inevitably undergone a measure of stylization, memories recorded by the sources themselves in Polish or Yiddish¹¹ exhibit a wide variety of register, vocabulary, and style. They include distinctive idioms: the language of children, such as the testimony of Rózia Unger or that of Lila Szynowłoga; Polish local dialect, such as that of Szajek Nysybom (all presented below); florid rhetoric, such as that of Fania Brzezińska, who clearly sought to demonstrate literacy; or the biblical cadences of Abraham Forman, interspersed with verbatim verses from the psalms.¹² Several of the witnesses seek to gain the sympathy and approbation of their anticipated readers by employing the political language of their time, including expressions such as “the reactionary underground,” “liberation of the homeland,” and “Soviet brotherhood.”¹³ If such

If the cameraman uses strong background lighting, it literally surrounds the subject with an aura of heroism, often resulting in appropriate narrations from witnesses. They may tend to avoid ambivalence or any reference to “gray areas” (Primo Levi).

- 11 I was assisted by Sara Arm and Aleksandra Geller, who together translated for me over twenty Yiddish testimonies.
- 12 Institute Archive, 301/4716, Abraham Furman, born 1898 in Ochotnica, original in Polish: “Exactly at that time several people managed to escape to the forests and there they resided, in the heart of the forest, between crevices and cliffs. We starved for weeks on end, we slept under the stars. Virtually no one would give us shelter, everyone drove us away from their homes without giving us so much as one spoonful of hot water... [A]nd when, one November day in 1942, the first snow fell, the rural population set out to hunt for the tracks in the forests, in the pastures, in the woods and the cliffs... [O]ur hiding place was a large pine tree with extensive boughs that served as a house for us both, for me and my wife. We had everything there: fear, wind, snow, rain, yes and always also a few frozen potatoes that we could roast or cook for ourselves at night.”
- 13 Institute Archive, 301/1276. See the reaction of the Jews to the Soviet invasion: “Following the terrible storm, the horizon of the Jews brightened. The Soviet brothers

language is taken to be no more than the parroting of propaganda, its singular relation to the content of the testimony is lost. Such phrases grate on the reader's ear only if the reader fails to acknowledge, in his own reaction, what the German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer calls the "stimulus of prejudice" (*Vorurteile reizen*). This visceral reaction is often a marker of the difference between the Polish and Jewish historical experience.

The testimonies examined in this article are complemented by ethnographic fieldwork conducted, 60 years after the end of the war, in the Sandomierz region and in some other locations in Kielce district.¹⁴ The ethnography offers a fresh understanding of the testimonies of the "righteous," namely, those Poles who came to the aid of Jews. The language of these witnesses, now old men and women, constitutes, for the scholar capable of deciphering it, a window into the past, preserving as it does traces of wartime vernacular: "to apprehend Jews," "to hand over Jews," "to hold," and "to conceal."¹⁵ Among those who have demonstrated the significance of this phenomenon is Bogdan Wojdowski, a prominent writer of Polish Holocaust literature, who bases his writing on "crude speech, the voice of memory of that time."¹⁶ In the present article this same idiom serves as a key to unlock doors to other sources. If it is at all possible to touch the past, we can do it only through this speech.

In this essay, which constitutes an initial study toward documentation of the history of mentality, I adopt the rule of "redescription,"¹⁷ that is, a new reading of old sources. To gain a fuller understanding, I have also availed myself of new ethnographic material

accept us, embrace us with sensitive, motherly arms, give us complete freedom, place us on an equal footing with citizens, enable us to enjoy equality of human and civil rights, such rights as only recently were absolutely prohibited to us."

14 This article constitutes an expansion and substantiation, by means of archival material, of a section of a report on ethnographic field studies conducted in the Sandomierz region in the years 2004-2008, see Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Legendy o krwi. Antropologia przesądu (Blood Libel Legends: The Anthropology of Prejudice)* (Warsaw: 2008) (hereafter: *Blood Libels*). The numbers and letters in square brackets indicate signatures on transcript pages.

15 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "Skaz antysemityzmu" ("Antisemitism Word for Word"), *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (Warsaw: Institute of Literary Research, 2009), pp. 302-17.

16 Henryk Grynberg, *Prawda nieartystyczna (The Unadorned Truth)* (Warsaw: 2001), p. 263.

17 "I was always of the opinion that one should begin to think thus, as though no one had thought of this before us, and only thereafter to learn from all the others," *Hannah Arendt, The Recovery of the Public World* (Melvyn Hill, ed.), (New York: St. Martins Press, 1979), p. 337.

which offers additional insights, or additional nuances, to the understanding of the subject. To see beyond our own conceptual walls, which box the subject in, we must first examine the concepts in our lexicon that are external to the subject, those that ethnography calls “etic,” i.e. as described by outside observers (as opposed to “emic,” as described by a person within the culture).¹⁸ One of the professional risk factors for historians and anthropologists is succumbing to the persuasive powers of sources with which they, to one extent or another, unconsciously sympathize. Nevertheless, the author’s outlook inevitably impinges on the testimony he confronts. This must be countered with a pervasive awareness of our views, and a continuous effort to avoid the pitfall of uncritical thought.¹⁹

In this article, I refer to the two types of witnesses as “survivors” and “abettors.” I eschew the term “the rescued,” which implies that these people were merely objects to be rescued, while the others were fully capable of saving them if they wished. In reality, the first condition for survival was for the person facing death to embark on the tortuous path of searching for help, and to subsequently persevere. No one could survive who did not affirm, anew each day, his or her will to live. This can be seen in Adolf Rudnicki’s book *Golden Windows*.²⁰

In criticizing the tendency to depict those in need of rescue as objects bereft of the capacity to act of their own volition, I seek to counter portrayals of rescue that employ a childish, ambivalent dichotomy between “Jewish gratitude that transcends all possible reward,” and “ignoble Jewish ingratitude.”²¹ The Polish discourse that denies any

18 The linguist Kenneth Pike proposed the distinction between “emic” and “etic” concepts in the 1960s, see Thomas N. Headland, Kenneth L. Pike, and Marvin Harris, eds., *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate* (London: Sage Publications, 1990). In the present text, I will use them as the interviewees’-informants’ concepts (emics), as opposed to scholarly/more problematized/self-reflexive concepts (etics).

19 See Slavoy Zizek, “The Reality of the Virtual,” lecture delivered in London on December 11, 2003: “In a given situation, there is always one universal truth. It can, however, be accessed only from a specific, partial and involved perspective.” See also D. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), and also Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “History as a Fetish,” in D. Głowacka, Dorota Głowacka and Joanna Żylińska eds., *Imaginary Neighbors: Polish-Jewish Relations After the Holocaust*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska University Press, 2007), pp. 40-63.

20 Adolf Rudnicki, “Złote okna” (“Golden Windows”), in *Stories* (Warsaw: 1996), p. 123.

21 See Mark Paul, ed., *Wartime Rescue of Jews by the Polish Catholic Clergy: The Testimony of Survivors* (Toronto: Polish Educational Foundation in North

responsibility for the fate of the Jews uses this dichotomy in speaking of Poles who rescued Jews, to absolve itself of all blame for relations between Poles and Jews during the period of German occupation.²² My choice of terms represents a conscious attempt to avoid, and to prevent others from falling into, the trap laid by such dichotomous usages.

Similarly, I reserve the use of the term “righteous” only for those who have been officially declared “righteous” by Yad Vashem. I prefer descriptive terms. Rescue and the taking of risk in rescuing Jews were not sporadic acts of will, but rather decisions that had to be made anew every day. In some cases, such decisions were rescinded under pressure of circumstances. Did the righteous person in these cases become unrighteous?

America, 2007), and in particular the chapter “Recognition and (in) Gratitude.” In a similar context and role see the recent work by Mariusz Nowik, “*Nawet milion Polaków ukrywało żydów*” (“As Many as a Million Poles Concealed Jews”), The Institute for National Memory, http://www.dziennik.pl/wydarzenia/article237576/Nawet_milion_Polakow_ukrywalo_Zydow.html (registration at the home page of the Institute for National Memory, www.zyciezazycie.pl).

- 22 Compare two examples of this discourse, separated by a distance of six decades. The first is a report by the first army emissaries to return from Poland to London in late August 1945: “Since the Jews benefited from being able to hide among Poles, thanks to which over 50,000 of them were rescued from death, there is no doubt that they should have exhibited at least loyalty toward the Poles. Meanwhile, from the moment that the Lublin authorities entered the areas of the Polish state, the Jews immediately began to inform on those among whom they had previously hidden, claiming that they had blackmailed them, that they had extorted money from them. The Jews submitted names of AK [the Home Army, the main Polish resistance force, supported by the Polish government in-exile in England] members to the authorities, and they themselves had dared as much as to beat and torture Poles in the camps, whom Jews had overseen with the agreement of the Soviets.” Source: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, Archives ref. no. A9 III 2 c/64, Report of Polish military personnel, London, 2/10/1945. This citation is taken from: August Grabski, *Działalność komunistów wśród żydów w Polsce (1944-1949) (Communist Activity Among the Jews in Poland [1944-1949])*, (Warsaw: 2004), p. 32. Sixty years later, in a conversation with an employee of the rural council from the village of Wielowieś in the Sandomierz region, the ethnographers note that the general public in the area thought that the number of Jews rescued by Poles was six times greater than that noted in the above-mentioned report [297N]: “Thirty thousand Poles were shot dead by the Germans only because they assisted Jews, and in Poland 300,000 Jews were rescued. That is to say, because we rescued them we lost 30,000 of our own. Because the Germans killed the entire family that assisted the Jews. And so this is how they repay us.”

The Righteous Unrighteous

One such ambivalent narrative was related to ethnographers in the village of Furmany [transcript 122w, Furmany village in the vicinity of Sandomierz, informant no. 1]:

[O]ne such case occurred here, there on the edge of the forest, when they kept these Jews, hid them. I don't know for how long, what or how, I only know what people spoke ... then German police came, *gendarmes*, and killed eleven or twelve Jews ... the same guy ... who kept them ... went and told that a whole herd of Jews had set upon him and had been unwilling to leave him alone...

In inarticulate language that smacks of the truth, the language in which people speak today in the rural areas of “keeping” Jews in hiding, an old resident of an adjacent village in the Sandomierz region told ethnographers [transcript 175N Sokolniki village, adjacent to Sandomierz]: “I myself concealed them. Yes ... I kept them in hiding for two months, and then they kind of moved around among the same people ... and people hid them.”

Q: They came to you, Mr. X, yes? Asked you for help?

A: Yes ... one of the Jewish women, she had these goods, materials, and she would bring what she had in this stash to keep for her, and used to take from us, stored them with us. And she used to go then to people in the homes and people would feed her, kept her with them, then she paid the people with this merchandise ... in the end there was no way to keep them ... there was one guy, Alscher [an ethnic German] ...they [i.e. Germans] found out about them ... people turned them in²³ and killed them.

Q: And you, Mr. X, hid one person, or ...

A: With children ... I hid two families.

Q: Yes...

A: [B]ut after a month, after a fortnight ... someone informed ...

Q: And in the village did the people know that these Jews were with you, Mr. X?

A: No, no, no, no. It was a hiding place. A hiding place. But they ... they were all killed. No one alive today knows about it...

23 The same euphemism for a denunciation appeared in other testimonies collected in 1946, for example in Institute Archive, 301/1773.

The man went on to speak of Jews who failed to survive even though they were helped. He himself had tried to rescue two families, to no avail – but he offers no details. A moment later he returns to the circumstances under which he took the Jews into his household. It transpires that a Jewish woman, a neighbor, came to take refuge in his barn, unbeknownst to him. He did not drive her away when he discovered her, but she did not stay there long – someone informed on her and she was murdered together with her two children [N179, Sokolniki village, adjacent to Sandomierz]: “I go there to take some hay for bedding for the cows, and I fall into some pit there. And lo and behold – Jews are there. Well, she ... this Jewess was sitting there with these children.”

Q: They were hiding there without your knowledge?

A: Yes, without my knowledge. She was there I don't know how many days ... and she begged to bring her something to eat, she was so hungry. Well, so I came home, I said to mother, to father, that this and that. First we cooked hot, and they already had to be fed, and she was there for some days and went onward. And she would return again, and again she begged, and we had to keep her there again for a week, or two weeks. Well, because it was a pity about these Jews!

Q: And you weren't afraid to conceal Jews like that?

A: Great God, well, it ... how could we have turned them in, to death?... [O]r to drive them away like some animal out to the street? It was impossible. We had to keep them and that was that. And apart from that they were people we knew. And even had they not been known, it would have been impossible to do such a thing. I am of the opinion that one must take in a person and help him ... but I felt sorry for them. When they shot her I watched it and got sick. People from the Gestapo and Polish police came. She was in the middle, the children on both sides ... and that's how they shot them...

Note that the speaker recalls the event in a manner that does not endanger his perception of good order in his world. He helped, he could have done no more. “There was no way to keep them,” he says. Nevertheless, the painful memory of having watched their execution clouds his satisfaction at having done a good Christian

24 One may unequivocally define the speaker's outlook as antisemitic. For example: “The Jews ruled before the war, and that was it.” “The Jews rule today as well. And when they rule, then we also feel that they are ruling. Because wherever there is an affair

deed.²⁴ Denunciations, “turning in” the Jews by the “people”, leads to just this place. Yet the role of executioner is not played by one of the “people” who denounced, but by a stranger, a *Volksdeutsch* named Alscher, and by “the Gestapo.” This reinforces the speaker’s conviction that his world is appropriately arranged and that he himself had behaved properly.

In the next village over, named Radomyśl, the person who hunted down Jews is identified as a neighbor [272N, Radomyśl]:

Q: [D]id you hear of anyone who handed Jews over to the Germans?

A: Yes, there were such people, here there was someone who used to capture the Jews and turn them in...

Q: And why?

A: Because they gave him money for it.

Q: The Germans? He simply did it for the money?...

A: [C]ertainly not for love!

Q: And what did you think of such a person then?

A: [W]e all cursed him: how could he have ... but these were such times, everyone was afraid, everyone kept very, very quiet!

According to this woman, the villagers, subjected to fear and terror, had condemned Jew hunting, but the fact that it was happening did not particularly shock anyone; they treated the evil they saw as the way of the world. In the popular belief, the Jew hunter was a scoundrel, a devil. In the folk-religious worldview, this role was as indispensable as that of the angel, the good, decent person.²⁵ How did the presence of a man like this affect the overall morality of the village? We learn about this only from Jewish documents.

involving corruption, then the Jew is there, a Pole is found there and Jews are found there.” “Now the Jews and the converted rule.” See *Blood Libels*, p. 623.

25 See, for example, the case of a girl who hid in the villages alongside the San River and who adopted a similar outlook. The testimony of Frieda Einsiedler, who was aged five when the war broke out: “From the moment they killed Grandma, no one did me any more harm. The farmers used to throw stones at me, they threatened to send the police, but I never took it to heart ... I knew them all already, I knew who the good ones were, who would not endanger me,” *Children Accuse*, p. 158. A further testimony concerns a neighbor who had engaged in hunting Jews in rural areas [2089W]: “There was like this little girl, here my neighbor was like this ... what did it bother him? And this girl would run away, and so I say: perhaps she’ll run somewhere, perhaps someone will

Szymon Sztrumpf hid together with his son (who also survived), his brother and his family (who did not survive), and his mother and her grandchild (who did not survive) in villages not far from Staszów. He submitted his testimony to the Historical Documentation Committee in Lodz only in 1948.

The witness came to us and requested that we accept his enclosed testimony and pass it on to the authorities... When he was asked why he had reported so late to submit evidence of this kind he replied that up to now he had been apprehensive as to his safety were he to level public accusations at the murderers of his family, and that now he is no longer afraid...

My brother, his wife and their children hid in various locations. In June 1942 they stayed with Józef Siudak, who lived in the village of Zapusty, who after a few days, together with his cousin Jan Siudak from the village of Wierzbica, murdered them. They shot them with guns at night, Józef took the corpses on a cart to the forest and buried them... Stefan Wilk ... and also Stefan Samiec, from the village of Zapusty told me of this... Józef Furman, who lived in the village of Zapusty, heard the shots and the cries of the victims. The murderers robbed their victims. I stress that the Germans were 25 kilometers from this village ... not one of them came to this village regarding matters concerning Jews. The farmers who concealed Jews were in no danger from the Germans... The Siudak brothers belonged to a band of robbers that hunted Jews...

This testimony includes a section on the murder of the witness' brother, his mother, Cylka Sztrumpf, who would move from one hiding place to another in the vicinity of the village of Zapusty together with her grand daughter, and also on the murder of two additional Jews: Lutek Kleinmann and Feliks Gruszka. The act of murder was committed, according to the testimony, by five local men acting on the authorization of the head of the village. Once they had murdered the mother, they removed her boots from her legs, extracted her gold teeth and tore out the earrings. The testimony

take her in?!" Interviewer: "Did you see this, madam?" "Of course! I remember it well... [H]e ran, caught hold of her, hard, and handed her over to the *gendarmes*... [B]ut fate was not kind to him, for he didn't live much longer either..."

concludes with a list of goods appropriated by the murderers: “a feather pillow, 12 meters of silk cloth for shirts and a kerchief.”²⁶

Shimon Schwartzberg relates in his testimony the activity of Jew hunters in the village of Osiembrów in the district of Kozienice. When the witness’ sister approached one of the residents requesting that he return to her the belongings that she had left with him for safekeeping, the man set his dog upon her and then turned to the village chief, demanding that she be arrested. The village leader (Polish: *sołtys*) severely beat

26 The testimony of Shimon Strompf, Institute Archive 301/3702, recorded on June 22, 1948. I wish to thank Dr. Alina Skibińska (who is preparing a book, *In Court*, on the subject) for finding corroboration for Strompf’s testimony among material from the archive of the Appeals Court in Kielce (SAK) 227a, 277b, 277c, upon the authorization of which the 1948 investigation of Józef Siudak and others was conducted. The material is preserved in the files of the Institute for National Memory (IPN):

Siudak Jan, Siudak Józef, Furtak Jan, Dynia Piotr, Krawczyk Leon, Krawczyk Stanisław, żelazko Julia, Misterkiewicz Stanisław, Krawczyk Konstanty Hipolit, Nowak Antoni, Furtak Maria, Janis Józef, Rudnik Stanisław, Kwiecijos Teofil, Furtak Paweł Piotr in the years 1943-1944 in the areas of the rural council Tuczępy, rural council Busko-Zdrój, in their capacity as members of the National Armed Forces (NSZ, a national-chauvinistic Polish resistance force) or of the Peasants’ Battalions (BcH, a resistance force made up of farmers), murdered, or were complicit in the murder of Jews in hiding, k. 1216 SAK 277a, 277b, 277c: 1948: 1960.

I quote the information on the affair according to Skibińska’s notes:

During the German occupation a large group of the National Armed Forces organization operated in the territory of the Tuczępy rural council. The organization’s commander was Waclaw Proshkowski and the group’s commander in Tuczępy was Jan Chlond. This group fought members of other partisan groups (it killed two members of the Farmers’ Battalions, and also took part in persecutions of Jews). The family of Jojna Yozef Sztrumpf, which until then had hidden with various farmers, found refuge in summer 1943 with Józef Siudak, in whose cellar they stayed for several weeks. Under the impression that they were extremely well-off, Siudak murdered them with the help of his cousin Jan. Jan initially shot one person through the opening to the cellar, and Józef then murdered the others using an axe. In the summer of 1943, two Tuczępy residents, Jan Siudak and Stanisław Sapa, apprehended a Jew who claimed that he was from the village of Szaniec, and led him to the head of Tuchampi council and then to the head of the village of Wierzbicy, Jan Furtak, who ordered the Jew to be shot dead in the adjacent forest. In May or June 1943, upon the order of Stefan Borek, two Jewesses,

the woman and then ordered two of the villagers to transport her by cart to the district offices (Polish: *gmina*). Since the district officials were unwilling to accept her, the farmers transported her to a sawmill where German gendarmes were stationed. It was only there that she was shot. In return, Władysław Łukasik demanded a reward of 50 kilograms of sugar. He was told in response: “You will receive the sugar when you bring also this Jewess’ brother.”²⁷

These two testimonies indicate that in these villages a fairly large group of farmers enhanced their livelihoods by capturing and robbing Jews (in the village of Zapusty this group comprised at least seven people). They made no particular effort to conceal their actions, as they murdered also in broad daylight. In their own way they tried to ensure that everything was done according to correct procedure: before they shot Stropf’s mother and her grand daughter, the murderers received “a written note” from the village chief. In the first case, the group of murderers included the village blacksmith, and in two cases the village heads were members of the group. The gang of criminals in the village of Zapusty was engrossed in a game of cards,²⁸ and the appearance of one of the Jewish women cut short the party. It transpires that the names of the murderers were common knowledge in the village. One may conjecture whether and how this knowledge affected the history of these villages after the war.²⁹

It is difficult to assess how representative these villages were. In these two examples a variety of types of response are evident. Some people concealed several

Cylka Łaja Sztrumpf and her eight year-old granddaughter Słupska, were shot dead in a forest not far from the village of Tuczępy. Following the murder, they were robbed of their shoes and gold rings. Stefan Borek captured Lutek Kleinmann, who tried to hide in a rye field. When Lutek escaped Stanisław Krawczyk shot him. Feliks Gruszka was caught in Julia Żelazko’s home – she guessed that the peddler was Jewish and denounced him to Stefan Borek. Gruszka was taken to the wood and killed there. The accused have never pleaded guilty.

27 Institute Archive, 301/3915. Regarding a reward of 50 kg of sugar, see also the testimony in Institute Archive, 301/5306 from the village Obózek adjacent to Jedlińsk.

28 Institute Archive, 301/3702.

29 The archive of the Jewish Historical Institute contains the testimonies of Poles who were shocked by the crimes committed in their villages during the German occupation. See, for example, Institute Archive, 301/5306, Testimony of Tytus Dumał from the area of Jedlińsk in the Skarżysko-Kamienna regional council; and also, *ibid.*, testimonies pertaining to events in *Książ Wielki*.

of the Jewish residents; others – such as the council secretary Zarzycki, the heads of the rural council of Rożniszew, or the Polish policemen who were stationed at Magnuszew and Grabów – feigned indifference and thereby protected the Jews.³⁰ Others murdered, and there were even those – and it is perhaps appropriate to include among them the person who, according to the first testimony, produced information on what he had found in the pocket of one of the murdered – who were unable to arrive at a clear decision regarding the category to which they belonged.³¹ This categorization somewhat complicates Jewish perceptions of the types of people they encountered: “Several of them pretended that they had no knowledge of the Jew, some expressed understanding of his plight, expressed compassion and sought to lend a hand, while others sought to hand him in to the Germans.”³² Among the possible responses, genuine apathy was a deficiency – the lack of a visceral reaction, as seen in the testimony below. At least two of these groups, the abettors and the informers, were hostile to one another (see the section below, “The Polish-Polish War Concerning the Jews”).

Conspiratorial Secrecy

Prior to addressing dissension among the Poles, it is necessary to paint, in broad brushstrokes, the conditions under which Jews were concealed. Every testimony that relates to this stresses above all that conspiratorial secrecy was essential. The following testimony shows that the speaker, who was nine years old at the time of the events she relates, had no inkling that her mother was hiding Jews. Her mother remained silent about it even in early 1945, out of apprehension that concealment of Jews was a punishable transgression under Polish law.

[W361]

A: [M]y mother even concealed a Jewish woman.

Q: And did you know anything about it?

A: I actually know nothing.

Q: Nothing ...

A: Nothing, absolutely nothing. I only know now that she had a Jewish friend from Zaklików, who entreated her to conceal her. She took her in and kept her under the hay for some time... Later my sister arranged for

30 On this “apathy,” see the Introduction to *Children Accuse*, p. 15.

31 The archive of the Jewish Historical Institute contains a number of testimonies of people of this sort, most of which include requests for financial compensation. See Institute Archive, 301/3993.

32 Institute Archive, 301/2252.

her to go for forced labor in Germany ... the Germans took [people] by force, but one could volunteer, so my sister reported there and gave the card to the Jewess ... and she apparently survived... I don't remember because I was a girl when the war ended, and she wrote a letter to my mother...

Q: She made contact, that is.

A: She made contact immediately after the war...³³

“Even my mother-in-law didn't know about it, and it would have been inconceivable to reveal it to strangers,”³⁴ say Mieczyslaw and Helena Gosk, who concealed nine Jews. There are, indeed, only a handful of cases of villages in which no one was tempted to inform when it was an open secret that a particular villager was hiding Jews.³⁵ In certain cases, when the person hiding the fugitives couldn't maintain secrecy, another member of the family secretly took responsibility. This is what occurred in the case

33 To her dying day the speaker's mother was unable to rid herself of the fear that her concealment of Jews would be discovered and she would be punished for it. See similar themes in Paweł P. Reszka, “L k Sprawiedliwych” (“The Fear of the Righteous”), Duży Format Supplement, *Gazety Wyborczej*, February 13, 2006.

34 Testimony submitted by the Gosk couple from the village of Wyżyków, Puchały rural council, Institute Archive, 301/5835.

35 In the collection of testimonies addressed here I found not a single mention of such a situation. In the ethnographical material from the Sandomierz region there was one case, that of Olga Lilien-Mazur, a physician from Lvov, who was offered sanctuary in Mokrzyszyn, in the vicinity of Tarnobrzeg, in which the entire community knew of her Jewish origin. Dr. Lilian worked as a pediatrician in the city, and died in August 1996, aged 92. “Everyone knew that she was here, everyone knew. But after all ... had anyone informed on her, they may have liquidated her, but no one was that malevolent toward her...” See also the village Mulawicze, in which the entire community concealed the a child named Wintluk. His story is related by Alina Cała in *Wizerunku żyda w polskiej kulturze ludowej* (*The Figure of the Jew in Popular Polish Culture*), (Warsaw: 2005), p. 131. Among the reports in the volume *Children Accuse* is a testimony by Josek Mansdorf, who was on the “Aryan” side: “The farmer understood who I was but did not say a word. After that all the village knew. But the farmer did not throw me out and the people did not hand me over to the Germans.” See *Children Accuse*, XXV and pp. 100-7.

of Władysława Przerwa from the village of Łoje, in the vicinity of Kozenice.³⁶ Before she took in David Goldman, who had escaped from the ghetto, he was hidden by her brother, Mieczysław Maj, for two weeks.

Mr. Goldman sewed for the farmers, and several of them therefore kept him with them...³⁷ When this became known to the neighbors, they threatened my brother, saying that because of him the entire village would be set on fire. Goldman was forced to escape. In July (most probably 1943) I came across Mr. David in a vegetable field. He asked me not to turn him in. From then on I regularly brought him milk, bread, everything I had.

From early fall of 1943 the refugee hid in the owner's cowshed, initially without her knowledge and eventually with her consent. In the winter he would come inside in the evenings.

On one occasion armed [Polish] partisans came in to eat supper. At the time Mr. David was in a small room. When my daughter asked them what they would do if a Jew wished to join the partisans, they said "A bullet in the head and throw him in the river."³⁸ I was extremely fearful that they might find out who was hiding with us. I hid Goldman under a quilt. When the partisans entered the small room they luckily failed to notice him. That's how Goldman survived with us until the liberation.

The motives for concealing Jews sometimes changed over time. The members of the Elbinger family were prosperous textile merchants in Nowy Brzesk. We are familiar

36 Institute Archive, 301/5908, Testimony submitted on May 24, 1963.

37 See the testimony in Institute Archive, 301/1773: A Jewish woman from Chlewice with Aryan papers who hid out in villages, related something that she heard from a woman who housed her: "When that scum starts running, I'll go after her until I see the end of her. I'll keep her alive for the harvest but then I'll finish her off."

38 On the attitude of the Polish underground toward the Jews see Aleksandra Bańkowska, "Partyzantka polska lat 1942-1944 w relacjach żydowskich" ("The Polish Partisan Movements 1942-1944"), in *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały (The Jewish Holocaust: Studies and Sources)* 1 (2005), pp. 148-64. See also the continuation of this text.

with their story through the testimony of their son Emanuel,³⁹ and the two testimonies of his sister Paula. The Elbingers hid with a family of farmers near the town.

During the day we were concealed in the attic. At first it was good there, but as time passed the people hiding us made increasing demands. Conditions deteriorated, they gave us less and less food and continually demanded more of us. We had considerable property in safekeeping with various people. Mother would often go to Nowy Brzesk to bring money... We were unable to meet the demands of our “benefactors.” Some days we ate nothing at all, and the farm owner once attacked father and beat him... We realized that our hosts were seeking to extort all our property from us and then kill us. Once we overheard a conversation: “Would that this should come to an end once and for all, we must sharpen the axes...”⁴⁰

Some survivors told about Poles who courageously persevered despite family tragedies. The testimony of Władysław Piwowarczyk, a Pole from Busko, whose brother had been a Communist prior to the war, begins with an account of how this brother, arrested by the Gestapo, was freed from the prison in Korczyn by his Jewish and fellow Communist comrades, Szapsa Raca and Chaim Piszcz.

At night they pried open the lock of the cell door and freed him... When they expelled the Jews from the town, more Jews came to me, others, the two Strosberg brothers with the wife of one of them, Weinbaum with his wife and child, and Szapsa Raca’s fiancée; the three Cukier sisters – Communists – and Weinbaum’s brother Szymek, with his wife. All of them together with my brother stayed in a hideout that I prepared for them underground. They were all with me for a year; that is, from February 2, 1943. Since my family found it hard to meet their needs, my brother decided to leave the hiding place and take with him another five

39 The testimony of Emanuel Elbinger in *Children of the Holocaust*; also in the author’s archive, testimony delivered in Krakow on July 5, 2008.

40 The testimony of Paula Elbinger: Institute Archive, 310/310/4223, delivered to the Historical Committee in Krakow in 1947, and also testimony in *Children Accuse*. Of the Elbinger family, only the father and the two children, Emanuel and Paula, survived. The family’s mother was murdered by local partisans (*jédrusie*) on one of the occasions on which she went out to search for food.

people... He led them to my sister ... in the village of Stanislawice. She prepared a good hideout for them underground... They stayed there for a whole year, up to January 31, 1944. Their hiding place was discovered by the people of the National Armed Forces (NSZ) ... they liquidated these Jews, as well as my brother...⁴¹

In a letter sent from Paris on January 31st, 1949, Izrael Weinbaum confirms that Piwowarczyk concealed Jews even after his brother was killed, and built for them no less than four shelters in his field. Nevertheless, Polish heroism and sacrifice for the sake of Jews was rare.⁴² More often, we may suppose, things looked as they had in Przysucha –

The entire large Biederman family (the mother and a number of children) were killed by a local fascist, Jan Otwynowski, now a citizen of Przysucha and owner of several houses and plots that formerly belonged to Jews... In 1942, when the ghetto was on the point of destruction, the Biederman family found refuge ... with Otwynowski... After around six months, once this “benefactor” had succeeded in extorting all the Biederman family’s property ... he decided that his patriotic mission had come to an end and murdered them all.⁴³

41 The testimony of Stanisław Piwowarczyk, delivered on November 11, 1949 in Łódź, Institute Archive, 301/4160.

42 One can nevertheless point out a further testimony from the province of Kielce, which relates concealment of Jews, where this concealment led to the killing of one of the members of the Polish family. See the testimony of Dawid Fromowicz, Institute Archive, 301/4055, regarding Antony Stolarz from Białolinie Radłowskie, adjacent to Tarnów. In this case too, it appears that the motive for aiding Jews stemmed from a left-wing outlook.

43 Institute Archive, 301/4743, the testimony of Szymon Rosenberg, composed on the basis of conversations held in Przysucha during the period up to May 1950. For testimony referring to acts of treachery, informing and murder, see Institute Archive, 301/5420 (the village of Łazów in the Maluszyn rural council, and Pilczyce, in the Włoszczowa regional council); 301/2778 (the village of Bełek, Mierzwin rural council, Jędrzejów regional council); 301/3262 (Skąła, Miechów regional council). 301/1908 (Łopatowiec, Pińczów regional council), 301/4315 (Raclawice, Rabsztyn rural council, Olkusz regional council); 301/2105 (Drohiczyn); 301/4716 (Ochotnica, Szczawa, Szczawnica, Łącko, Kamienica adjacent to Limanowa, Jazowsko adjacent to Nowy Sącz); 301/3810 (testimony on the Nagórki murder, Rogienice rural council,

The Story of Maria Szczecińska

Political and religious convictions presumably impelled some left-wing Poles to rescue Jews,⁴⁴ whereas others were motivated by devout religious faith.⁴⁵ But what other circumstances led Poles who do not fit these categories to decide to help Jews, and to persist in this over time?

The story of Maria Szczecińska from Staszów in the province of Kielce, a woman who concealed fifteen Jews over a period of 22 months, appears to be an extremely rare case, but at the same time typical. A report from the 1960s states:

On October 2, [1947], the citizens Pasmantier Biene, Segeł Daniel and Spic Samuel reported to us and testified that the citizen Maria Szczecińska, who lives at 39/22 Sienkiewicz Street, a Catholic and mother of five children, concealed 15 Jews⁴⁶ during the occupation in Staszów ... we built ourselves a hiding place in the Staszów railway station, this was an excavation beneath Szczecińska's apartment. She was a clerk who worked at the railway service. We paid for the food. When the Gestapo found out that Jews were hiding in the station, Szczecińska led us to a hiding place in the forest, with acquaintances of hers. She sat with us and protected us, and when things calmed down she took us to her place, where we sat in a cellar all day long... [W]e stayed with her for 22 months...⁴⁷

The next document in this collection was written in 1963. It is a personal history written in Szczecińska's own handwriting. From it we learn that when she became a widow in 1930 and remained the sole provider for five children, she obtained a position in the

Łomża district); see also *Children Accuse*, pp. 159-60; and also the testimony of Benjamin Einhorn, which corrects a version submitted in Tadeusz Seweryn's article *Bread and Blood*, in a publication marking the fifth anniversary of the destruction of the Krakow ghetto, p. 167 (Institute Archive, 301/777). According to the testimony, the concealment of the Grübel family by Władysław Kozka from the village of Skrzydlina stemmed solely from motives of robbery.

44 See the documents regarding concealment of Jews by the Kaniut family from Chorzów, which was associated with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), Institute Archive, 301/6268.

45 See the section below, "Priests, Nuns and Catholic Laypeople."

46 The text of the testimony mentions fourteen people.

47 Institute Archive, 301/2790.

railway by virtue of personal connections and was transferred to Staszów.⁴⁸ In 1941 a number of Jewish acquaintances approached her and asked her to conceal them. She agreed, and for a month (a different version of the testimony speaks of four months) she kept them in a woodshed. The fugitives then returned to the ghetto, where they were employed by Amler, a German road construction company. When the ghetto was liquidated they again asked her for sanctuary.

I must admit that then, in 1942, when I agreed to take them all in, I thought that this would last perhaps for several months, and that the Germans would then calm down. I did not know that we would live in this horrific awfulness for two and a half years. I lived with the children in a small house, 200 meters from the station. During several dozen nights the children and myself dug beneath one of the rooms, removing the earth partly to the river and partly to the garden. Subsequently, now together with the Jews, we completed setting up the shelter and we even equipped it with electrical lighting. It seems to me that one of the factors that facilitated the decision to conceal these people was the fact that I handed over to other Polish families all their valuables for safekeeping (to my regret, not all of them were subsequently willing to return the items that they had taken). Staszów is a small town ... no one imagined until the end of the war that I could have concealed so many people in my house without taking their property. In order to describe the miracles of ensuring food for so many, without arousing suspicions, not to mention when one Jewish woman, Pinka Posmantier had her baby in our dugout, I would have to write a book. I am unable to do that but probably the best ending is the fact that when the first Red Army troops entered Staszów, fifteen Jews emerged from my hiding place alive and well...⁴⁹

Another version of Szczecińska's narrative, written three years previously,⁵⁰ offers additional details. It gives the ages of Szczecińska's children, who shared the responsibility for concealing Jews in their home. Her eldest daughter was fifteen years old in 1939, and the youngest was ten years old. At the time, Szczecińska lived

48 Institute Archive, 301/5715, signed "Staszów: March 19, 1963."

49 Ibid.

50 The continuation of this file, Institute Archive, 301/5715, testimony dated April 23, 1960.

in a detached three-room lodging close to the station building. Since she hailed from Poland's eastern border regions, she was referred to as a "Russian." "I was rather isolated there in Staszów and by virtue of this isolation I managed to conceal the Jews in my home," she writes. We learn from the documents that she accommodated "three married couples ... as well as two single men... The baby born in the hideout was that of Bina Segal..."

What remains etched in the memory of the reader of Szczecińska's testimony is her isolation, the imperative impressed upon the children to keep the secret under all conditions, the thought process that preceded the decision about how and where to build the shelter, and the conscious choice of indigence as protection against the jealousy of her neighbors. Seclusion, to the extent of physical isolation, blocked every breach through which the secret might have leaked, while her poverty averted any suspicion that she might be hiding "rich" Jews.

Indigence as a spur to a compassion that does not balk at sharing what little there is with others who suffer misfortune also appears in the testimony of Lilly Szynowłoga, who was five years old when the war broke out. She hid in the vicinity of Chęciny in Kielce province.

A Polish acquaintance advised us to go to the cemetery, to an old pauper who would take us in. Mother delivered me there and paid for me... My cousin and the old man prepared a hideout, covered it with stone slabs... We lined the hideout with straw... We sat concealed there until Christmas... The old man brought us food when there was no one in the cemetery... He was very decent. When the second winter came we no longer had money. Our cousin went to town but there he was captured by AK [the Home Army] men,⁵¹ who wanted him to tell them where rich Jews were hiding. But my cousin did not betray us, so they shot him in the town square and buried him in the cemetery where we were hiding. Mother was very weak and I was very small and there was no one to look after us. We would have died of hunger had it not been for that old man. He went about the villages and begged, and thus protected us and concealed us for half a year until liberation...⁵²

51 This was probably Icek Grynbaum, shot dead on the Chęciny marketplace by the Wierny guerilla detachment of the Barabasz resistance force (AK, the Home Army). I am working on a book on the war crimes and murders of Jews perpetrated by Barabasz in the Kielce district.

52 Institute Archive, 301/5521.

The Story of Victoria Nowosielska from the Village of Glinów

Zalman Zalctrejger,⁵³ who escaped from the Opoczno ghetto in October 1942 together with his brother-in-law Herschek Zygielfarb, was concealed by Wiktorja Nowosielska, a resident of the nearby village of Glinów. The two men stayed with her for 26 months, until the arrival of the Soviet army on January 17, 1945. Two familiar themes resonate in his description of her: solitude (even though Nowosielska was not alienated from her community) and poverty. Nowosielska's husband died two days after they took the Jews into their home. The couple was childless. Upon the death of her husband, neighbors and acquaintances came to visit her, which put the two Jews hiding in the attic at risk of being discovered. The money that the men brought with them lasted for at most six months, up to Easter 1943. From this time onward, Nowosielska fed them at her own expense: "She sold many things left by her husband, and cared for herself by engaging in petty trade. And she continued to feed us as before, as in the period when we had paid her for provisions – three times a day," Zalctrejger explained. She received assistance from unwitting members of her own family from nearby Zachorzów, who supported the indigent widow with provisions from their farm – potatoes, cabbage, and occasionally meat." Nowosielska would give us the best food, such as lard and the like, and when we tried to refuse this she insisted, stressing that she was free to go about and could eat everything, while we were confined without fresh air and without seeing sunlight – and we therefore had to eat better." She kept the presence of the fugitives secret from her extended family. The two men in hiding could overhear conversations held in the apartment below through a crack in the ceiling, and through a crack in the roof they were able to observe the road.

The risk of discovery was greatly exacerbated during the period of the Polish Warsaw uprising (August 1944), which saw the arrival of a wave of refugees from the capital. "With Nowosielska's agreement we turned one of the rooms into a pig-sty and a hen-house, and we destroyed the kitchen stove and the heating stove in the neighboring room in order to render it uninhabitable. And the people from Warsaw indeed were not tempted to take up residence in such accommodation." A similar stratagem was utilized when the front approached the village. The landlady "tied a sheet to her head, spread around her all sorts of bottles and medicinal containers, and pretended that she was suffering from a serious ailment." The fear of contagion deterred the various gangs from seeking lodging there, although it did not prevent the carrying out of searches in the attic. To counter such eventualities an additional emergency hideout was installed in the house. This was a bunker for two people, excavated beneath the floor, in which

53 Institute Archive, 301/2533, recorded on July 24, 1947. The following four quotes are taken from this same testimony.

Zalctrejger and Zygielfarb hid on certain occasions, having to lie without moving for ten to twenty hours.

In the second half of 1944, when tension in the village rose as the front approached, the two Jews suggested that they leave for the forest, but Nowosielska refused to agree to this. “To all the arguments she replied: ‘if it is death, so to everybody. If it is life, so to everybody.’ She was better than a mother to us. Her sacrifice was completely unselfish.” The testimony concludes by mentioning that Nowosielska was forced to leave her village after the liberation, although no reason is given.⁵⁴ A photograph of a woman and two men is attached to the testimony .

Mydlów (1942-1945)

Another memoir⁵⁵ shows how concealment of Jews played out in situations in which the providers of protection failed to abide by the rules of secrecy that guided the protagonists of the cases above. This detailed account is one of many that illustrates how the relationship of a rescuer and a fugitive could change to the detriment of the latter; in this case he was saved by chance. The author of the diary is Urele (Aron) Sztarkman, a Jew taken to a labor camp in Narol, who subsequently survived deportation from Opatów to Sandomierz. Equipped with forged Aryan papers, Sztarkman hid in the village of Mydlów.

[p. 53] I have been marching an entire day. It is already evening. From afar I see a small hut in a field. The hut stands in a valley, one can hardly spot it between the hills and the valleys. I thought to myself how wonderful it would be were the farmer to agree to the plan forming in my mind. I approach. The dog begins to bark. The owner comes out. I ask if I may enter. Yes, he replies. I want to buy something to eat. He has nothing, not even a crust of dry bread. He has only three morgs [1 morg = approx. 1.4 acres] of infertile land, a small hut with a barn, a small horse. He too is small.

54 Testimony, Institute Archive, 301/2533. As a rule, those who had concealed Jews were forced to leave their previous home after the war when this was revealed; see the section below, “Revenge Taken by Poles on Other Poles.”

55 Institute Archive, 301/108, “Mein adurchlebne fun jor 1939 biz 1945” (“My Life Story from 1939 to 1945”); the above excerpts were translated by Sara Arm. See also the description in Michał Czajka, “Inwentarz zbioru pamiętników, Archiwum ŻIH, zespół 302” (“List of titles in the collection of memoirs, Institute Archive, Collection 302”), (Warsaw: 2007), pp. 90-91.

[p.54] I huddle up from the cold. The garment – patches on patches. He has no wife, she died three years ago. He is already fifty years old. Only a poor girl, Marysia, visits him since she has nowhere to go. He also has no children. I question him about everything. That he is poor and has no wife or children is very good as far as I am concerned. He tells me that if he had several pairs of trousers and boots, Marysia would marry him. I tell him that I'm a Jew. I ask him if he would like me to stay with him, not for free, I will pay him well. He replies immediately, "Yes." Even five people. No one comes here. Even Marysia agrees, but she wants a Sunday dress for church ... The peasant always wants more. I realize that the owner is completely unaware of the situation of the Jews...

[p. 57] What does our life with Paweł look like?⁵⁶ In the winter in the bunker: the bunker is two meters long. We broke up a bed so as not to sleep on the floor. One cannot stand upright. We are compelled to stand bent over.

[p. 58] The bunker is dark, we can't see each other ... the proprietor visits us once a day and brings us food. The entrance to the bunker is very small. The dog stands guard over us alongside the bunker. That's how we know when to keep quiet. Quiet. Our host begins to catch on. Every day he needs something else. We have clothed him well. We have equipped Marysia with fine things. We have already married this couple off. Partisans begin to move about in the village. The partisans of AK [*Armia Krajowa*, Home Army] present a greater danger to us than the Germans. We are surrounded by enemies on all sides. Our host begins to catch up with what a Jew means, that he can be endangered too.

[p. 59] Money opens his eyes. Every single day he has new requests, until now he has not understood our situation, now he intends to change his attitude. Marysia, his wife, wants a lot, not quite aware – what. Our host orders us to buy him some more morgs of farmland. We attempt to explain that he must not buy now, people would immediately suspect him of hiding Jews. We give him money, we give him lots of things, everything we came with, we just want to survive. He finds new reasons to extort money.

56 The author hid together with another fugitive named Leibke (Lejb).

[p. 60] He says he would build a new barn. We repeat – not now. So he would keep this money until after the war. The same goes for ground buying money. He would leave us without a penny. That is why he keeps Jews. Paweł implies that our life is at stake. Now he knows, his life is threatened too, it means more money... But where from should we have it, lying in this dark hideout. Marysia, his wife, has a lot of wishes too, although she is not sure what to want.

[p. 61] Our host understands that he mustn't wear his new smart clothes on Sundays, people would wonder in the church. But Marysia would not listen to reason. She wants to boast to her cousins about high laced boots that her husband ostensibly bought her. And she sews a smart dress with a flowered kerchief. Marysia did not hide anything, she was plain stupid, and was unable to fathom the danger. And thus suspicions grew, while there was no change in our lives. Our host now intimates to us that our lives are at risk. He already knows everything. His life, too, is at risk. This means that we must continue to give money... Where are we to find so much money – after all, we are lying in a gloomy bunker...

[p. 62] We had no idea of what was happening in the house.⁵⁷ On Sunday Marysia has guests, they wonder how come she has such a good life. They say: your host has but three morgs [roughly 4.2 acres]. They start to suspect something, yet unconfirmed suspicions. Paweł is well known in his village, everybody knows he is very poor. He is a hired harvest hand at rich farms, otherwise he can't manage on his own. Everyone knows that!

Spring arrives. We move from the dugout to the attic, there we have an excellent view, every morning we watched what happened, when people went about their chores. We had to be careful not to oversleep. God forbid!

[p. 67] We knew that Stach was the eldest in the village and was twice married, both wives died. Now he courts Marysia, who dislikes him as much as the rest of villagers. He is wicked... This winter he handed over a Jew. It was like this: one night a Jewish fugitive from a Treblinka train came in and begged Stach to let him get some sleep.

57 During the winter the men hid in the bunker, and in the spring they would move to the attic.

It was freezing outside, snow. At first, Stach would not let him in, then when the Jew showed him money, this old pig allowed him to sleep in the barn. That is what his farm hand related. Yet the next morning Stach locked the sleeping Jew in the barn and denounced him to the village head. Germans came, led him towards the wood and shot him. Stach got the Jew's boots and 10 kilograms of sugar in reward. Our host kept repeating that Stach was the most dangerous. "If he finds out about you, we'll be lost altogether."

[p. 69] Marysia, courted by Stach, is different from other villagers, she is more of a city person; for some years she helped a textile vendor, Berek; she liked Jews, had Berek come to her, she would have hidden him.

[p. 73] The Germans are still here, we must still wait and lie in the hideout. Our time has not yet arrived. Our host tries to provide us with news every day: that the partisans are searching for Jews in order to liquidate them. The partisans announce in the village that anyone found keeping Jews will receive the death penalty...

[p. 74] The risk to our lives becomes graver by the moment. The partisans now appear in the village every day... As evening falls, ten to fifteen partisans arrived, armed with various weapons, and they begin interrogating our host, asking whether he knows of any Jews hiding in the village. The host conjectures that, were he living in the center of the village, he might have known something, but here there is nobody. They all go to sleep, and in the morning go on their way. Our host tells us all this, but we overheard it ourselves.

[p. 75] Our host is quite scared too, but Marysia, his wife, does not care. She wants to wear a new dress every Sunday and show off... Several partisans approach the window yelling: bring out the Jew you are keeping, otherwise we will shoot you dead...

[p. 76] The partisans search only in the barn, not in other places. On their way they say to our host that this is the last time that they are giving him his life as a gift. If they have to come once again, he will be executed by firing squad and his house will be set on fire. Paweł retains his composure... We realize that he is scheming to hand us in to the partisans. I begin to explore an alternative solution. [p. 77] The year is 1944. I go out to search for a different hideout but ... the partisans are all over the place... I return to the former location. My host is glad that I have returned... I tell him that I have brought more money. This satisfies

him. We give him the first gold ten-ruble piece. He doesn't even know what it is, but tells us that he has heard of it. This is a very good thing. He begins to promise us that we shall survive. Even if they do the worst to him, he will behave worthily.

[p. 78] The host comes to us joyfully: the Russians have arrived!

The literary authenticity of Sztarkman's diary is on a par with the psychological authenticity of the circumstances that he describes. Poverty is the best measure for predicting whether a gentile will agree to shelter a Jew. Yet the money that Jewish fugitives were sometimes able to offer their rescuers could, paradoxically, operate to their detriment. When a previously indigent person suddenly seems to have money, it can attract attention and lead to suspicion that he is hiding Jews. In this case, the farmer who takes in the two men gradually learns, in 1942, that Jews are being hunted down and that he could pay a high price – both money and his life – for concealing them. The farmer struggles with himself, and, thanks to circumstances, emerges not entirely pristine, but intact, and on the side of righteousness.

Mimicry

Some Jews were able to save themselves by disguising themselves as gentiles – that is, taking on false identities and obtaining “Aryan papers” testifying to their racial soundness. The ability to do so depended, of course, on looking enough like a Pole to pass as one, being familiar enough with Catholic customs and prayers to behave like a Pole and, in short, being able to integrate fully into Polish society. If a Jewish refugee offered protection by a Pole could take on such an identity, both he and his benefactor had a better chance of surviving. Such cases feature particularly prominently in the testimonies of children. Rozia Unger of Sandomierz relates the following:

In 1940, I think, father handed me over to a farmer with whom I tended the cows. I also looked after the horses. There were children there and they played with me; they were very small and I looked after them. I so loved the little girls, like they were my sisters. They treated me like one of their daughters. I ate whatever they ate. In the beginning they concealed me, and later told the neighbors that I was a relative of theirs, and so I played alongside them and with them. They never told I was Jewish. I went to church with them. I didn't know exactly what a “Jewess” was. During the first year I longed for mother, later I got used to things. I was there for five years... After the war I was afraid to return

to the Jews. When I played with the children they would tell me that the Jews murder [gentile] children to make matzot...⁵⁸

Szajek Nysybom, five years old at the outbreak of war, went into hiding with farmers from 1942 onward in the vicinity of Kozienice. That he blended into his surroundings is apparent from the language of his testimony, which he gave in peasant dialect. “The uncles took me, using my wits I went to the village to a farmer and I began to work.”⁵⁹ Nysybom wandered from one place to another, eventually managing to stay with a single farmer for two years. “I prayed, I recited prayers... I didn’t think of anything, only what would become of me. I stayed there until the liberation, it was good there... I called myself Stanisław Walencik. I invented this name myself. I wasn’t afraid of anyone...”⁶⁰

It was far more difficult for the older children to assimilate completely into the Polish environment. Basia Goldstein, nine years old upon the outbreak of war, would later testify: “Those of my age in the village did not want to play with me, they would say that I was a Jewess. I was often very sad, I had no one to confide in, I often longed for the Jews.”⁶¹

58 Institute Archive, 301/3699. Blood libel legend is mentioned also in the testimony of a nine-year-old boy in 1947, Ludwik Jerzycki: “First I was in a village. I took the cow out to pasture and she would often run away from me into the wheat field. So then they would beat me. They always gave me bread to eat with black coffee, and sometimes kasha. After the liberation they brought me to a children’s home in Chorzów. I cried, I didn’t want to go to the Jews, because they told me that Jews kill children”; Institute Archive, 301/2755.

59 Institute Archive, 301/3003. A similar testimony was submitted by Szmul Ismah, who wandered homeless in the vicinity of Tykocin, Institute Archive, 301/2735. On the topic of assimilation of Jewish children in the countryside within the environment see *Children Accuse*, Preface, XIII.

60 The same theme can be seen in the memory of Polish farmers in the area of Sandomierz [139N]: “I would only look the German in the eye, like ... and he asked twice, three times, even five times... If you only bowed your head and replied without looking him in the eye – then it would be ‘Rauss’ [get out] and off to the labor camp, that I was lying ... and if you looked him in the eye, because of that, that you speak the truth, because you look him in the eye.” See also the testimony of Witold Weiman, a high school student, Institute Archive, 301/1945.

61 Institute Archive, 301/2793, testimony submitted in Lodz on October 5, 1947; the girl, named “Basia Goldstein” by the protocol recorder, herself signed her name as “Frymer Dwojra.”

The theme of cruel behavior by Polish children and youth (*kawalerka*) recurs again and again – so often that, in the absence of a reason to doubt the reliability of the testimonies, it must be seen as a mass phenomenon.⁶² Adults, and those who spoke good Polish and were familiar with the local dialect, found it even more difficult to survive during their wanderings through villages. This is reflected in the anonymous testimony of a mother who wandered around the Częstochowa area with her infant son. “I attempted to reach the Saint Anna monastery through the forests... Dressed in the kerchief and apron of farmer women I looked like a peasant. It was a cold morning. The boy, who awoke from his slumber, wondering and perturbed, asked: ‘Why are we leaving Dad?’ I replied: ‘We are the Lord’s pilgrims and we shall wander among the villages...’⁶³

This text gives the impression that the author succeeded in deceiving the peasants only in those villages in which the inhabitants had not experienced the temptation to enrich themselves at the expense of persecuted Jews. All through the autumn she tramped northward with her son, experiencing both good and bad encounters along the way. In the winter their predicament became so harsh that, like many others,⁶⁴ she

62 *Children Accuse*, Preface, XXIV and XXX, as well as testimonies in the body of the book on pp. 66, 70, 89, 111, 127, 132, 135, 137, 138, 156, 161, 182, 184, 256. Among the testimonies in the Historical Archive see 301/3215, on Polish youngsters from the area of Kulcza Mała who went out on horseback to hunt for Jews. See also 301/2736 on “Polish youngsters who show *gendarmes* the locations of hideouts.” Particularly shocking memories of the custom of forcibly undressing people in order to verify their Jewish origin are to be found, for example, on pp. 89 and 127. See too the testimony of the Home Army resistance soldier who operated in the Sandomierz and Skarżysko-Kamainna area. He told me that, at the time of the deportation of Jews from Skarżysko, there were Polish children who roamed around the railway station under German orders, looking up into the eyes of passersby in search of Jews (March 8, 2008, testimony in the author’s files). One should also note examples of different behavior on the part of children, such as Institute Archive, 301/1791: “Polish youngsters stood to one side and said: ‘Run away now, because no one is looking’”; Institute Archive 301/3743: “I approached a girl that I knew with whom I had played when we were still free. She was glad to see me, greeted me nicely, fed me, and her mother meanwhile prepared a bag of food. Suddenly a man entered, a Jew hunter. I was alarmed and grew pale. My friend calmed me, I immediately controlled myself, she took out toys and a doll, we played as if nothing had happened, and I showed no sign of fear. But how afraid I was – probably God alone knew.” See also *Children Accuse*, pp. 128, 136, etc.

63 Institute Archive, 301/1698.

64 “I saw Jews coming out of hideouts, I saw an unconscious old man who had been

decided to make her way into the ghetto at Radom, and at the same time to try to obtain a work permit in her own village, Kłonice. Even the local *Volksdeutsch* [an ethnic German Polish citizen] did not hinder her.

In our village there were the brothers Friedrich, ethnic Germans, who knew me. These two youngsters were crueler than all the Germans... A terrible panic seized me when I saw one of them, [in the uniform of] a *gendarme*, standing at the door of the council office, directing the visitors. He recognized me immediately... “Why did you come? Why don’t you wait to obtain a *kennkarte* [work permit] in the usual manner, at the village office?...” He finally told me: “Enter...” In the office there were four German women... I started lamenting that I am so poor, if I have any documents, so I might find myself a job, even leave for Prussia... I told even that my wicked family reproached me about every breadcrumb. I spoke dialect that amused them...

A few moments later she passed by a peasant woman who said: “Look at the Jewess, she’s wearing an apron, that’s how she’s trying to save herself now; pity that no one cares.”⁶⁵

Descriptions of the public exposure of a Jew’s identity by Poles appear time and again in various testimonies. They recall the scene in Roman Polanski’s film *The Pianist* in which a Polish neighbor of the Jewish protagonist (played by the Polish

beaten by the farmer with the shaft of a cart until he fell, Jewish women wearing wigs, they all came out of the forests, the mothers led them in the direction of the ghetto and the peasants mocked: ‘Don’t worry, this way too you’ll end up in Treblinka.’... This was a deceitful ploy on the part of the Germans, an amnesty as it were, designed to concentrate them all in one place and to capture them all. A month later they destroyed the ghetto and sent everyone to Treblinka,” *ibid.* See also Institute Archive, 301/2425, Zalman Baum on the reaction of the Jews to such an “amnesty” in Sandomierz: “When they saw that the Poles were robbing and murdering them, the Jews returned to Sandomierz... Over 10,000 Jews gathered from all the surrounding villages.” See also Institute Archive, 301/1773: “In Ternopol, in July 1941, the witness was afraid to return home because the farmers along the way killed every Jew that passed by”; *ibid.*: “In Bełżec there was no point in the Jews escaping from the camp, since the locals would hand them in immediately.” The same document relates the handing in of Jews in Doliszowice, in the Pińczów regional council and in Kazimierza Wielka.

65 Compare to Institute Archive, 301/2252.

actress Katrzyna Figura), recognizes the fugitive and screams in horror “Jew! Jew!” Here are some examples from the testimonies:

The landlady, that awful antisemite, began shouting in the passageway: “Quick, get those Jews out of here, or I’ll call the police.”⁶⁶

Two men once grabbed me by the shoulders and shouted “You are a Jewess...”⁶⁷

All of a sudden she called to him, in a mixture of German and Polish – the woman whom I recognized as the concierge of our building prior to the war. She asks him whether he knows who the girl accompanying him is, and immediately adds: “She is a Jewess, I know her.”⁶⁸

More than once she had heard how they called after her: “Grossman, Jewess, arrest her!” The witness had managed to evade such individuals.⁶⁹

A Polish woman from Drohobycz traveled with us on the train. We didn’t know her, but she knew us, and immediately began to talk about Jews, saying that they were fleeing, that they wanted to live but would not succeed – they had already lived long enough.⁷⁰

66 Testimony of Pesla Penczyna, Institute Archive, 301/1525.

67 Testimony of Rozalia Kożuchowicz, Institute Archive, 301/2732.

68 Testimony of Bronisław Szwejca, *Children of the Holocaust 2*, p. 203.

69 The author of the testimony eventually succeeded in arranging a place for her son at an institution of the Albertinian nuns at Częstochowa. Once the origin of the five-year-old had been exposed, he was left at the doorstep of the nuns of the Skrytki order; but here too someone had informed on him to the authorities and the boy was shot by the Germans. A similar situation – a description of extortion on a train and two unsuccessful attempts at extortion on the roads nearby Połaniec during the destruction of the ghetto – is portrayed in the testimony of Dorota Keller, Institute Archive, 301/4635.

70 Testimony of Jan Kulbinger, who was 13 years old in 1943, *Children Accuse*, p. 221. See also *Children of the Holocaust 2*, p. 185: “On the way we came across a farmer on a cart harnessed to a horse: ‘What are you doing here, Jew boys, after all, all your people have gone to the gas. You yourselves can dig yourselves a grave here. Do you want spades?’” See also Philip Białowicz, *Bunt w Sobiborze (Revolt in Sobibor)*, trans. Piotr Kowalik, (Warsaw: 2008) (hereafter: *Revolt in Sobibor*), on p. 131: “Shortly afterwards the axes destroyed our wall and we were exposed. As we emerged, the crowd that had assembled to watch clapped their hands and called out ‘Bravo!’ When

The Polish-Polish War Over the Jews

Underground, evasion maneuvers, isolation, covering up tracks, camouflage – the lexicon of Jewish hiding and concealment suggests warlike strategies. On the basis of the testimonies, documents, and ethnographic interviews discussed here, assistance to Jews by Poles can be described as a literal war between Poles, sweeping up the people who, without public and social support, helped the Jews survive. Polish society, for reasons that will be discussed shortly, regarded assisting Jews a breach of loyalty to family and to the village community.⁷¹ While Polish opinion is divided regarding its origin and its reach, the conventional attitude is: “The Germans did the Poles a service by annihilating the Jews. From now on the Poles will be cleverer, and will not allow the Jews to control them. The Jews present a far greater danger to Poland than the Germans. There is nothing more dangerous than a Pole who serves Jews.”⁷²

Such views took hold amongst the Polish public, particularly after part of the extremist fascist underground organization, the National Armed Forces (*Narodowe*

they led us under guard, I understood how they had managed to find us – many local Poles went down on all fours and pressed an ear to the ground, and that’s how they hunted down the Jewish neighbors.”

71 See Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne. «Ząb» przeciw dwu wrogom* (*The National Armed Forces: Weapon Against Twin Enemies*), (Warsaw: 2005), p. 19; and *ibid.*, chapters 4 and 5, and in particular pp. 89, 319-20. See also a characterization of the ideology of the Polish Organization in ONR (the Radical National Camp or Falanga – a fascist organization established in 1934), from which split first the Lizard Alliance (*Związek Jaszczurzy*), which subsequently joined the NSZ (National Armed Forces), in Rafał Wnuk, ed., *Atlasie podziemia niepodległościowego 1944-1956* (*Atlas of Underground Organizations in the Struggle for Independence 1944-1956*), (Warsaw-Lublin: 2008), p. xxvii: The ideology of OP [the Polish Organization of ONR] took shape prior to World War II, and did not undergo significant changes throughout its existence. Poles who could prove the purity of their race over four generations were eligible to join the organization. Since the leaders of the national-radical camp defined Polishness in terms of ethnic origin, it could be passed on only through genetic inheritance, which precluded any possibility of assimilation of groups that were not Polish by ethnicity. As a group, the Jews were regarded as a particularly negative element, both for cultural-religious reasons and because of the position they had established within the prewar labor market.

72 Institute Archive, 301/1772, a conversation among Poles overheard by a Jew who hid under an “Aryan” identity. See also testimony 301/4567, submitted by Ida Gerstman on 11/7/1946. Gerstman succeeded in escaping from Kielce following the pogrom (1946), and her testimony sheds light on the awareness of the rural population in

Sity Zbrojne–NSZ) was accepted into the ranks of the main underground organization, the People’s Army of Poland (*Ludowe Wojsko Polskie*–LWP),⁷³ and began to serve

the Kielce area approximately a year after the end of the war: “I managed to get to Słowiki at five in the morning. At the station I heard how one of the peasant women was speaking: “‘I’m setting out, taking with me a knife, should I catch a Jew or Jewess I shall cut pieces of meat from them and salt them.’” ... On the train I saw that people were looking at me suspiciously. One of the women pointed at me: “‘This is a lousy *żydowica* [Jewess, a perjorative], she should be thrown under the wheels of the train.’” Another woman responded to this with: “‘At the next stop we’ll hand her over to the militia – they can then shoot her.’” At the next stop the women seized me by the head and legs, and pulled me toward the track in order to throw me under the train. I pleaded for my life, and they replied that I was a Jewess, that I must bite the dust. The children began stoning me. I asked the railway clerk to shoot me because I couldn’t stand this any longer. He replied, “‘You want to die an easy death? Take your time, suffer a little more.’” Luckily for me a militia man arrived and ordered them to leave me alone, explaining that he himself would sort me out. They left me alone, and the policeman demanded that I give him a ‘tip’ for beer. I gave him the last 500 zloty. He let me go. I returned to the train, and the peasant women identified me once again and handed me over to the police shouting “‘Kill the *żydowica!*’” The policeman led me to a detention room of the railway police. This was in Jędrzejów. They led me to a cell to which they led also another Jew, whom they had likewise removed from the train once they had identified him as a Jew. Before my eyes the militia man kicked him and a man in civilian clothes in the office hit him in his face. A group of children threw stones at us through an open window... A young girl in school uniform shouted: “‘Get out from under the bed, so that we can stone you, your good times have come to an end, now you must all die in agony, in return for our blood. We shall erect a monument of gold to Hitler and we shall ask of God that a newborn Hitler arise.’”

- 73 Marek Szapiro, *Nim słońce wszędzie... Dziennik pisany w ukryciu 1943-1944 (Before the Sun Rises...: A Diary Written in Hiding 1943-1944)*, ed. Feliks Tych, who added the preface, in conjunction with Magdalena Prokopowicz (Warsaw: 2007) (hereafter: *A Diary*), p. 491; diary entries for April 19, 26, 1944: “The National Armed Forces were placed under the command of the Home Army underground, which in return “acknowledged their valuable civil contribution”; and also, on p. 505: “It was inconceivable to me how it was possible to introduce into the Polish underground body, the Home Army, the so-called National Armed Forces. If we are to believe what is said, the people of the National Armed Forces were, at least up to March, the tool of the Germans for the elimination of peasants, Jews and so forth, unwanted elements within a fascist Poland. And such traitors are received with honor and praise merely because they lent a hand to an agreement (out of consideration of their own benefit)?”

under its command. In no section of the Polish public subject to German occupation was there a consensus regarding assistance to the Jews. The testimony of Abraham Finkler, who together with his group sought to join the Polish underground, illustrates this “lack of unity”:

Engineer Strzelecki, a member of the Home Army, entreated us to obtain weapons so as to fight the Germans together. Twenty-three Jews assembled, went to the forests in which we had arranged to meet them. The Home Army men began to shoot at us, killed two Jews. Not being able to discern between AL (People’s Army, leftist) and the Home Army, we did not look more for partisans. We lived as an independent partisan group in the forests in the Siedlce area.⁷⁴

74 Institute Archive, 301/55. And compare with a testimony about a raid by Soviet partisans on refugees from Ostrów-Mazowiecka ghetto (a similar narrative included in the testimony of Helena Arbeiter quoted in *Children Accuse*, p. 160), and their subsequent swearing-in to the underground, and an attack by an unidentified group of armed Poles, who explained that this was a “party order,” Institute Archive, 301/3055: “A group that wished to join the partisans had to swear allegiance in the presence of two Polish partisans. This was supposed to take place in a bunker, by the light of a coal gas lamp before the red-white Polish flag. The Polish partisans were armed with a machine-gun and sub-machine-guns, and at a particular moment they fired several salvos at those present, about sixteen in number... as became clear later, these partisans had belonged to a group of the People’s Army. For details of this matter see Alina Skibińska, Dariusz Libionka, “Przysigam walczyć o wolną i potężną Polskę, wykonywać rozkazy przełożonych, tak mi dopomóż Bóg’. żydzi w AK. Epizod z Ostrowca świętokrzyskiego” (“I swear to fight for a free and strong Poland, to execute the commands of the superiors, may God give me strength’: Jews in the Home Army, an episode that occurred in Ostrowca świętokrzyskiego”), *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały (The Jewish Holocaust: Studies and Sources)* 4 (2008). See also the testimony of farmers who were engaged in work on behalf of the authorities in Kruszyna, Institute Archive, 301/5306, which describes how a group of Jewish escapees had been handed over to the Germans by a partisan unit from an unidentified organization: “The Polish commander and the German commander saluted each other.” See also the episode involving a group of escapees from Sobibor death camp, which was accepted into a partisan unit from an unidentified organization in the province of Lublin, *Rebellion in Sobibor*, pp. 211-13.

A diametrically opposite situation is portrayed in the following testimony. Abraham Furman was a member of the Home Army (AK) in the Szczawnica – Limanowa region in southern Poland, and a sympathetic comrade convinced him to leave.

In 1943 I met a man who told me for the first time that what he termed “forest bands” were being created in the forests. This was the Home Army, which comprised people of various sorts. I thought that I, too, would find my place there, and would, first of all, be able to take revenge for all our people who had been murdered, and secondly, I would be able to protect the life of my wife, the only surviving member of the family, from this virulent pestilence – but to my deep regret I was wrong. After a number of weeks my strongest impression was of pervasive chaos, and beyond that, great hatred of Jews. I grew friendly there with a most intelligent person, I didn’t know who he was. Nevertheless, over time I learned that he was a former judge, and also, prior to his retirement, a captain in the Polish army. His underground name was “Góral” (man of the mountains). I never enquired about his surname. One night he said to me that I should try to get away, since he could not take responsibility for my life.⁷⁵

The testimony of Zalman Baum, who escaped from Sandomierz with his large family and several acquaintances and hid in villages in the area, sheds light on the mentality of some of the units of the Peasants’ Battalions (*Bataliony Chłopskie*–BCh) cells in the Sandomierz area, and of some of the People’s Army militia stationed in Wiązownica.⁷⁶

75 Testimony of Abraham Furman, Institute Archive, 301/4716. The witness writes: “I am a born Jew, but I belong to the Polish nation, because that suits me fine.”

76 Details of an encounter with a unit of this organization appear in Bauman’s testimony. The gang was commanded by a local policeman named Śliwiński, who levied “a weekly tax from all the Jews in the town of Koprzywnica, and from us he took an individual ‘tax’ for failing to hand in the Jews to the authorities.” This gang was meant to receive from a unit of the Peasants’ Battalions (or a Home Army detachment) supporting fire for its attack on a bunker containing Jewish escapees. The bunker was, in all probability, attacked under the guise of the campaign against “robber gangs.” See note 113 in my article, “The Aftermath of the Shoah in Jewish Accounts and in the Memory of the Polish Hinterland in Light of Ethnographic Research,” in Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, eds., *The Shoah Aftermath* (forthcoming). The website of the mobile company of the People’s Army claims that it, too, included

These groups hounded Jews under cover of a campaign against gangs of robbers. The testimony likewise shows what the Polish definition of “robbery” meant from the Jewish perspective.⁷⁷ By depriving the Jews of the right to obtain food and weapons, while at the same time refusing to accept them into the partisan forces, the Poles in effect condemned them to the same fate that the Germans had prepared for the Jews.

A friend of mine in the fighting unit revealed to me that the Peasants’ Battalions organization, which had promised to provide us with weapons, intended to round us up and then liquidate us. We had for some time suspected that this was their real intention, and had thus not revealed everything to them... Following a few ambushes, we managed to take the Poles’ weapons from them. We possessed just two pistols and three grenades. We had to get some more weapons by any means since buying them for money was impossible. We obtained army uniforms. We began to operate as Poles in areas in which we were not known, and identified ourselves as the Mobile Peasants’ Battalion. A friendly Pole informed us about organizational passwords. He was a member of this organization too. When we encountered people from the Peasants’ Battalions we always made a point of asking for their password and giving them the response. They thus always accepted us as a company of the Peasants’ Battalions, and did not suspect us. We had many such encounters. We learned ever more about the organization’s secrets. We knew that one of its objectives was to exterminate Jews. Every day we heard that they were searching for Jews and killing them.⁷⁸

three Polish Jews: Jerzy Bette was in the company from the day of its inception, and since he had a command of French and German, he was appointed to listening to news on radio stations... A second Polish Jew who saw action was “Fala” [“wave” in Polish] whose surname was known only to the commander. He and “Bob” assassinated a dangerous Gestapo functionary in Sandomierz, in the stadium during a football game. We found out about the origin of the third one only after his death, when in his will he asked to be buried in the Jewish cemetery in Krakow. But, of course, this begs the question of why the Jewish origin of all these three fighters had been kept secret. See http://www.jedrusie.org/www_odwet/felietony.html.

77 See also *Children Accuse*, pp. 150-51, the testimony of Nuchim Werner from the area of Bitków, as well as the testimony of Hersch Cukier from the Ziemianowicze area on the Niemen River, pp. 201-2.

78 Institute Archive, 301/2425. Examples in the text. Acting on his own initiative, Baum captures the commander of a gang that engaged in hunting down Jews, and it transpires

There were instances in which farmers feared the partisans on the one hand,⁷⁹ but on other occasions cooperated with them in robbing Jews. Among many similar narratives, Baum relates the story of seven escapees from Sandomierz ghetto, in the final stages of its liquidation, who had previously hidden in Wiązownica. They were then told that they had to leave and find a different hiding place, since their host had taken in another Jew, far richer than they, a Jewish policeman named Morgen. “The seven of them paid Czarniecki his due and decided to take the remainder of their property with them, so that they would be able to pay for another hideout. Czarniecki, however, was loath to part with such good customers, and kept the seven men with him. At this time a group of the Home Army was forming. The group discovered the seven, led them to a police outpost and turned them in to the Gestapo.”⁸⁰

In the countryside, political motives were trumped by greed and envy of the ostensible wealth of the Jews. Such hostile attitudes led farmers, who might be inclined to help Jews, fear their neighbors more than the Germans.⁸¹ It is difficult to assess the extent of the degeneration of basic human decency in villages that enriched themselves at the expense of Jewish fugitives. Reading the testimonies is nearly unbearable – time and again the same scenario appears: Poles grant sanctuary to Jews and conceal them; then rob and murder them.⁸² True, atrocities such as the extraction of a gold tooth, as mentioned by Kazimierz Wyka, were not the norm among Polish farmers, but this is small comfort.⁸³

that he is Antoni Jarosz from the village of Przewłoka. The man, who thought that he had fallen into the hands of the Home Army, admitted that he had murdered Jews. Diwan, the group’s commander, forbade Baum to execute Jarosz. The testimony mentions also that Jarosz, who limped after having been wounded in battle, had been “a major in Kielce,” see my *The Damnation of Fantasy. Political Transformation of the Blood Libel Motif in the Pogroms of Rzeszów, June 1945, Cracow, August 1945, and Kielce, July 1946* (forthcoming). See there the mention of Jarosz, who in autumn 1944 commanded a militia outpost in Koprzywnica, and who provided a personal commendation on the aforementioned Edward Śliwiński.

79 [184N] “In Trójca they hid seven and the partisans fell upon them and killed them, two remained.”

80 Institute Archive 301/2425.

81 Institute Archive 301/1698.

82 See note 43 above, which indicates the sources for acts of murder in that collection of testimonies.

83 “A gold tooth extracted from the mouth of a corpse will always ooze blood, even after no one remembers where it came from,” Kazimierz Wyka wrote in his book,

Solidarity and Discord

Jews who were informed on and turned in by Poles sometimes survived. Basia Goldstein, whose story was told above, survived, along with her Polish benefactors, by virtue of the Christian prayers that she knew by heart, and thanks to the assistance given her by the head of the rural council.⁸⁴ A Jewish boy adopted by Władysław Piwowarczyk escaped an even graver danger. After one of the neighbors informed on him, the police chief in Opatów himself confirmed that the boy had been circumcised.

My sister held the boy firmly to her breast so that the commander could not pluck him from her and proclaimed: “Sir, you can kill me together with the boy. I shall not give up the boy.” The police chief threatened to take her to the Gestapo if she refused to hand over the boy... My brother ... met with the police chief and threatened him, informing him that should he disturb a hair of the boy or of his sister, or set the Gestapo on them, that would be the end of him.⁸⁵

From this episode we learn of the limits of the control exercised by the local Polish police force under the conditions pertaining in the town of Opatów. The later testimony presented below illustrates the considerable influence exercised by Polish officials within the German administration.⁸⁶ As transpires also from reports from the areas

życie na niby. Pamiętnik po klęsce (Make-Believe Life: A Memoir After the Defeat), ed. Henryk Markiewicz and Marta Wyka, (Krakow, Warsaw: 1984), p. 138. Regarding cases of the mutilation of body parts while extracting teeth on the part of Germans and Poles see, among other testimonies, Institute Archive, 301/3743, 13, 1791, 3702, 1846, 2008, 4163. See also *Rebellion in Sobibor*, p. 272, on the Jewish cemetery in Izbica.

84 Institute Archive, 301/2793. See also the testimony of Bauman regarding Mala Perlmutter from Tarnobrzeg (Institute Archive, 301/2425): “The girl was accepted in Branów as a Polish child, thanks to the high-school teacher Lolek Wawrzycki from Branów. Many Poles testified that the girl was a Jewess, but thanks to Wawrzycki’s efforts she was saved. She was raised in the priests’ lodgings by the housekeeper.”

85 Institute Archive, 301/, notation missing. A similar circumstance is related in the testimony of Stanisław Jeronimski from the village of Chobotki, Malinówka regional council (?) [the question mark appears in the original] in the vicinity of Białystok, Institute Archive, 310/1468.

86 “On the way we stopped to drink water next to the home of the head of the council. ‘These are attractive brunettes,’ said the head of the council. ‘No doubt Jewesses.’ ‘No,’ replied Mr. Sikorski with a smile that tried to conceal fear. ‘These are relatives

of Tuczépy and Osiemborów in Mokrzyszów in the vicinity of Tarnobrzeg, the entire village cooperated in hiding Dr. Lilian, who had escaped from Lvov. The account makes it clear that both the head of the employment administration and the village head were involved in the decision to protect her. The village folk simply followed their lead. An old woman of the village relates:

[N114] [G]endarmes arrived to carry out a search on the premises of the local collector of the compulsory tribute of produce ... who had failed to deliver the required amount of produce to the authorities. One of the *gendarmes*, a German, recognized her by her appearance and immediately said that this was a Jewess. The village leader, who lived in an adjacent house... said: “Don’t trouble yourself about her, look, she’s working, who works is not Jewish.”... Later ... Stanisław Połubicz, who was head of the employment administration, protected Dr. Lilian and issued her a forged work card. He already knew what was going on because this episode immediately became known in the village... people began talking about it ... and the *gendarme* came riding on a horse and roamed the entire courtyard looking for her, but nobody talked to him. It was all quiet and as if Dr. Lilian had disappeared, but she was of course in hiding. She had no further troubles, and she survived, and she was grateful.

One can but surmise what could have been done to rescue Jews had more Poles demonstrated solidarity with the victims and sought assistance from those in positions of authority in the local administration.⁸⁷ Although what I call “The Polish-Polish War Over the Jews” involved no small degree of risk, only seldom did this risk approach the level of danger that the Jews themselves faced. In the passage that follows, a village leader, who attempted to rescue a fleeing Jew, lost his fight against the local Jew hunters, but did not himself lose his life. This battle was waged in the

of my wife.” The testimony of Ewa Janowska-Boisse, née Keinberg, *Children of the Holocaust 2*, p. 78.

87 See the section below, “Priests, Nuns, and Catholic Laypeople.” See too the testimony of Bronisław Szwejca, *Children of the Holocaust 2*, p. 203: “[A]ll of a sudden she called to him, in a mixture of German and Polish, the woman whom I recognized as the concierge of our building prior to the war. She asks him whether he knows who the girl accompanying him is, and immediately adds: ‘She is a Jewess, I know her!’ Mr. Czaplą drew his revolver, began to curse her, called her a Polish swine, and threatened to shoot her dead by his very own hand if she made even another sound.”

village of Sokoly, not far from Bialystok, only a few days prior to the Russians' entry into the region. The local farmers (among whom was, according to the testimony, "a well-known antisemite by the name of Kazimierz Truskolaski", who prior to the war had been indicted for killing a Jew) apprehended a Jew hiding in the forest, Abram Kaplański, who sought to buy food. "Duchnowski, head of Lachy village, it was reported, asked the Truskolaskis 'leave Kaplański alone, he is a decent guy.' The Truskolaskis, according to the report, threatened Duchnowski, 'If you don't bring him we will bring you [to the Germans]!'"⁸⁸

A further testimony tells of Izrael Lewin, a Jew from the area of Wizna, who hid in the home of a Polish friend during the notorious Jedwabne pogrom. "During the night, 'boys' from the village arrived asking about me, saying that they wished to purchase goods. Szymański, who realized what was happening, told them that he would protect me with an axe in his hand. The 'boys' left, but smashed the window panes with stones."⁸⁹ Similar chords are sounded in the testimony of Karolina Sapetowa, a wet nurse with the Weisser family, Jews living in Krakow, who succeeded in rescuing two children by taking them to her own village in the vicinity of Wadowice.

At first the children would leave the house, but as time passed I had to conceal them inside. That, too, did not help. People knew that I was hiding Jewish children and I began receiving threats and blackmail so that I would hand the children over to the Gestapo, claiming that the entire village would be set on fire because of them and that everyone would be murdered. The village leader was sympathetic toward me. The most aggressive I used to pacify with gifts, or simply bribed them... One day the farmers decided to eliminate the children and made a plan ... to split their heads open with axes... I put the children into a cart and told everyone that I was taking them out of the village in order to drown them... They all saw and believed, and when night fell I brought the children back and hid them with the neighbor.⁹⁰

88 The submitter of the testimony, Rachel Kaplańska, adds: "Sokoli, and in particular the village of Lachy, were, prior to 1939, under the influence of nationalist extremists," and he warns that "if the Sokoli police were to arrest the members of the Truskolaski family this would lead nowhere. Kazimierz Truskolaski belongs to the People's Army organization and this organization is very active there." Institute Archive, 301/1458.

89 Testimony of Izrael Lewin, Institute Archive, 301/4391.

90 Testimony of Karolina Sapetowa in *Children Accuse*, pp. 275-77.

Such daring was sorely missed by the youngest sister of Emanuel Elbinger, the mother and grand daughter of Szymon Sztrumpf, and by many others. Some slight remorse can be heard in the words of a Polish policeman who, when asked by a Jew: “Why are you beating us, sir, are we not beaten enough?” retorted: “Should I be kissing you? After all, your landlord handed you in? Now I have the right to deal with you.”⁹¹ This issue is put into sharper focus by Maria Hochberg-Mariańska, as follows:

Among the Poles who traveled by train in the summer of 1942, at the height of the deportations from the ghettos, there were, it may be assumed, many who viewed the Jew hunters on the trains, who apprehended Jews and handed them over to the policemen, with disgust and shame. But very few of them had the courage to say what they felt in those moments – just say it out loud. From my own experience I know that a few simple and direct words would have sufficed to cause a person to think and to desist as he stood upon the brink of the chasm of this crime.⁹²

Likewise, in the period following the liberation, known as the period of “railway campaigns [Polish: *akcja pociągowa*],” nothing much changed in the atmosphere on Polish trains. Even prior to the pogrom at Kielce in July 1946, and the handing over of Jews to Polish thugs by people from the surrounding villages, who seemed not to have noticed that the war was over,⁹³ we read in testimony dated January 1946 of an attack, on the approach to Krakow, on a train bearing Jewish refugees from Lvov.

91 Institute Archive, 301/3262.

92 See *Children Accuse*, Preface, XXIII. See, for example, the testimony of Ewa Janowska-Boisse related above, *Children of the Holocaust* 2, p. 80: “The village chief, who noticed that Władysław was befriending our mother, said to him one day, ‘People are talking, saying that Mrs. Janowska is Jewish, and I shall have to report this to the police.’ Władysław Nogala replied: ‘If you do that, your head will rest there, on that rubbish dump.’ See also *ibid.*, p. 178, the testimony of Sven Sonnenberg: “‘It appears as though some Jew boy has wormed his way into the queue – let someone go and fetch a policeman, I’ll keep him here.’ I was petrified with fear. All of a sudden an old woman pushed her way from behind. When she was close she said to the salesman: ‘What’s happening here? What do you want of this boy? Can’t you see you’ve scared him to death?... Give him bread and don’t waste time. I wouldn’t want to complain to my son that the service in this store isn’t worth a thing.’”

93 See note 113 in my article “The Aftermath of the Shoah in Jewish Accounts and in the Memory of the Polish Hinterland in Light of Ethnographic Research,” note 76 above.

As I was walking down the platform along the carriages I felt a blow to the head and heard a cry, “Thrash the Jews.” I instinctively began to run, but at that moment I was apprehended by thugs who knocked me to the ground and began to beat and to kick me. My glasses fell off, they hit my nose and my head swelled. Several militiamen stood beside me on the platform ... and did nothing to help me. I tried in vain to get into one of the carriages. Also a doctor arrived accompanied by two nurses from the Red Cross, saw how the thugs were running after me and did not react at all... At that moment one of the hooligans approached the carriage, shouting “Where are the Jews here? I will kill them all.” Most fortunately, there was someone who shouted “There are no Jews here.”⁹⁴

Priests, Nuns and Catholic Laypeople

Neither were places under the authority of the Catholic Church immune to the war among Poles over the Jews. The priests and nuns who sought to assist Jews had to deal with the same problems that beset laypeople. Clergy faced flocks that were deeply divided about the Jews.⁹⁵ Jews in hiding often overheard people exclaiming to their protectors “How can you, a Catholic, not be ashamed to conceal Jews?”⁹⁶ Behaviors tolerated and even encouraged by the church prior to the war, including jokes at the expense of Jews, mockery, and abuse, took on an entirely new significance under German occupation. The accounts collected in *Children Accuse* include many examples of cases in which church functionaries took a clear stand and even tried to prevent such acts.⁹⁷ Yet, in the vast majority of cases, not one of them connected the high frequency of such incidents to the church’s prewar tolerance of antisemitism. The persecution of the Jews in the Polish countryside was more broadly attributed to the “natural order of things under heaven,” than to human and cultural agency, and was certainly not connected with the Church’s anti-Jewish theology.⁹⁸

94 Testimony of Dawid Grünbaum, Institute Archive, 301/1357.

95 See the testimony of Emanuel Elbinger concerning the priest of the Nowy Brzesk community, who feared his own vicar; see also cases of concealing children in Greek-Catholic monasteries in the Ukraine, in the memoirs of Kurt Lewin, *Przeżyłem (I Survived)*, (Warsaw: 2007).

96 Testimony of Shmuel Gerber, Institute Archive, 301/3535, regarding Bolesław Pogorzelski from Zabłudów, who concealed him during the German occupation.

97 See, for example, *Children Accuse*, pp. 111, 127, 128.

98 Note the similarity between this explanation and the outlook prevalent among

On more than one occasion, clergy, aware of the risk involved, refused to take in Jews. A Jewish woman, a mother with a tiny boy who sought shelter in the vicinity of Częstochowa, later testified: “Darkness. A group of peasants is milling in front of the gate to the monastery. I knew that a converted Jewess was working in the monastery, Sister Rozalia, and I asked to call on her... I told them openly who I was, and she went to ask the Mother Superior... the Mother Superior did not agree to put us up for a night, explaining that were this to become known to the Germans they would murder the entire community; she wouldn’t believe I walked 25 kilometers, and she kept telling my boy ‘Go to your Daddy, go to Daddy’s wagon’.”⁹⁹ The mother and her son stayed overnight in the home of one of the farmers.

The nuns were glad that the farmer put us up and spoke to the priest, who promised that the monastery would supply us with food, but he was afraid to allow me and the child to enter its walls. We were generously supplied by the monastery, and so was the farmer hiding us. The vicar knew about us and was quite helpful... One of the women, who worked in the monastery as a servant, told her friend that we were Jews. They began whispering, to point at us... The farmer was afraid to continue to accommodate us... I returned once more to the monastery and begged for sanctuary. They were afraid and our wanderings continued.¹⁰⁰

In the general atmosphere of fear and suspicion, people who wanted to assist and rescue Jews were unsure about revealing their secret to their priests. A resident of

peasants, of extortion and threats, addressed at the beginning of this article. This outlook is reinforced by the example of two or three antisemites from the prewar period, who rescued Jews during the occupation. These cases, which featured very extensively in the discussion of this topic, generally include the priests Stanisław Trzeciak, Jan Mosdorf and Jan Dobraczyński. A similar role is played by the episode, mentioned with surprising frequency, of Dr. Juliusz Kamiński, a Jewish physician with the Kielce-Częstochowa regiment of the National Armed Forces. See examples in Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Po Zagładzie. Stosunki polsko-żydowskie 1944-1947 (After the Holocaust: Relations Between Poles and Jews 1944-1947)*, (Warsaw: 2008), p. 136, note 29, and additional references.

99 Institute Archive, 301/1698.

100 See the testimony of Stella Kolin, née Obrębska (*Children of the Holocaust 2*, pp. 89-90), who was accepted into the monastery at Częstochowa after the outbreak of the Polish uprising in Warsaw, and who revealed her Jewish identity in confession.

Staszów, Maria Szczecińska (see above), who feared that the local priest would betray her, went from Staszów as far as Krakow for confession.¹⁰¹

A small collection of encouraging documents kept in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw document honorable and unreserved resistance on the part of priests and laypeople. In an example from Janowice, a Jewish woman testified that a devout peasant woman who hid her under pressure from her relatives, and who demanded that she send her away, eventually turned to her priest for advice. “He instructed [me] to continue keeping her, since it was now winter and she had no place to go ... and so she remained there eleven months. The Polish woman explained her decision thus: the most important commandment in her view is Jesus’ imperative regarding the need to host and feed a passerby who has lost their way, and it is more important to obey this imperative than the edict of the German authorities demanding that Jews be handed in...”¹⁰²

The memoirs of Fania Brzezińska from the town of Knyszyn in the Bialystok region are replete with bitter portrayals of the behavior of her Polish neighbors,¹⁰³ who marked houses with a cross or a Star of David in order to differentiate between Jews and Christians. When “a wild mob gathered to stage a pogrom and burn the houses of the defenseless Jews,” Brix, the town’s priest, entered, “endangering his life, into the rioting mob and ordered them to be quiet and to calm down.”¹⁰⁴ This occurred in June-July 1941, following the Soviet retreat and the entrance of the Germans into the area.

101 About 150 kilometers, Institute Archive, 301/2790.

102 Testimony of Mira Kwasowicer, Institute Archive, 301/2007. Janowice near the railway station to Lewickie, Juchnowiec Kościelny municipality, in the Bialystok district.

103 Institute Archive, 301/1276, a description of the situation following the initial German incursion. Shortly thereafter the Germans withdrew from Knyszyn in the wake of the German-Soviet pact: “Sunday, September 17, 1939, noise, tumult, screams in German and devilish laughter, mixed with the inner gratification and the ironic smiles of cynical satisfaction on the part of our Polish citizens from the nearby villages, who would gain their sympathy with stolen Jewish property.”

104 On this issue see also Dariusz Libionka, “Duchowieństwo diecezji łomżyńskiej wobec antysemityzmu i zagłady żydów” w: *Wokół Jedwabnego* (“The Clergy of the Lomja Region in the Face of Antisemitism and the Jewish Holocaust”), in P. Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, eds., *Around Jedwabne* (Warsaw: 2002), pp. 119-20, and from the same source, vol. 2, part V, document 15, p. 238 and footnote 3, Testimony of Samuel Suraski, Institute Archive 301/3959. The editors of the volume of documents report the name of the priest as “Franciszek Brix.” See also document no. 4, pp. 196, 198 (the testimony of Pesia Schuster-Rozenblum, Institute Archive, 301/1274,

While the priest of Knyszyn was able to suppress the pogrom for a moment, the document pertaining to the priest Ignatcy życiński from Trójca adjacent to Zawichost shows that his authority was actually negligible. From the testimony of Zofia Zysman, who on several occasions was concealed in the clergyman's lodgings, it transpires that, although the priest was respected, this did not deter the locals from attacking his house when they suspected him of harboring Jews. On nineteen different occasions his home was subjected to raids by parties of criminals, or perhaps partisans, seeking traces of Jews.¹⁰⁵ Apparently, Poles who accepted the authority of religious leaders on other issues did not necessarily listen to them when it came to the Jews. Furthermore, priests were more powerful in rural areas than in the city. As a result, the situation in the countryside – where the Germans, partisans bands, and the Church all competed for authority – was more complex than in the cities. Not all Catholics made such direct choices as those of the Janowice peasant woman described above.

Of all the episodes in which Poles placed themselves in danger out of religious motives, the story of David Nathan, who witnessed the execution by firing squad of his wife, daughter, parents, his wife's parents, and five brothers and sisters, cannot be forgotten. He related how a family of farmers from a village in the vicinity of Skąła in the Miechów regional council took him into their home.

I begged him that if he believes there is God in heavens, so he will give me some old clothes and I'll try to repay him. He told me he had none but he would try to find some, and he let me stay in his home. He gave me tattered trousers to put on, he tried to heat my frost bitten feet. He kept me in his cowshed but he was too poor to find me some other clothes. His mother-in-law found me some wooden clogs but no jacket.

in which mention is made of the priest Cyprian Łozowski); and on this priest, see also Andrzej Żbikowski, "Pogromy i mordy ludności żydowskiej w Łomżyńskim i na Białostocczyźnie latem 1941 roku w świetle relacji ocalałych żydów i dokumentów sądowych ("Pogroms and Murders of the Jewish Population in the Areas of Łomża and Białystok in Summer 1941, According to the Testimonies of the Jews Rescued and Court Documents"), in *Around Jedwabne*, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 207.

105 See <http://www.savingjews.org/righteous/pv.htm>. See also Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations 5: Poland*, pp. 646-47. The name of Father życiński does not appear in Zofia Zysman's testimony (Institute Archive, 301/2016).

My host, Jozef Biesiada, promised his mother-in-law that he would order me out of his home. Once his mother-in-law left, he knelt down in front of his wife and begged her to allow him to leave me in the house. He explained to her that it was probably due to a divine miracle that God had rescued me from the cemetery, from the clutches of the executioners, and that this was God's will. They discussed this almost all night long. His wife explained to him that he was endangering them both and their four children, she cried and said that she was afraid, but he promised that he would conceal me well underground, and that the war would not last much longer. He eventually managed to convince his wife, he led me to the barn, and, although it was a Sunday, he removed the hay and began to dig a hideout in the ground, in which I could enter in a prone position. He did not ask me even for one penny, and said that he devoted his life to the grace of God. And that I should pay him only if in future I would be able to do so. And so I survived with him for 27 months, lying in that hideout, and I would only occasionally go out to relieve myself... I froze in the winter, my shirt rotted on my body, lice consumed me, but they really had nothing with which to clothe me. They lived in abject poverty, yet they shared whatever they had with me.

When the Red Army arrived I was unable to walk on my own, my legs were numb, dead. My host: "The Jews have always been here and will remain forever." Two weeks later my host drove me, carefully hidden under hay, from the village.¹⁰⁶

Revenge Taken by Poles on Other Poles

This last testimony ends characteristically: after liberation, the righteous Pole released his Jew from his hideout clandestinely, fearing unrighteous Poles. Here we see the unforeseen consequences of the Holocaust. I began this article by noting that it addresses Jews and Poles who survived the Holocaust together – albeit according to different rules and under different circumstances. Both were at constant risk of immediate death during the war years; both were also hounded and hunted in Poland's

106 Institute Archive, 301/3262, testimony submitted in Kraków on 25/6/1947. The same theme of moving a concealed Jew in a clandestine manner appears in the testimony of Pinkas Gruszniewski, Institute Archive 310/2736: [in the year 1946] "She hid me under a blanket, and in the outlying villages she told people I was her nephew. She transported me to Łomża, my town of birth. I feared that someone might recognize me and could kill me, for no other Jew was living there any longer."

rural areas after the war ended. “A certain farmer said that had he known of someone who had concealed Jews in their house, he would have murdered them on the spot,” as Tema Kaplan testified.¹⁰⁷

A letter, written in 1947 by Miriam Hochberg-Mariańska to the editor of the Polish journal *Kultura* published in Paris,¹⁰⁸ tells of righteous Poles who, in their testimonies before the Historical Committee, requested that their personal details remain confidential out of fear that their lives would be disrupted if their stories became public knowledge.¹⁰⁹ While the historical committees endeavored to do this, such secrets were not always kept. “When the Soviets came, my hostess registered me at a different school as Zgmunt Weinreb and was forced to hand me over to a boarding school, because people began to harass her for harboring a Jew.”¹¹⁰ Waław Andresiewicz, from the village of Janów near Białystok, concealed the 19-year-old Abram Licer during the time of the German occupation. Following the liberation, Licer sought to retrieve the property he had placed for safekeeping in the hands of one of the neighbors, but gave up the idea when a militiaman that he knew warned him that people were planning to kill him. The recorder of the testimony notes:

Once Licer had escaped, the militia came looking for him in Trofimówka. The head of the household, Andresiewicz, was beaten by militiamen, who broke two of his ribs (medical certificate from Janów). Some days later they again visited him and beat him. The first time they also robbed him. A week ago they were there again, they tore the fur lapel off his coat, [saying] “why did you protect the Jew?”

107 *Children Accuse*, p. 133.

108 See also *Children Accuse*, p. xxxii.

109 See, for example, *Children Accuse*, p. 131: “This gentleman does not wish his name to be mentioned, since he does not want it to become known that he concealed Jews.” See also what happened to Antonina Wyrzykowska (a heroine of Jan Tomsz Gross’s and Anna Bikont’s books on the Jedwabne massacre, where Poles rescued fourteen Jews) after the war – she was beaten because she had concealed Jews. In the latter source, p. 253: “They yelled: ‘You are abject servants of the Jews, you concealed Jews who crucified Jesus!’”; see also p. 255: “I am pleased with mother. But my sister thinks that we had better deny it, lest they cut off all our heads”; p. 256: “You yourself, madam, do not know where we are living. So you tell me, madam, how many such people there are who will look favorably upon my concealing Jews? One in ten? And I am probably exaggerating?... In Poland I would not reveal such things to a priest for all the money in the world.”

110 *Children Accuse*, p. 111.

When Lipcer reported this to the regional militia command in Bialystok, two of its men in Janów were dismissed from their posts.¹¹¹

The following three testimonies likewise address events in the Bialystok district where, in the wake of the German retreat from the area, the phenomenon of the hounding of Poles who had rescued Jews is particularly evident.

[Rosolty project, Zwyki rural council, nearby Bialystok]. In October 1945 the gangs that roamed the forest discovered that Bogusław Pogorzelski had concealed me during the period of the occupation. In the night ... a gang of eight people banged on the door of his home. The head of the household hid in the attic, his wife opened the door. They immediately said to her, "Give us this Jew. Aren't you, a Catholic, not ashamed to conceal a Jew!?" They took Pogorzelski to a separate room, beat him, threatened him, and when they did not find me they loaded all the property into sacks and promised to return it only if they handed me in... Pogorzelski did not sleep in his home for three months following this incident... Once I had moved to live in Bialystok, Pogorzelski would come to see me often and complain that the gang members come to visit him on occasion, extort from him under pressure of threats, and follow him...¹¹²

Here is the testimony of the Gosks, a farmer and his wife from the Wyżyki, Puchały rural council who concealed nine Jews for a period of twenty-two months;

111 Testimony of Samuel Goldberg, Institute Archive, 310/1251.

112 Testimony of Samuel Gerber, Institute Archive, 301/3535. Similar testimony of Pinkas Gruszniewski, Institute Archive, 301/84: "After the liberation a woman from the village of Miastkowo named Sadowska came to the farmer's smallholding. I heard her relating that she had concealed Jews and that she was therefore afraid of revenge on the part of the forest gangs, who had already attacked her on several occasions, fired shots, robbed her of horses, demanded gold." Gruszniewski submitted also a second testimony – Institute Archive 301/2736, in which we read: "My farm owner wanted me to be baptized as a Christian and spoke to the priest about this, but the priest was afraid, since there were armed groups of the UPA [Ukrainian Liberation Army] and of the National Armed Forces [NSZ] in the area, and were anyone to have found out that I was a Jew, they would have robbed the owner of all his property and would have killed me."

Once the front had moved westward, the partisans came and harassed us for several years. It was worst at night... it affected our health. The wife developed heart problems just from fear...¹¹³

My in-laws, Krzysztof and Emilia Débowski from Knyszyn, concealed the rabbi Bram Krawiec together with his wife and children – altogether nine individuals – during the German occupation. They sat in hiding beneath the floor of a store... No one knew of this throughout the period of occupation. When the front approached, the neighbor met the rabbi's wife, who had gone out to fetch water from the well. From this time onward the neighbor employed threats to blackmail my father-in-law... In May 1945 the neighbor told a certain forest gang that the Débowski family had hidden Jews. They attacked the house one night and my father-in-law Débowski was murdered in his bed. The other members of the family managed to flee and all the agricultural property was plundered...¹¹⁴

The theme of revenge taken by Poles on other Poles for rescuing a Jewish woman appears likewise in the testimony of Naomi Centneszwer: “After the liberation they told me that I would not be able to remain with them, since the men of the People's Army underground often visited the village, and would kill them because of me... One night the men of the Home Army came to us. It was in autumn, a few months after the liberation. The next morning my host forced me to leave, claiming that they would kill him because of me...”¹¹⁵

Given the atmosphere of persecution, the natural solution for many was to leave Poland. Many Poles who had helped Jews chose in the end to emigrate.

The Righteous Unrighteous

Marek Shapira once compared the guilt of Germans and Poles with regard to the Jews to that of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.¹¹⁶ This metaphor, while flawed in many respects, helps explain why Jews in general, including many whose lives were saved by Poles, nevertheless have little sympathy for the nation to which their saviors belong.

113 Institute Archive 301/5835. See also the letters left by survivors concealed by the Gosks farmer family. The letters were sent from Israel in the 1960s, Institute Archive, 301/5812.

114 Testimony of Alojzy Kopka, Institute Archive, 301/2966.

115 Institute Archive, 301/2750.

116 Szapiro (Shapira), *A Diary*, diary entry September 15, 1944:

When I examine the issue of the attitude of Germans toward the Jews on the one hand, and that of the Poles toward the Jews on the other hand, I think of

Well-known books about the rescue of Jews by Poles, such as *He is a Compatriot* by Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna,¹¹⁷ or those that highlight *żegota*,¹¹⁸ an organization that helped save Jews, focus on the nationwide activities organized by that distinguished cell of the Home Army. Yet this literature relates almost exclusively the spirit and the will of part of the Polish intelligentsia, whose views on

a literary comparison, very different in detail and superficial... In the tragedy *Macbeth*, Shakespeare presents to us a married couple of criminals. The difference between him and her is apparent: before he comes to a decision to murder, the husband is compelled to ponder and to struggle with himself. The wife makes the decision immediately, with no indecision whatsoever; but every deed must be linked to something in one's inner makeup that is responsible for it – if not prior to the deed, then in its wake! The moral crisis afflicts the reckless accomplice to the murder only after the deed has been done, because it did not occur beforehand. This is a profound problem in the psychological realm, and I refer to it here in order to stress that it has nothing in common with the analogy that I wish to draw. Hitler is, as it were, despite all the differences, the manifestation of Macbeth. Before deciding to commit the crime he calculated everything in advance and approached the task with a firm decision: if he wins the war, who will then care about the fate of the Jews? And if he loses the war, then what can one do, this will be the end of his regime and of Germany in its entirety, but the Jews will no longer be there. Among the Poles, on the other hand, the decision to assist the Germans in annihilating the Jews was made without any due preparation. And what is moving and generates strong emotion in this situation stems from the fact that the Polish victory is not the victory of Hitler. In this case, Lady Macbeth's success depends on the defeat of Macbeth. And what, therefore, was the factor that made me think of this analogy? – this is the decisive image: when the victorious allies sit down to the victory feast, the blood-stained figure of Banquo, the spirit of the Polish Jew, will be revealed to the Polish Lady Macbeth (but likewise to the entire world). And this will not be the realization of some moral compunction, but, quite openly and absolutely decisively, it will constitute the pointing of an accusatory finger at Poland.

117 W. Bartoszewski, T. Prekerowa, *He is a Compatriot*.

118 See Dariusz Libionka, “Polskie piśmiennictwo na temat zorganizowanej i indywidualnej pomocy żydom (1945-2008)” (“A Survey of Polish Writing on the Topic of Assistance to Jews on the Part of Individuals and Organizations 1945-2008”), *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i Materiały (The Jewish Holocaust: Studies and Sources)*, 4 (Warsaw: 2008), pp. 17-80.

the Jewish question were hardly representative of the Polish people as a whole, and who operated primarily within the cities.¹¹⁹ The situation was entirely different in the Polish provinces, represented in the testimonies addressed here mainly by the regions of Kielce and Kraków. True, even in these areas some leaders of the underground organizations understood how essential the imperative to rescue Jews was to the preservation of Poland's national spirit and moral stature.¹²⁰ But, when it came to the Jews, the outlying areas of Poland were ethically debased. It was a remote region, where people lived according to their own standards, resistant to all authority. Even the Church, which in general enjoyed its greatest support here, was unable to change much in these desolate areas. This was all the more the case because the Church itself had only recently gained an awareness of the consequences of the antisemitism that had previously been a significant part of its doctrine.

The Polish public, as a collective, prefers to identify itself with those Poles who saved Jews rather than those who persecuted and killed them. True, Yad Vashem has awarded the title of 'righteous gentile' to more Poles than to any other national group. The problem is that the Poles who rescued Jews did so as individuals, in most cases in opposition to most members of their communities. As a civil and religious collective – at least in the regions of Kielce and Kraków, to which the testimonies examined here relate – the Poles failed the test. If this conclusion is confirmed by further research, then it might illuminate the discord between a society proud of its collective virtues but, at the same time, heedless of its failures to adhere to accepted moral standards.

Translation: Avner Greenberg

119 Ibid.

120 A prominent literary figure that exhibits this level of awareness is Lashek in Sławomir Mrożek's novella "Nose", in *życie i inne okoliczności (Life and Other Circumstances)*, (Warsaw: 2003), pp. 79-91.

