

WHY WE STAYED: POLAND'S REMAINING JEWS' EXPERIENCES, IDENTITIES, AND  
REASONS FOR NOT EMIGRATING, 1939-2018

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## I. Introduction

“Of the more than three and a half million Polish Jews [before World War II], about five thousand are left. They are mostly old, lonely, ill people. The average age of the members of the Jewish communities is seventy. There are no children or young people: there is no middle generation. The fates of the majority of these people have been both unusual and astoundingly varied. But they all share the consciousness that something is irrevocably coming to an end, which gives their lives a tragic dimension. ‘We are definitely the last,’ we heard more than once, and also from the very young. ‘Jews as a community, or even as a mini-community, will no longer exist in Poland. We are on the way out.’”<sup>1</sup>

So wrote Polish journalist Małgorzata Niezabitowska in the first chapter of her 1986 book *Remnants: The Last Jews of Poland*. During the previous several years, Niezabitowska and her husband, photographer Tomasz Tomaszewski, traveled across Poland, interviewing the last known Jews remaining in the country after the most recent large wave of Jewish emigration had taken place in 1968. Their predictions for the future of Polish Jewry were quite bleak.

How wrong these dire predictions were. Antony Polonsky, a leading scholar of the history of the Jews of Eastern Europe and of Poland in particular, writes that presently, although Poland’s Jewish community “is small, it has shown remarkable dynamism since 1989.” In Polonsky’s words, “according to Michael Schudrich, chief rabbi of Poland, there are at least 30,000-40,000 Jews in Poland. The number of people with some connection to the Jewish world is even larger. With the end of communism and the decline in hostility to Jews, more people

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<sup>1</sup> Małgorzata Niezabitowska and Tomasz Tomaszewski, *Remnants: The Last Jews of Poland*, trans. William Brand and Hanna Dobosiewicz (New York: Friendly Press, 1986), 14-15.

have been willing to acknowledge their Jewish identity, while significant numbers of ‘hidden children’ were now told by their Christian foster-parents of their Jewish roots.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, by all measures there is a Jewish revival in present-day Poland. Even if the estimates that Antony Polonsky cites are too optimistic, others, while slightly lower, still mark a significant surge in Poland’s Jewish population since the dire situation of the 1980s. The *American Jewish Yearbook* estimated Poland’s Jewish community in 1979 at just 6,000,<sup>3</sup> a number similar to that offered by Niezabitowska and Tomaszewski. By 2008, however, Poland’s Jewish population was estimated at 20,000 according to the *Yearbook*.<sup>4</sup> While 20,000, 30,000, or even 40,000 Jews make up but a tiny fraction of Poland’s population of 38 million, this is a remarkable increase from the population of 5,000 in 1980. Unlike in neighboring Germany, where the large growth in the Jewish population since 1991 has been primarily the result of immigration from the former Soviet Union,<sup>5</sup> in Poland the growth of the Jewish community is almost exclusively due to growing numbers of closeted Jews publicly embracing their origins.<sup>6</sup>

This range of estimates on the number of Jews living in Poland both today and in the 1980s results from several factors. First, there are many people of Jewish origin living in Poland who have no ties, religious or cultural, to the Jewish community, which makes it difficult to establish the country’s Jewish population. When asked how many Jews live in Poland, Jonathan Ornstein, head of the Jewish Community Center in Krakow also gave wide-ranging estimates. “Between 20,000 and 100,000,” he said. Later in the interview he explained why it is so difficult

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<sup>2</sup> Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume III – 1914 to 2008* (Portland, Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 813.

<sup>3</sup> Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb, eds., “Poland,” in *American Jewish Yearbook 1979* (79), 256.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Singer and Lawrence Grossman, eds., “Poland,” in *American Jewish Yearbook 1979* (108), 515.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed study of Jewish migration to Germany since the 1990s, see: Barbara Dietz, Uwe Lebok, and Pavel Polian, “The Jewish Emigration from the Former Soviet Union to Germany,” *International Migration* 40, no. 2 (June 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Marcin Dzierżanowski, „Chcę być Żydem”, April 17, 2013, *Wprost*, accessed May 4, 2018, <https://www.wprost.pl/tylko-u-nas/396074/chce-byc-zydem.html>.

to establish precise numbers: “I think there are a lot of people who have Jewish roots, but they don’t understand that makes them Jewish. A lot of people will say I am not Jewish but my mother is.”<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the Polish Jews who don’t identify with the Jewish religion or culture that Ornstein mentions, there are what Antony Polonsky has referred to as “hidden children.” Some Jewish children were smuggled out of ghettos during the German occupation and brought up by Christian families or raised in convents and orphanages. Szymon Datner, a pioneer of Polish-Jewish studies, estimates that in Warsaw alone 600 Jewish children survived the Holocaust in this way.<sup>8</sup> Many of these children never learned about their true origins, or learned about them as adults. One of my narrators is one such former “hidden child.”

Finally, many Polish Jews cut off ties to Jewish institutions in the 1970s. They feared for their safety not only because they had just witnessed the anti-Jewish witch-hunt atmosphere of 1967-1968, but also because Jewish organizations were at that point heavily infiltrated by communist agents.<sup>9</sup> The decline in Poland’s Jewish population in the two decades following 1968 noted by Niezabitowska results not only from emigration, but also from the fact that many Polish Jews distanced themselves from organized Jewish life, only to embrace it anew after the fall of communism.

Furthermore, there undoubtedly were and are many Poles with Jewish ancestry who do not hide or deny their origins, yet never had much of a connection to them. For example, Władysław Szpilman, the great Polish composer and pianist of Jewish origin who after the war

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<sup>7</sup> Toni Susskind, “Q+A with Jonathan Ornstein,” *J-Wire*, April 7, 2016, <http://www.jwire.com.au/qa-jonathan-ornstein/> (accessed May 1, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Szymon Datner, *Las sprawiedliwych. Karta z dziejów ratownictwa Żydów w okupowanej Polsce* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1968), 70.

<sup>9</sup> Grzegorz Berendt, „Życie żydowskie w PRL po Marcu ‘68”, *Rzeczpospolita*, October 13, 2008, <http://www.rp.pl/artukul/204321-Zycie-zydowskie-w-PRL-po-Marcu--68.html> (accessed May 1, 2018).

played a leading role in Poland's cultural life and stayed after 1968 (outside Poland he is best known for his wartime experiences, which are recounted in his memoir *The Pianist*, which has been adapted into a critically acclaimed film by Roman Polański), said in his last interview in 2000: "I don't feel Jewish. I don't deny my ancestry; after all, I didn't change my last name. [...] However, I consider myself to be more a Pole than a Jew. I was born and raised in Poland, which is my fatherland. I can live anywhere in the world, but I want to die in Poland."<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly, there were and are many other Poles of Jewish origin who had or have feelings similar to Szpilman's and officially were not and are not counted in the statistics of Jews in Poland.

Szpilman's words evoke the oral history concept of subjectivity and its role in some Polish Jews' decision to stay in Poland. Luisa Passerini writes that "oral sources refer to and derive from a sphere which I have chosen to call subjectivity." She defines subjectivity as "an area of symbolic activity which includes cognitive, cultural and psychological aspects." Subjectivity, she explains, "has the advantage of being a term sufficiently elastic to include both the aspects of spontaneous subjective being (*soggettività irriflessa*) contained and represented by attitude, behavior and language, as well as other forms of awareness (*consapevolezza*) such as the sense of identity, consciousness of oneself, and more considered forms of intellectual activity."<sup>11</sup> Later in this thesis, we will see that a key element of my narrators' subjectivity is a strong sense of identification with Poland and with Polishness, a factor that undoubtedly contributed to their decision to stay in Poland, especially by the time that they were adults and had greater control over their destinies than when they were children.

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<sup>10</sup> Tadeusz Knade, „Człowiek musiał być silny”, *Rzeczpospolita*, October 12, 2002, <http://archiwum.rp.pl/artykul/405536-Czlowiek-musial-byc-silny.html> (accessed April 6, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Luisa Passerini, "Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism," *History Workshop Journal* 8, no. 1 (1 October 1979), 85.

According to the estimates of historians Piotr Stankowski and Albert Weiser, 2,710,000 Polish Jews, or 81 percent of the country's Jewry, perished in the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup> While this estimate means that 81 percent of Polish Jews perished at the hands of Nazi Germany and its accomplices, nonetheless several hundred thousand Polish Jews survived. While the majority of them left Poland, the most recent significant wave of Jewish emigration occurring in 1967-1968, neither Hitler nor postwar Polish anti-Semites achieved their dream of creating a Poland that was *judenfrei*.

After 1989, it became clear that many more Jews had stayed in Poland than anyone had previously thought. Why did they stay in Poland when so many other Jews left? Even if they were not directly affected by persecution, why did they decide to go against the grain and stay in Poland? And also why did they publicly embrace their Jewishness after the fall of communism? These are some of the questions I sought to answer based on my interviews with five Polish Jews who never left Poland and who were born between 1932 and 1940 and who consequently are survivors of the Holocaust (and, in one case, of Soviet persecutions).

Historians have noted that Polish-Jewish relations varied on a large scale during the German occupation of Poland, and this was often determined by geography, with positive relations prevalent in some regions of Poland and negative ones dominant in others. There was much variation even within regions themselves.<sup>13</sup> One preliminary conclusion is that after the war there were significant variations in Polish-Jewish relations as well. While I cannot draw far-

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in: Anna Cichopek-Gajraj, *Beyond Violence: Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia, 1944-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 19.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Joshua D. Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). In his masterful study, Zimmerman has found that the reactions of the Polish resistance to the Holocaust during World War II echoed local attitudes towards Jews. For example, in northeastern Poland, where anti-Semitism was already strong before the war and where in the summer of 1941 the local Polish population participated in bloody pogroms of Jews, the Polish underground was openly hostile to the Jews. By contrast, in the province of Volhynia (in present-day Ukraine), Poles and Jews faced two mortal enemies, German Nazis and Ukrainian nationalists, which led to largely positive relations between the two groups. In Volhynia, the Polish Home Army was protective of the Jews.

reaching conclusions from interviews with five people, my interviews so far indicate some directions for further research. From interviews with my narrators, I found that during the two waves of postwar Jewish emigration motivated by growing anti-Semitism, one in 1945-1946 and one in 1967-1968, there were certain areas of Poland – not only geographic areas, but also specific institutions and social milieus – that made some Polish Jews feel safe enough that they did not consider emigrating.

My approach to oral history interviews conducted for the purposes of this thesis is informed by the advice of Alessandro Portelli that “written and oral sources are not mutually exclusive.” In fact, he suggests that oral and written sources are complementary.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in writing my thesis, I use oral and written sources in a complementary way. While my interviews will be used to answer questions that have been neglected by previous literature, I also compare them to what has been written for the purposes of verification, which is something that Portelli recommends doing.<sup>15</sup> For example, my narrator Prof. Jan Woleński’s account of how Poland’s Stalinist regime crusaded against anti-Semitism in the postwar era, yet at the same time sought to turn Polish Jews into Poles, is remarkably similar to that offered by Anna Cichopek-Gajraj in her book *Beyond Violence: Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia, 1944-1948*. Both describe that while the communist state very vocally condemned anti-Semitism, in reality it sought to create an ethnically homogeneous nation.

Oral history is a particularly fitting methodology for writing my thesis, because, as Portelli writes, oral history can “cast new light on unexplored areas of the daily life of the non-hegemonic classes.”<sup>16</sup> Polish Jews were by all means a non-hegemonic class in the postwar era,

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<sup>14</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 46.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.



especially under communism, and especially between 1967 and 1989. In the immediate postwar era Poland's communist regime strongly opposed anti-Semitism, although it tried to forcibly assimilate Polish Jews and deny their cultural uniqueness. In 1968, the regime initiated an anti-Jewish purge of many institutions, forcing thousands of Polish Jews to emigrate. Consequently, the hegemonic class in the People's Republic of Poland offered a different account of this history than Polish Jews themselves did. Furthermore, there was censorship under communism, and books that frankly dealt with the recent Polish Jewish past, such as the 1968 events, were banned. Such was the case of Małgorzata Niezabitowska and Tomasz Tomaszewski's book *Remnants* or works such as Andrzej Szczypiorski's novel *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman* (originally published in Polish as *Początek*). Neither work could be legally published in Poland until the 1990s. Both oral history interviews with Polish Jews and memoirs written by them (especially those published in the West, outside the reach of communist censors) arguably could provide a much more honest reflection on difficult matters, such as the 1968 events, than spending hours in any archives from the communist era.

This notion is echoed by Donald A. Ritchie. He writes that "information gained from interviews can force historians to rethink what they knew."<sup>17</sup> This is especially relevant to the experience of Polish Jews under communism. My interviews challenged many of my own assumptions. For example, I had never entertained the thought that postwar Krakow, the site of a pogrom in 1945, was a city relatively free of anti-Semitism, until I interviewed Jan Woleński and Zofia Radzikowska. This indicates a need for more oral histories with Polish Jews who stayed in Poland after 1945-1946 and after 1967-1968, because a larger sample size is necessary to establish even preliminary, working hypotheses.

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<sup>17</sup> Donald A. Ritchie, "Introduction: The Evolution of Oral History," in Donald A. Ritchie, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 12.

Ritchie also writes that oral historians have rejected questionnaires, as “no single set of questions could encompass the diversities of experience, observations, and opinions,” and that oral historians should try to prompt their narrators as little as possible.<sup>18</sup> In conducting my interviews, I have used precisely such an approach. Although I did structure my interviews and did ask my narrators specific questions (for example, “Has anti-Semitism been declining in Poland in recent years?” or “What are your predictions for the future of Jewish life in Poland?”), I also asked them general questions and encouraged them to tell me about their lives and experiences within certain contexts generally.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 13.

## II. Historical Context

The history of the Jews in Poland dates back to the foundation of the Polish state in the tenth century. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, Jews from Hungary, Prague, and above all the German speaking states began to arrive in Poland to escape persecution and to seek better economic prospects. Shortly upon their arrival in Poland, Jewish immigrants became active in monetary trade and in minting coins. The Jewish arrivals from Germany brought with themselves Talmudic learning as well as the Yiddish language, which had evolved from German dialects.<sup>19</sup>

Whereas across Europe east and west Jews experienced violence and expulsions, the Polish state gave them protections and privileges. In 1264, Boleslaus the Pious, the duke of Greater Poland, signed a charter known as the Statute of Kalisz, imparting upon the Jews many rights, protections, and privileges. Christian misdeeds against Jews were harshly punished; punishments included the confiscation of property, fines, and the requirement to pay damages to the victim. Jews were exempted from the jurisdiction of municipal authorities; instead, they were under the jurisdiction of the *wojewoda*, the local military commander, or the judge whom he appointed. The Statute of Kalisz mandated that in legal disputes between Jews and Christians, the Jewish defendant was to be judged by a Jewish judge, and in cases between Jews they were judged in a Jewish court. The charter protected ritual slaughter (*shechita*) and Jewish funerals, and prevented Gentile debtors from forcing Jewish creditors to take money on the Sabbath. Later Polish kings, most notably Casimir III the Great, encouraged Jewish immigration from Germany and Austria and confirmed the privileges laid out by Boleslaus the Pious, making only small changes. While there were some blood liberal charges in Poland at this time, overall there was

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<sup>19</sup> Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), 28-29.

less popular anti-Semitism than in many other parts of medieval Europe.<sup>20</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, Poland's Jewish community was Europe's largest.<sup>21</sup>

Once the largest country in Europe, in 1772, 1773, and 1795 the internally weakened Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth disappeared, having been partitioned by Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Each partitioning power took a different approach to the Jewish question. In Austrian-ruled Poland, Joseph II opposed Jewish autonomy and instead sought to Germanize the Jews; he abolished the *kahal*, or elected local Jewish communal structure, and introduced public education and military service for his Jewish subjects. In the Russian partition of Poland, Catherine II sought to keep the Jews separate from the general public and limited their residence to cities. In 1791, she largely restricted their residence to the Pale of Settlement, which was largely made up of what had previously been Lithuania. Of the three partitioning powers, Frederick II's Prussia was the most progressive in its policy towards the Jews. In 1822, full civil equality was granted to the Jews, although this was accompanied by the abolition of the *kahal*, and discriminatory legislation banning Jewish settlement in some cities remained in effect until 1862.<sup>22</sup> The largest group of Polish Jews lived under Russian rule. Their situation deteriorated after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, after which the Russian state began a campaign of pogroms.<sup>23</sup>

The Polish state regained its independence in 1918, at the end of World War I. In the interwar era, relations between Jews and Gentiles in Poland varied depending on the period. Politically, there were two very different dominant Polish approaches to the Jewish question. Roman Dmowski, the founder of the National Democratic Party and a member of the Polish

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<sup>20</sup> Bernard Dov Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100-1800* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972), 33.

<sup>21</sup> Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland in Two Volumes – Volume II: 1795 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 240.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>23</sup> Richard M. Watt, *Bitter Glory: Poland and Its Fate, 1918-1939* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 361.

delegation to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, was openly anti-Semitic and believed that economic life in Poland had become monopolized by the Jews, leading to the pauperization of ethnic Poles. His National Democrats called for boycotts of Jewish businesses. By contrast, Józef Piłsudski, the Polish chief of state in 1918-1922 and one of the chief architects of regained Polish independence, strongly opposed anti-Semitism and had a vision of Poland as a multiethnic state. From 1918 to 1926, Poland was ruled by governments influenced by the National Democrats. Their hostility towards the Jews was expressed, for example, in their refusal to subsidize Hebrew schools to the degree required by the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>24</sup>

In 1926, Piłsudski gained power in Poland through a *coup d'état*. Old tsarist laws that harassed Jews were repealed, and Jews could count on a considerable degree of protection from the government against violence. After Piłsudski's death in 1935, anti-Semitism, sometimes violent, began to grow again. The government encouraged and sometimes initiated boycotts of Jewish businesses. Many Polish universities adopted quotas on the number of Jewish students accepted or established humiliating "ghetto bench" systems in which Jewish students were forced to sit apart from their Gentile peers.<sup>25</sup>

In the newly independent Polish state, most Jews were unassimilated, in that they spoke a different language than the majority of the population, with which it usually had at most official relations. This was in stark contrast to the situation in Western Europe, which saw high levels of assimilation. In prewar Poland, most Jews spoke Yiddish as their first language, and most spoke Polish with a strong accent, if at all. At the same time, Gunnar S. Paulsson notes that this general picture masks the fact that during the interwar era the assimilation of Polish Jewry was occurring at a rapid pace. In Warsaw, most Jewish children attended public schools where Polish was the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 358-360.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 360-364.

language of instruction, and there were growing numbers of private Jewish schools whose working language was Polish, while Yiddish and Hebrew language schools offered mandatory Polish classes. Meanwhile, older generations increasingly began to learn Polish, because their growing economic relationships with Poles necessitated that. In Paulsson's words, "If the Holocaust had not intervened, it is likely that the Jewish community of Poland would by now have become as completely assimilated [...] as any other modern diaspora community."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Gunnar S. Paulsson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940-1945* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 28-29.

### III. Prewar Identities of Narrators

All of my five narrators came from assimilated families. To a significant extent, this determined their survival during the Holocaust; after all, assimilated Jews were more likely to have non-Jewish Polish friends who would be willing to hide them, while their knowledge of Polish language and customs made them more likely to successfully pass for Gentiles. Katarzyna Meloch's father was an historian and her mother was a teacher of Greek and Latin who, after losing her job because of her communist views, later became a civil servant. She says of her parents: "They were part of the Polish intelligentsia that was of Jewish descent. They wanted to be two-hundred percent Polish; not one-hundred percent, but two-hundred percent. In my home, I never heard anything about the Jews before the war, even though I was seven [when it broke out]. We never celebrated any [Jewish] holidays or traditions, and there was a tree in our house on Christmas. Maybe it had no religious meaning, but the Christmas tree was there."<sup>27</sup>

Alfreda Zawada's father was a tailor, while her mother worked in a store. Her parents spoke Polish rather than Yiddish, but they did practice Judaism.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, Joanna Sobolewska knows little about her biological parents, because she was taken in by a Polish family as an infant and did not know that the mother and father who had raised her were not her biological parents until she was eighteen. However, from the information she was able to piece together, she has learned that her biological parents were young people, also assimilated: her mother came from a family of physicians, for example, which meant that her parents were immersed in the Polish language and cultural milieu.

Without a doubt, of my narrators, Prof. Jan Woleński came from the most assimilated family; if Katarzyna Meloch's parents were "two-hundred percent Polish," then his parents'

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<sup>27</sup> "The Reminiscences of Katarzyna Meloch," January 7, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> "The Reminiscences of Alfreda Zawada," January 11, 2018.

Polishness exceeded two-hundred percent. His mother and grandparents had converted to Catholicism, and his grandfather was a senator representing the right-wing Polish Christian Democratic Party. Later, when discussing his postwar experiences, Woleński says that his mother “did not consider herself to be Jewish, and even if she did, she felt it was her private matter,” and that the same was true of his grandparents. He claims that while his family was not anti-Semitic (it should be noted that the very fact of being a Jew does not make one immune to anti-Semitism), topics related to Jews and Judaism were never discussed at home. In fact, Prof. Woleński was completely unaware of his Jewish origins until 1980, when he was forty, several years after his mother had died.<sup>29</sup>

Of my narrators, Zofia Radzikowska’s family had the strongest links to the Jewish culture and religion. Her father was a furrier who owned a shop in the center of Krakow, and her mother worked for a company that sold dental products. She recalls having a nanny, which is likely an indication that her parents were well off financially. Radzikowska’s parents were definitely religiously Jewish. For example, some of her earliest childhood memories include seeing her father praying in a Jewish prayer shawl. Her mother explained to her that “this is how we, Jews, pray.” After the war, Radzikowska’s mother enrolled her in a Hebrew school in Krakow (one that, she notes, was secular and promoted Zionism) until the school was closed. Radzikowska’s mother’s second husband, whom she met after the war, was also Jewish, a man from Lwów (now Lviv, Ukraine) who served in the Polish Army, and most of her mother’s postwar friends were also Jews. However, while maintaining a clear Jewish identity, Radzikowska’s parents were also very assimilated. They solely spoke Polish with her at home and only spoke Yiddish with each other when they did not want her to understand what they were saying. She remembers being upset at this and yelling at her parents, “asking them to speak in a human language.” She notes

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<sup>29</sup> “The Reminiscences of Jan Woleński,” December 29, 2017.



that her parents did not live in Kazimierz, traditionally the Jewish quarter of Krakow, which she says symbolized “the process of leaving the *shtetl*.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “The Reminiscences of Zofia Radzikowska,” January 9, 2018.

#### IV. World War II and the Holocaust

In September 1939, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union invaded Poland. The next five and a half years led to a nearly complete destruction of Polish Jewry. More than eighty percent perished. In general, Poland faced an extremely cruel occupation, and while non-Jewish Poles were not slated for complete annihilation like the Jews or Romani, they also suffered immensely during the war. According to the estimates of historians from the Institute of National Remembrance, between 2.7 million and 2.9 million Polish Jews perished at the hands of Nazi Germany (1.86 million died in concentration and extermination camps). Meanwhile, 2.7 million non-Jewish Poles were killed by the Nazis, while more than 100,000 perished at the hands of Ukrainian nationalists and upwards of 150,000 were killed by the Soviets. Proportionately, no other country lost as many people during the war.<sup>31</sup> The Poles formed the largest underground resistance movement in Europe, and the Polish armed forces in exile fought on both fronts, forming the fourth largest Allied army.<sup>32</sup>

The topic of Polish attitudes towards the persecuted Jews during the German occupation has been the source of unending controversy for many decades. An accurate, dispassionate description of Polish-Jewish relations during the war is offered by British historian Martin Winstone: “It may therefore be reasonably said that only a minority [of non-Jewish Poles] actively helped Jews, just as a minority actively persecuted them. As in every other country, the response of the largest part of society was indifference with varying degrees of sympathy, ambivalence, or enmity. It is undoubtedly true that a major inhibition to greater help was fear. [Hans] Frank’s [the governor of the General Government, the part of Poland under German

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<sup>31</sup> „IPN: Polska poniosła największe straty osobowe w II wojnie światowej”, Onet.pl, August 28, 2014, accessed February 24, 2018, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/ipn-polska-poniosla-najwieksze-straty-osobowe-w-ii-wojnie-swiatowej/n3193>.

<sup>32</sup> George J. Lerski, *Historical Dictionary of Poland, 966-1945* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996) 18.

occupation that was not directly annexed by the Third Reich – F. M.] shooting order of October 1941 had left rescuers potentially liable to the death penalty.”<sup>33</sup>

In our interview, Katarzyna Meloch put forward a very interesting and logical hypothesis, related to the impact of Polish Jews’ wartime experiences with non-Jewish Poles on their postwar experiences. In our pre-interview talk, before I had turned on my recorder, she told me that those Polish Jews who stayed in Poland after the communist regime’s anti-Jewish campaign of 1968 (a topic I will explore in greater depth in a later chapter) were more likely to have received assistance from non-Jewish Poles during the Holocaust. I returned to this topic in our interview. “This is my theory, but not only my theory,” she says. She mentions the Polish Association of Children of the Holocaust (*Stowarzyszenie Dzieci Holocaustu w Polsce*), an association of 600 Jews living in Poland who survived the war and were thirteen or younger in 1939 or were born during the war,<sup>34</sup> of which Meloch is a member, largely were saved by non-Jewish Poles. In the organization, she says, “there are people who were somehow rescued by Poles in very different ways. Sometimes they came from [ethnically] mixed families [...] Usually, there was a Jewish mother and non-Jewish father, or something like that. And the [non-Jewish] grandparents did everything in their power to save their grandchildren. [...] Many children were in orphanages run by nuns. The contributions of Polish nuns are still underappreciated. They were great rescuers [...] because they knew that saving another person was the key to going to heaven. And they were afraid of nothing. [...] They really knew how to [rescue Jewish children]. Where I was, there was a nun who would hide circumcised Jewish boys

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<sup>33</sup> Martin Winstone, *The Dark Heart of Hitler’s Europe: Nazi Rule in Poland under the General Government* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 183.

<sup>34</sup> Association of Children of the Holocaust, accessed February 24, 2018, <http://www.dzieciholocaustu.org.pl/szab51.php?s=index3.php>.

in some container when the Germans came.”<sup>35</sup> Meloch’s belief that Polish nuns played a crucial role in saving Jews during the Holocaust conforms to what historians write: Antony Polonsky estimates that two-thirds of female religious communities in German occupied Poland sheltered Jews, saving at least 1,500 of them from certain death.<sup>36</sup>

Meloch’s theory that Jews who survived the Holocaust thanks to Polish help were more likely to stay in Poland after the war makes perfect logical sense. After all, it would seem natural for a Jew who had negative experiences with Poles to want to quickly leave Poland after the war and that one who had positive experiences with them would maintain a warm, sentimental sense of attachment to Poland. Of course, my cohort of five narrators is much too small to draw conclusions about the veracity of this hypothesis. However, of the five Polish Jews who stayed in Poland throughout the postwar era whom I interviewed, three, possibly four, survived the Holocaust thanks to the altruistic help of Poles. Certainly, this hypothesis is worth studying in greater detail, but a study of the potential relationship between wartime relations with Poles and a Polish Jew’s decision to stay in postwar Poland necessitates a much larger sample size.

Another one of my narrators who survived the Holocaust thanks to the aid of Poles is Joanna Sobolewska. From the information that Sobolewska was able to piece together after the war (she did not know she was Jewish and that her parents were not her biological parents until she was eighteen), in 1943, one day before the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising broke out, a Polish “Blue” policeman<sup>37</sup> helped to smuggle her out of the ghetto. She says that her grandfather’s

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<sup>35</sup> “The Reminiscences of Katarzyna Meloch,” January 7, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume III – 1914 to 1920* (Oxford, Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 470.

<sup>37</sup> In the General Government, the Germans excluded Poles from all positions of higher authority, but for the sake of convenience they maintained low level authorities (such as village elder) and the prewar police force after brutally purging it of “racially undesirable elements.” The Polish “Blue” police were used to aid the Germans in repressions against Jews, Roma, and Polish partisans, although the extent of their participation in such activities is subject to debate, and a large proportion of them served as double agents for the Polish underground. For a good

brother was a convert to Catholicism and her parents had contacts with the prewar police. Eventually, she was taken in by Mrs. Niczowa, who was the cousin of her grandfather's wife. Later, Sobolewska was handed over to Anastazja Sobolewska, who raised her as her adopted daughter.<sup>38</sup> Sobolewska's experiences are similar to those that Katarzyna Meloch claims are common for members of the Polish Association of Children of the Holocaust: she survived thanks to Poles and had a relative who was a Christian convert with ties to non-Jews.

Prof. Jan Woleński came from a family of Jewish converts to Christianity. Additionally, he and his parents spent the bulk of the war far from their city of origin. Woleński's mother and father were from Lwów (now Lviv, Ukraine), but he was born in Radom in 1940, where he was baptized, and shortly thereafter they fled to Warsaw. They were in a city far from their hometown, which made the likelihood of their being recognized as Jews by an acquaintance virtually nil. Additionally, they all had authentic baptismal certificates, which made it much easier to pass for non-Jewish Poles.<sup>39</sup> However, he and his family still received help from Poles during the Holocaust. Although he did not mention this in my interview with him, he wrote in his book that two Polish families helped his family in occupied Warsaw.<sup>40</sup>

With Zofia Radzikowska, things are more complicated. She and her mother survived the Holocaust hiding in villages outside Krakow–Borek Fałęcki, and Łęg (both of which are within city limits today) –while her father died during a transport to a death camp. Radzikowska and her mother rented apartments there. One time, a Polish “Blue” policeman threatened to denounce them to the Gestapo, although he left after her mother paid him a bribe. Eventually, he came back. Again, Radzikowska's mother succeeded in paying him to leave them alone (in addition to

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overview of this topic, see: Adam Hempel, *Pogrobowcy kłęski. Rzecz o “policji granatowej” w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie 1939-1945* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1990).

<sup>38</sup> “The Reminiscences of Joanna Sobolewska,” January 4, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> “The Reminiscences of Jan Woleński,” December 29, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Jan Woleński, *Szkice o kwestiach żydowskich* (Krakow and Budapest: Wydawnictwo Austeria, 2011), 54.

money, she gave the policeman, himself a father with children, some of the young Zofia's clothes), although her financial resources were running out, so she decided to move to another village where it would be difficult for him to find them.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, a Polish policeman endangered Radzikowska's and her mother's lives, and so they had negative experiences with Poles during the war. However, it is uncertain if they received help from non-Jewish Poles, which makes it impossible to see if her specific experiences are concurrent with Katarzyna Meloch's suggestion that Jews who survived the Holocaust thanks to Polish aid were more likely to stay after the war. When I asked her if she and her mother received aid from Poles during the occupation, she replied that she did not know. In response to my question if the local villagers knew of her Jewish origins, she explained that it was very likely. She notes that in rural Poland, people gossip a lot, and she was baptized at the age of seven in the local parish church; it was (and is) extremely rare for Polish children to be baptized so late. She suspects that the policeman came to threaten her and her mother because he was tipped off by a local. Of course, we will never know if he received one report or more from a local, so it is impossible to know what the inhabitants of Borek Fałęcki thought of Radzikowska and her mother. The fact that only one policeman threatened them could indicate that most of the villagers were passively protective of Radzikowska and her mother or at least indifferent, although of course we can never know that for certain.<sup>42</sup>

The case of Alfreda Zawada cannot be tested in light of the Katarzyna Meloch's suggestion that Jews who survived the Holocaust thanks to the aid of Poles. Unlike my four other narrators, Zawada fell victim not to the Third Reich, but to Poland's other occupier. Along with her parents, she was deported to Siberia by the NKVD in 1939. There, her parents died of cold

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<sup>41</sup> "The Reminiscences of Zofia Radzikowska," January 9, 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

and starvation. Her wartime experiences are the most moving and most brutal of my narrators. The dominant theme of my interview with Alfreda Zawada is survival amidst cold and hunger. When she was taken into a Soviet orphanage, she above all remembers being happy that she could have a bowl of soup and bread everyday. At the end of the war, she was repatriated to Krakow, where she was placed in an orphanage.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> “The Reminiscences of Alfreda Zawada,” January 11, 2018.

## V. Anti-Jewish Violence in Postwar Poland, 1945-1946

Although most Polish Jews perished during the war, in the final analysis several hundred thousand were still alive by 1945. However, liberation did not signal the end of Polish Jewry's problems. In 1945-1946, after the Germans had left Poland, a wave of anti-Jewish violence swept the country; similar phenomena occurred in several other countries in East-Central Europe at the time. The largest, most shocking, and most notorious example of this was the 1946 Kielce pogrom, during which forty-two Jewish Holocaust survivors were killed by their Polish neighbors.

There is a lack of consensus among historians on the causes of this wave of anti-Jewish violence or on the number of victims. David Engel believes that the number of victims was between 650 and 750 and situates the violence within the greater context of the virtual civil war in Poland between the anti-communist government and the new communist regime.<sup>44</sup> Jan T. Gross put the number of victims at 1,500 and argued that anti-Jewish violence in postwar Poland resulted from anti-Semitism fueled by a feeling of guilt for the misdeeds of some Poles during the war and for the acquisition of their property.<sup>45</sup> However, this hypothesis has had many critics. For example, the legendary Marek Edelman, who was one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and later became a successful cardiologist in postwar Poland and a dissident during the Solidarity era, disagreed with Gross's diagnosis, saying that anti-Jewish violence in post-war Poland had little to do with anti-Semitism, but instead resulted from "banditry."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> David Engel, "Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944-1946," *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol. 26 (1998): 43-85.

<sup>45</sup> Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz – An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006).

<sup>46</sup> Joanna Szczęta, „Edelman: Wszystko, o czym Gross pisze, to prawda”, January 19, 2008, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,4851465.html> (accessed March 20, 2018).



Yet another explanation is offered by Polish historian Marcin Zaremba in his work *Wielka trwoga. Polska, 1944-1947 – Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* (“The Great Fear: Poland, 1944-1947 – The People’s Reaction to Crisis;” it has yet to be translated into English). Zaremba provides a multifaceted view, arguing that several years of German Nazi anti-Jewish propaganda made anti-Semitism increase among a large part of Polish society. Meanwhile, there was a general brutalization among Polish society during and after the war, which translated into violence against not only Jews, but also against Germans, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and, of course, other Poles. Finally, he shows that in the 1940s a sizable part of Polish society was capable of believing irrational myths, such as the blood libel, which played a key role in the outbreak of the Kielce pogrom.<sup>47</sup>

Regardless of the causes of this violence, it understandably made many Polish Jews feel unwelcome in their homeland and want to emigrate. In the aftermath of the Kielce pogrom in July 1946, 100,000 Polish Jews emigrated.<sup>48</sup> However, as Antony Polonsky argues, the horrific violence in Kielce proved shocking to many Poles, which led to an abrupt halt in anti-Jewish violence. While many Jews emigrated, other stayed; by 1952, there were still between 70,000 and 80,000 Jews living in Poland (these are the official estimates of the Jewish community; the number of Poles of Jewish ancestry who did not necessarily identify as Jewish was at that point, as now, much larger).<sup>49</sup> Anna Cichopek-Gajraj notes that in neighboring Slovakia, anti-Jewish violence lasted longer than in Poland (until 1948) and that it led to a much greater rate of Jewish

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<sup>47</sup> Marcin Zaremba, *Wielka trwoga. Polska, 1944-1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2012), 584-615

<sup>48</sup> Anna Cichopek-Gajraj, 233.

<sup>49</sup> Polonsky, 607-608.

emigration: after 1948, Poland's Jewish community shrank by forty percent as a result of emigration, compared to eighty percent in Slovakia.<sup>50</sup>

I did not ask my narrators about the causes of this wave of anti-Jewish violence. Some might consider this to be a missed opportunity, but in addition to the fact that my research focus was not why the violence broke out but why some Polish Jews stayed in Poland despite it, I figured that my narrators would not have much to say as witnesses. They were all children when this occurred. Furthermore, most were unaware of this violence and learned about it many years later, so their ideas about it are undoubtedly shaped by things they have read in historical literature written many years after it had happened, just like my own thoughts on this wave of violence.

One of the most interesting conclusions from my narrators is that one factor that prevented some Polish Jews from emigrating as a result of the anti-Jewish violence in post-war Poland was not only that it abruptly ended in 1946, but also that it was limited to only some parts of Poland (and sometimes was limited to only certain sections of cities). While the Kielce pogrom was undoubtedly a shocking example of anti-Jewish violence and aroused fear in most, if not all, Polish Jews, nonetheless it appears that in some regions of Poland Jews did not feel directly threatened by this violence. Most surprising are the observations of Zofia Radzikowska and Jan Woleński. After the war Radzikowska lived in Krakow with her mother and stepfather. By late 1945, 8,961 Jews were living in Poland's former royal capital. On August 11, 1945, a pogrom broke out in Kazimierz, the historically Jewish neighborhood of Krakow. Five Jews

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<sup>50</sup> Cichopek-Gajraj, 227-230.

were seriously injured, four of whom were hospitalized, and there was one confirmed death, although it is possible that two other Jews were killed.<sup>51</sup>

I was very surprised when Zofia Radzikowska, whose family background was the most culturally and religiously Jewish of my narrators, said that she did not feel threatened by the violence. She recalls being a precocious girl and reading about the pogrom in a local newspaper. However, she says: “Only one victim was documented, and everything occurred around Plac Nowy [‘New Square’], and [the anti-Jewish violence] never occurred outside Kazimierz; it was not as if it had all flooded [*rozlało się*] the entire city.”<sup>52</sup>

What’s more, Radzikowska presents the dominant atmosphere in postwar Krakow with regards to the Jews as tolerant. She claims to have personally never experienced any anti-Semitism. She says that she was never hid her Jewish origins, and in the immediate postwar era inherited a characteristically Jewish last name from her stepfather, yet never suffered any ethnic prejudice, either at school or at the Jagiellonian University, where she first was a student and later a law professor. In fact, the only bullying she ever experienced was at Hebrew school from children from religious households who knew aspects of the Jewish religion she was ignorant about.

Like Radzikowska, Jan Woleński lived in Krakow after the war. Then oblivious to his Jewish origins, he likewise describes postwar Krakow as being rather tolerant towards the Jews: “In school or at university, it was very rare that someone said something like, ‘It was good what Hitler did. It's too bad that he didn't slaughter them all.’ Such statements were met with a very harsh reaction [from teachers]. When I heard a statement like that in school, the teacher threatened the student with expulsion if he said something like that again. The same happened at

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 122-125.

<sup>52</sup> “The Reminiscences of Zofia Radzikowska,” January 9, 2018.

university. So there was an atmosphere, let's say, of certain sympathy for Jews in Krakow. Cracovian Jews were probably the most assimilated in Poland. [...] There was no official anti-Semitism. Again, I'm talking about Krakow. I was probably too young to understand this, but when you look at these things now, they were quite different. Some of the police apparatus was anti-Semitic, as was part of the security services, as we know now. Part of the working class in Radom went on strike in protest against the prosecution of the perpetrators of the Kielce pogrom. This was a pretty complex situation; it is pretty well described in the literature.”<sup>53</sup>

Knowing of the 1945 Krakow pogrom, I was very surprised by Jan Woleński’s and Zofia Radzikowska’s accounts of a climate of tolerance for Jews in postwar Krakow. Even if the 1945 violence was contained to just one neighborhood in a major city, it seems paradoxical that while pogroms did not occur in other parts of Poland after the war, they occurred in Krakow. However, reading an interview with my third narrator from Krakow made me think of a working hypothesis.

Radzikowska and Woleński, both retired university professors, belonged to Krakow’s intellectual elites. My third Krakow narrator, Alfreda Zawada, was the only one of working-class origin. Orphaned by the war, she did not have the opportunity to receive a postsecondary education and finished a vocational school, working at a chemical plant. Unlike Radzikowska and Woleński, she experienced significant anti-Semitism in postwar Poland. Her mother-in-law frequently insulted her, imploring her to move to Palestine, while she frequently experienced very unpleasant harassment from a co-worker.<sup>54</sup>

Alfreda Zawada was my only working class narrator, and she was the only one who experienced significant anti-Semitism after the war. Might class have been a factor in influencing

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<sup>53</sup> “The Reminiscences of Jan Woleński,” December 29, 2017.

<sup>54</sup> “The Reminiscences of Alfreda Zawada,” January 11, 2018.

postwar attitudes towards Jews in Poland? She notes that the head of the chemical plant where she worked was Jewish. Although this is impossible to verify, this could be because the anti-Semitism of Zawada's co-worker was economic in nature and resulted from a power relationship.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, while Zawada describes anti-Semitism as "terrible" [*straszny*] under communism, she also had positive relations with many non-Jewish Poles. She says that most of her girlfriends were Catholics who treated her well, taking her to cafes or the theater, and not harassing her. Whereas Zawada's mother-in-law insulted her ethnic origins, her father-in-law and sister-in-law treated her well, defending Zawada from her mother-in-law's barbs. Furthermore, in the immediate postwar era, when a pogrom erupted in Krakow, she was in an orphanage, where many of the children were Jewish. Yet she claims to have witnessed no ethnic tensions there.<sup>56</sup> In other words, while Alfreda Zawada did experience anti-Semitism in postwar Krakow, unlike Zofia Radzikowska or Jan Woleński, she had many positive experiences with non-Jewish Poles as well. While one working class narrator is not enough to draw far-reaching conclusions, Zawada's example suggests that while working class Cracovian Jews may have been more likely to experience anti-Semitism, they likely still experienced less of it than in other parts of Poland.

Like Zofia Radzikowska and Jan Woleński, my two Varsovian narrators, Katarzyna Meloch and Joanna Sobolewska, never experienced anti-Semitism in the postwar era. Once again, class could be a factor; Meloch is a retired journalist, while Sobolewska worked as a sociologist. Regardless of the causes, neither experienced anti-Semitism after 1945. Sobolewska was six and seven years old during the wave of anti-Jewish violence in 1945-1946, and

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

furthermore she did not know about her true origins until she was eighteen. However, while she herself never experienced anti-Semitic attacks, one time when she was on a farm doing sociological research, the son-in-law of the farmers she was visiting told her: “You know, the occupation was terrible, the Germans and the war were bad, but they did one thing right: they got rid of the Jews.” Nobody reprimanded him.<sup>57</sup>

This remark is the exact same one that Jan Woleński claims to have heard twice in his life, once in high school and once at university. He says that in Krakow students who said this were threatened with expulsion. Here, however, we have an example of someone in rural Poland making a similar statement yet not being chastised by anyone. This stands in contrast to the environment in Warsaw that Sobolewska describes. Again, this demonstrates that class may have influenced postwar Polish attitudes towards Jews. In order to draw conclusions on the relationship between class and anti-Semitism in postwar Poland, however, a larger sample size is needed.

When I asked Katarzyna Meloch about the wave of postwar anti-Semitism in Poland, she says that she never experienced it firsthand. Unlike Zofia Radzikowska, she did not read newspapers and was not aware of anti-Jewish violence. Furthermore, she says that she lived under her adopted identity and name after the war, so many people were unaware of her origins. She explained that her school was entirely free of anti-Semitism, she recalls that during the war her principal cancelled classes during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising to express solidarity with the Jews who were being killed. However, Meloch claims that she did not talk about her wartime experiences and used her wartime last name at this time because the (naturally, unfair and inaccurate) stereotype of Jews passively accepting their fate during the war, which stood in stark

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<sup>57</sup> “The Reminiscences of Joanna Sobolewska,” January 4, 2018.

contrast to the Polish insurrectionary tradition, was common in postwar Poland, which made her feel ashamed of who she was.<sup>58</sup> In other words, while Meloch describes her school and the district of Warsaw where she was living as enlightened and free of ethnic prejudice, there was clearly a fear of “soft” anti-Semitism.

Katarzyna Meloch has suggested a correlation between experiences of Polish aid during the Holocaust and a Jew’s decision to stay in postwar Poland. My second interview with her led to another logical and compelling hypothesis. She did not explicitly state this, but I myself reached this conclusion. When we discussed the fact that Meloch did not experience anti-Semitism in 1945-1946, she says: “I lived in Saska Kępa. There was no wave of anti-Semitism there, because during the war nobody there betrayed Jews [to the Gestapo]. There were two districts of Warsaw where there were no Poles who blackmailed Jews: Saska Kępa and Żoliborz.”<sup>59</sup>

Meloch’s comments on Saska Kępa suggest a correlation between wartime attitudes towards Jews in Poland (which were in part dependent on geographic location, with positive attitudes prevailing in some regions and negative ones in others) and attitudes in the immediate postwar era. My narrators indicate that although there certainly was some anti-Semitism in postwar Krakow, as evidenced by the 1945 pogrom and the fact that Alfreda Zawada experienced harassment on the part of her mother-in-law and co-worker, overall postwar Krakow was tolerant towards the Jews. Historians agree that Polish-Jewish relations in Krakow were, overall, positive during the war, despite some negative elements. Emanuel Ringelblum, the famous chronicler of the Warsaw Ghetto, wrote in 1943: “There are many Jews hidden in Cracow, despite the large number of police contacts and informers who hunt the Jews down

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<sup>58</sup> “The Reminiscences of Katarzyna Meloch,” January 8, 2018.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

mercilessly. In the territory of ‘Little Poland’ [should be translated as Lesser Poland – F. M.], Polish-Jewish relations had been friendly for a long time, and this naturally had an effect on the rescue of Cracow Jews.”<sup>60</sup> He is echoed by contemporary historian Andrzej Chwalba, who writes that “Compared to the cities of the former Congress Poland and Eastern Galicia, Krakow was considered to be a city that was friendly towards the Jews.”<sup>61</sup> By contrast, the Kielce region, where the biggest outbreak of anti-Jewish violence in postwar Poland occurred, was, in the words of Antony Polonsky, “a long-standing stronghold of the nationalist Right.”<sup>62</sup>

In conclusion, in 1945-1946 a wave of anti-Jewish violence swept Poland, killing hundreds of Jews. Interviews with my narrators indicate that this violence was limited to some parts of Poland, but did not spread to others. In fact, the example of Krakow, where a pogrom took place in 1945 but was limited to just one neighborhood and that my narrators describe as being overall friendly towards the Jews in the postwar era, demonstrates that postwar attitudes towards Jews varied not only between regions, but even between districts within a single city. They also suggest that there likely was a correlation between class and postwar Polish-Jewish relations, although more interviews are needed to test such a hypothesis. One likely reason why more than half of Polish Jewry still stayed in the country after 1946 is not only because anti-Jewish violence came to a halt right after the Kielce pogrom, but also because not all Polish Jews felt threatened by it. Undoubtedly, those who were assimilated into Polish culture felt less threatened. Furthermore, interviews with my narrators along with a review of the literature indicate that, at a regional level, postwar attitudes towards Jews in Poland were often a continuation of prewar attitudes.

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<sup>60</sup> Emanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*, trans. Dafna Allon, Danuta Dąbrowska, and Dana Keren (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 139.

<sup>61</sup> Andrzej Chwalba, *Okupacyjny Kraków* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011), 153.

<sup>62</sup> Polonsky, 607.



## VI. The Anti-Jewish Purge of 1967-1968

As in 1945-1946, in 1967-1968 a wave of anti-Semitism swept Poland, leading many Jews to emigrate. Whereas the anti-Semitism right after the war led to hundreds of Jewish deaths and was popular, rather than official (in fact, Anna Cichopek-Gajraj notes that Poland's communist regime strongly crusaded against anti-Semitism at this time, particularly in the press<sup>63</sup>), in 1967-1968 it was largely non-violent (although a few intellectuals were beaten) and came from the top.

While in Polish society this anti-Jewish campaign is frequently referred to as “1968” or simply “the March [1968] events” [*wydarzenia marcowe*], in earnest it began one year earlier. In 1967, Israel defeated its Arab adversaries in the Six-Day War. Poland's Jewish community welcomed this development with relief, while many non-Jewish Poles were likewise enthusiastic about the Israeli victory. Many Poles were proud of the fact that quite a few Polish-born Jews, “our Jews,” had contributed had contributed to the Arab defeat. Furthermore, the communist regime was never popular in Poland, and the fact that the Soviet Union and its allies had sided with the Arabs and that the communist propaganda was very pro-Arab during the conflict had the unintended consequence of making many Poles' sympathies pro-Israel. Finally, many Poles saw parallels between Israel's struggle and the Polish fight for independence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while Polish society identified the Israelis with the West, democracy, and civilization, as opposed to the “backward” Arabs.<sup>64</sup>

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union and all of its allies except maverick Romania broke off diplomatic ties with Israel. The Polish communist regime did so on June 12, 1967.<sup>65</sup> In addition

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<sup>63</sup> Cichopek-Gajraj, 130-134.

<sup>64</sup> Włodzimierz Rozenbaum, “The March Events: Targeting the Jews,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 20 (2009): 68.

<sup>65</sup> Jerzy Eisler, “1968: Jews, Antisemitism, Emigration,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 20 (2009): 45.

to the backdrop of the dramatic geopolitics in the Middle East, a struggle for power between two factions was unfolding in Poland's Communist Party. One was the so-called Natolin group (its name deriving from the district of Warsaw where its members had meetings), which consisted of ethnically Polish communists who were pro-Soviet and dogmatic. Meanwhile, the Puławy group (its name is a reference to Puławska Street, the Warsaw street where its meetings were held) was relatively reformist and advocated for greater Polish independence from the Soviet Union. Many of the members of the Puławy group were Jewish.<sup>66</sup>

In 1964, Mieczysław Moczar, the head of the Natolin group, became the minister of the interior. Moczar was known to be an anti-Semite, and he opposed the Puławy group, whose members included quite a few Jews, believing it had an agenda inimical to Polish interests. The Six-Day War and the enthusiastic reaction of many Polish Jews to the Israeli victory gave Moczar the perfect pretext to present the Jews as being loyal primarily to Israel rather than to Poland.<sup>67</sup>

The communist regime began to crack down on Poland's Jews. Polish Jews received threatening letters and phone calls. In the fall of 1967, Jewish editors of the communist press lost their jobs and an anti-Jewish purge swept the Polish Army: hundreds of Jews, including fourteen generals and 200 colonels, were ousted. By the end of 1967, 500 Jews had left Poland.<sup>68</sup>

In 1967, the purge of the "encyclopedists" also took place, one of the most curious episodes in the anti-Jewish purge. An article on Nazi Germany's camps in the *Wielka Encyklopedia Powszechna* ("Great Universal Encyclopedia;" Poland's equivalent of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* published by the state publisher) distinguished between ordinary

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<sup>66</sup> Joanna Beata Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008): 235-236.

<sup>67</sup> Anita Prazmowska, *Poland: A Modern History* (New York: I. B. Taurus, 2010): 192.

<sup>68</sup> Eisler, 47-49; Piotr Wróbel, *Historical Dictionary of Poland, 1945-1996* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998):15.

concentration camps, where non-Jewish Polish inmates were most likely to be imprisoned and whose conditions were very cruel but still gave inmates some chance of survival, and extermination camps, whose sole purpose was to liquidate European Jews (and, to a lesser extent, Roma and Sinti). The communist press attacked the editors of the encyclopedia for downplaying Polish suffering at the hands of the Third Reich and instead emphasizing Jewish suffering. Eventually, the Jewish editors of the encyclopedia lost their jobs.<sup>69</sup>

The anti-Jewish campaign really took off in early 1968, however. In January, Soviet pressure led to the closing of a Warsaw production of *Forefathers' Eve*, an anti-Tsarist play by Adam Mickiewicz, Poland's national bard. Parts of the play criticizing Russian control over nineteenth century Poland were loudly applauded. In March, more than a hundred protests by university students and the intelligentsia erupted across Poland. The regime's reaction was harsh: 2,591 people, including 597 students, were arrested, while many students were conscripted into the army, expelled from their universities, or beaten.<sup>70</sup>

The fact that many of the protesting students and intellectuals were in fact of Jewish origin (including Adam Michnik, Irena Lasota, Jan Lityński, Henryk Szlajfer, and Karol Modzelewski, who were among the leaders of the protests) was seized by the regime. The official press blasted the protesting students as a Zionist fifth column disloyal to Poland. Some reformist writers, not all of them Jewish, were beaten, probably the work of the communist secret police. About 9,000 people lost their jobs; they were largely, but not exclusively, Jewish. The purge above all affected the intelligentsia and the state administration: nearly 500 university lecturers lost their jobs, about a fifth of whom were at Warsaw University, as did 40 percent of senior and mid-level officials at the Foreign Ministry. More than 15,000 Jews left Poland and

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<sup>69</sup> Michael Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 80-81.

<sup>70</sup> Polonsky, 699-700.

were stripped of their Polish citizenship (which was restored only in recent years). Among the most famous Polish intellectuals who left were the sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman as well as the philosopher Leszek Kołakowski (Kołakowski was not Jewish, but his wife was and furthermore he supported the protesting students).<sup>71</sup>

During the Holocaust, Polish responses to the Jewish tragedy varied on a wide scale, from hostility and collaboration through indifference and altruistic aid at the risk of one's life. Similarly, in 1968 Polish responses to the anti-Jewish purge varied. The prominent Polish writer and dissident Jan Józef Lipski wrote that most Poles were indifferent to the campaign. Meanwhile, some showed solidarity with their Jewish neighbors, openly protesting against the purge and parting with their Jewish friends at Warsaw's Gdansk Station (from which many Jews left Poland; this station has since become a symbol of 1968 and now there is a commemorative plaque there with a quote from the Polish writer of Jewish origin Henryk Grynberg, who had left Poland a couple years before the 1968 events), although for others the campaign only increased their pre-existing anti-Jewish prejudices. Antony Polonsky writes that in 1968 the greatest popular anti-Semitism in Poland was found in rural areas.<sup>72</sup>

One salient preliminary conclusion from my interviews with my narrators about this period is that, like in 1945-1946, in 1968 anti-Semitism did not affect all Polish Jews. Among those unaffected by the anti-Jewish campaign are both those who knew they were Jewish and those who did not. The anti-Jewish purge focused on the intelligentsia, military, and state apparatus. Furthermore, it varied geographically. Academics at Warsaw University were particularly affected. Jerzy Eisler writes that Lodz was another city where the official anti-Semitism was strong: he notes that in the eye clinic at the Military Medical Academy there,

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 699-703.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 704-705.

doctors were required to present baptism certificates (an odd requirement from a communist regime that officially promoted atheism).<sup>73</sup>

During World War II, relations between Jews and Gentiles in Krakow were better than in many other parts of Poland. Likewise, although a pogrom broke out in the Kazimierz district in 1945, it did not spread to other areas of the city and, in general, anti-Semitism was condemned in postwar Krakow. My narrators indicate that in 1968 anti-Semitism was also relatively muted in Krakow.

Jan Woleński was unaware of his Jewish origins in 1968. However, he did observe the anti-Jewish campaign and was well aware of what was going on, more so than most other Poles. “I was in a unique situation,” he says, “because I was then a member of the Polish Communist Party [later, Woleński recanted communism and became active in Solidarity in the 1980s – F. M.], so I was in the center of these events that other people did not always know about.”<sup>74</sup> At that time, Woleński worked for the Chair in the Theory of the State and Law, so he received a special bulletin “where there were translations of reprints from the Western press. There we could, for example, read the famous speech by [Gamal Abdel] Nasser [Egyptian leader during the Six-Day War – F. M.] in which he said that he’d drive the Jews into the sea. Thus we knew the real reasons behind this war, at least my colleagues and I knew them, but we did not believe in them.”<sup>75</sup>

Woleński notes that for Jews, Krakow, and the Jagiellonian University in particular, were relative oases of peace in 1968: “The propaganda and the press or television were the same in Krakow as elsewhere, but things were a little different at the universities, maybe not at all of

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<sup>73</sup> Eisler, 51-52.

<sup>74</sup> “The Reminiscences of Jan Woleński,” December 29, 2017.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

them, but at the Jagiellonian University in particular. Only two professors left the university, and they did so voluntarily: [Stefan] Ritterman whom I mentioned [...] and a certain Prof. Jan Górecki. Nobody even knew that he was Jewish, and people thought that he had left Poland to achieve success, but then it turned out that he had spent the whole war in hiding, changed his name, and told someone that he no longer wanted to go through the same thing. There were two or three more people who left.” Furthermore, he notes that the Communist Party tried to tone down everything at the Jagiellonian University, because any repression of professors in Krakow would inevitably be compared to the 1939 arrest of nearly 200 Jagiellonian University professors by the Gestapo, and their subsequent deportation to the Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen concentration camps (these professors were not necessarily Jewish; this was part of Nazi Germany’s campaign against the Polish elites and turning the Poles into a nation of slaves).<sup>76</sup>

While Krakow was not spared of student protests in 1968, Jan Woleński notes that the regime’s response there did not take on an anti-Jewish nature. “In the Party organization, two students were caught handing out flyers, but this had nothing to do with the Jews,” he recalls. Woleński also notes that the militia’s response to the student upheaval was much less violent than elsewhere in Poland.<sup>77</sup>

Radzikowska, who also worked at the Jagiellonian University as a law professor in 1968, confirms Woleński’s account, especially with respect to the university: “Of course, people lost their jobs, but this above all concerned the army, the militia, the secret police, and the high-ranking party apparatus. [...] In 1968, things were very bad in some institutions [...] but there was nothing at the university. [...] In Krakow, there were student protests that were broken up

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

with the aid of teargas, but there were no anti-Jewish excesses here, and nobody lost his or her job at the Jagiellonian University. One of my friends left for Sweden, not Israel, but only because he had achieved success very early on. He was very gifted, worked in Katowice, headed a [university] chair, but his wife worked at the prosecutor's office, where there was a bad atmosphere. However, absolutely nothing happened at the Jagiellonian University.”<sup>78</sup>

Even if a Polish Jew did not directly experience persecution on account of his or her origins in 1968, the outburst of official and, to an extent, popular anti-Semitism would still have made immigrating to a safer country an attractive prospect. As I told Zofia Radzikowska, “If you wanted to leave then, I’m sure that the [communist] authorities would have not tried to prevent you from doing so.”<sup>79</sup> Why did my narrators not consider voluntary emigration?

I recalled Radzikowska’s words that she strongly considered herself to be a Zionist under communist rule; for a Zionist, 1968 would be the perfect time to immigrate to the Jewish state. “Yes, but at the time I had a very strong Polish identity,” she replied, adding that “in particular people in Israel cannot understand this at all.” She continues: “I grew up in Polish culture, Polish history, and the Polish language, so what should I have identified with? I had assimilated the Hebrew culture and considered it to be absolutely a part of me, but this does not mean that it took the place of what I had grown up in: Polishness. I always somehow was able to reconcile [being a Pole and being a Jew], and I still reconcile this today. All Polish Jews are Polish patriots, but that’s a normal truth, right? Nobody is surprised that a French Jew is a Frenchman or that an American Jew is an American. Only in Poland does the notion that a Jew is a Pole arouse great

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<sup>78</sup> “The Reminiscences of Zofia Radzikowska,” January 9, 2018.

<sup>79</sup> “The Reminiscences of Zofia Radzikowska,” January 9, 2018.

emotions. Who was I supposed to be? After all, I was born here and have spent my whole life here.”<sup>80</sup>

In addition to a strong sense of attachment to Poland and to Polishness, Radzikowska also mentions the practical inconveniences of moving abroad as discouraging emigration in 1968. Emigrating, she says, “would have been a one-way ticket. I would have had to give up my apartment and all my property. [...] It was very difficult for people who went through all this. Later, I read what people went through. It was horrible.”<sup>81</sup> In other words, staying in Poland sometimes was motivated, at least in part, by convenience.

There are strong parallels between the experiences of Zofia Radzikowska and those of Joanna Sobolewska in 1968. First, both worked at institutions that had evaded the anti-Jewish campaign. Radzikowska worked at the Jagiellonian University, which was largely untouched by state anti-Semitism. Meanwhile, Sobolewska says of her employment at the time: “I worked at the National Library, which was a unique place. It was like a museum. There were no problems there. Furthermore, there were very few people of Jewish origin working there. I worked in the institution of books and literacy and we did research on literacy there.”<sup>82</sup>

Additionally, Sobolewska was insulated from the rising current of anti-Semitism thanks to her milieu. The majority of her friends were of Jewish origin, so they naturally did not participate in the state’s campaign of ethnic hatred. As far as her non-Jewish friends go, they expressed solidarity with Poland’s Jews: “My friends’ reaction was that horrible things were

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> “The Reminiscences of Joanna Sobolewska,” January 4, 2018.



happening, but they were my friends, so they were well-mannered and met high intellectual and moral standards and had particular views.”<sup>83</sup>

Furthermore, in addition to not being directly affected by the anti-Jewish campaign, Radzikowska did not want to voluntarily emigrate also because of a strong attachment to Poland and because of possible hardships related to emigration. When I asked Sobolewska about why she did not consider leaving Poland in 1968 after she told me that the majority of her (mostly Jewish) friends left the country after the dramatic events that had taken place that year, she replied in a similar vein as Radzikowska: “I’m a Pole. Why should I have wanted to emigrate? Life as an immigrant is difficult. I found some family in Israel; they would have probably helped me, but the thought never even crossed my mind. It’s as if I were to explain to you why I don’t want to move out of my house.”<sup>84</sup>

Radzikowska’s and Sobolewska’s feelings of attachment to Poland and sense of identification with Poland show the degree to which Luisa Passerini’s concept of subjectivity affected my narrators’ staying in Poland after the 1967-1968 purge. My oldest narrator was born in 1932, and the youngest was born in 1940. During the first major wave of Jewish emigration from Poland in 1945-1946, they were all children and whether or not they stayed in Poland was completely determined by their parents. In 1968, they were all in their twenties and thirties and had much greater control over their destinies. If they were not victims of the anti-Jewish purge, and none of them were, staying in Poland was dependent on their own decisions.

The strong feeling of identification with Poland and seeing themselves as Poles is a recurring theme in my interviews with my narrators. For all of them, their identification with Jewishness – cultural, religious, or otherwise – was much weaker under communism than today.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

However, even today Polishness is a more salient element in all of my narrators' identities with the exception of Zofia Radzikowska. I asked all of my narrators how they would describe their national identities. Radzikowska said: "This was said most beautifully by Aleksander Wat [a prominent Polish writer of Jewish origin and convert to Catholicism – F. M]. [...] When asked [about his identity], Aleksander Wat said: 'I am neither a Polish Jew nor a Jewish Pole. I am a Polish Pole and a Jewish Jew. And I like that definition the most.'"<sup>85</sup>

Even my the narrator with the strongest sense of a Jewish identity identifies as a "Polish Pole." The other four, however, identify themselves as Poles first and Jews second. This is most colorfully described by Jan Woleński. When I asked him if he considers himself to be a Polish Jew, a Pole of Jewish origin, or something else, he replied: "I am a Pole of Jewish origin; what more can I say? There are Poles of German, Czech, Slovak, Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Belarusian origin, and there are also Poles of Jewish origin, German origin, and so on. [...] I am a fan of sports. If Poland were to play Israel, then naturally I cheer for Poland. But if Israel plays someone, then I cheer for Israel."<sup>86</sup> Naturally, Woleński did not know about his Jewish origins in 1968, but his explanation of his identity and the fact that he was not personally affected by that *annus horribilis* for many Jews suggest that even if he did know who his ancestors were he would not have been particularly interested in leaving.

In the cases of all five of my narrators, a strong sense of Polishness was a factor influencing their decision to stay in Poland, particularly after the dramatic events of 1967-1968. In order to determine if there is any correlation between subjectivity and staying in Poland, it would be necessary to conduct interviews not only with Polish Jews who stayed in Poland, but also with those who voluntarily emigrated (as opposed to those who were persecuted and forced

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<sup>85</sup> "The Reminiscences of Zofia Radzikowska," January 9, 2018.

<sup>86</sup> "The Reminiscences of Jan Woleński," December 29, 2017.

to emigrate in 1967-1968). Did the latter have a strong sense of Jewish identity? Did they see themselves as Jews first and Poles second (or not see themselves as Poles at all)? Were voluntary Jewish emigrants less assimilated into Polish culture? These are some questions worth asking them.

Once again, Alfreda Zawada's status as my only narrator of working class origin provides a unique perspective on staying in Poland during major waves of Jewish emigration. When I asked her if the 1968 campaign affected her, she said with a laugh: "Me? No, I wasn't an engineer or a lawyer." She describes Gomułka, the head of Poland's Communist Party at the time, as "kicking out all the Jewish lawyers, engineers, and doctors."<sup>87</sup> The 1968 anti-Jewish purge in Poland above all affected the intelligentsia and state functionaries. Polish historian Jerzy Eisler writes that "March '68 remains predominantly a pogrom [of course, he means 'pogrom' in a symbolic, not literal, way – F. M.] against the intelligentsia. It was in March '68 that the mass media attacked individual writers and scientists with particular viciousness."<sup>88</sup>

Traditionally, Jews have made up a large part of Poland's intellectual elites. In the interwar era, for example, 56 percent of Polish physicians in private practice and 33.5 percent of attorneys were of Jewish origin.<sup>89</sup> Of the seventeen laureates of the Nobel Prize who were born in Poland, slightly more than half (ten) are of Jewish background. However, many Jews, like Alfreda Zawada, did and do belong to the working class. They formally escaped the state persecutions in 1968. Consequently, 1968's effects on the Jewish working class in Poland merit greater research.

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<sup>87</sup> "The Reminiscences of Alfreda Zawada," January 11, 2018.

<sup>88</sup> Eisler, 37-38.

<sup>89</sup> Michlic, 103.

However, in addition to a state sponsored campaign, the 1968 events did succeed in arousing anti-Jewish sentiments among part of Polish society, particularly in rural areas. I asked Zawada if she herself experienced greater discrimination as a result of her ethnic origins then. She says that she hated Gomułka, although she did not experience greater anti-Semitism, with the exception of her co-worker who for years harassed her for being Jewish.<sup>90</sup>

Katarzyna Meloch has brought to my attention the fact that although intellectuals were one among the chief victims of the communist regime's anti-Jewish policies in 1967-1968, the Polish intelligentsia has traditionally been among the forces most opposed to anti-Semitism in Polish society. For example, the Polish intelligentsia openly expressed its horror to the wave of violent anti-Semitism in 1945-1946 described in the previous chapter.<sup>91</sup> In 1968, a Pole of Jewish origin who was part of the intelligentsia might have been targeted, but at the same time he or she would have been more likely to receive support from his or her surroundings than people in other sectors of society, which makes being a Jewish intellectual in Poland in 1968 to a degree a mixed blessing. Meloch says: "My life was easy, because I lived in an exclusive Polish milieu that organized, for example, institutes on literary research. My friends held a Party meeting against anti-Semitism and often subsequently received punishments from the party. [...] Living in such an environment gives us the privilege of isolating us from the rest of society."<sup>92</sup>

One of the first parts of the anti-Jewish campaign of 1967-1968 in Poland was the firing of Jewish editors of Polish newspapers. To recap, Katarzyna Meloch worked as a journalist under communism. However, the fact that she was not an editor likely made the regime uninterested in targeting her.

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<sup>90</sup> "The Reminiscences of Alfreda Zawada," January 11, 2018.

<sup>91</sup> Gross, 29.

<sup>92</sup> "The Reminiscences of Katarzyna Meloch," January 8, 2018.

The dramatic events of 1967-1968 dealt a major blow to Poland's Jewish community. The communist regime's anti-Jewish campaign led to the emigration of 15,000, possibly more, Polish Jews. However, we have to bear in mind that on the eve of the 1968 events Poland's Jewish community was estimated at 25,000 to 30,000 people.<sup>93</sup> We can say that at least half of Polish Jewry stayed in the country. I write at least half because the figure of 25,000 to 30,000 Jews in 1968 refers to those Jews who had ties to official Jewish communities. There were many more Poles of Jewish origin who did not know they were Jewish (such as Jan Woleński) or did not identify at all with Jewishness. Many, although not all, would embrace their Jewishness after the fall of communism, a theme I will explore in greater depth in the next chapter.

Although 1968 was a major loss to Polish Jewry, it must be remembered that thousands, possibly many more, Polish Jews stayed in Poland, even if their ties to the Jewish religion or culture were weak or non-existent. Mieczysław Moczar and Władysław Gomułka did not make Poland *judenfrei*.

My narrators offer some preliminary conclusions as to why some Polish Jews stayed. First, they make it clear that not all Polish Jewry was affected by the anti-Jewish campaign. Like the popular anti-Semitism of 1945-1946, the official anti-Semitism of 1967-1968 was stronger in some areas than others. While the anti-Jewish campaign was particularly virulent in Warsaw and Lodz, the excesses appear to have been much milder in Krakow. Official anti-Semitism also varied on an institutional level; according to Joanna Sobolewska, the National Library was an island free of anti-Semitism in Warsaw in 1968. In addition to geographic differentiation, certain sectors of Polish society were free of the campaign, such as the working class. What's more, although the intelligentsia as a whole was among the primary targets of the anti-Jewish

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<sup>93</sup> Dariusz Stola, "The Hate Campaign of March 1968," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 20 (2009): 18.

campaign, Katarzyna Meloch's example demonstrates that at the same time the Polish intelligentsia has been a major source of opposition to anti-Semitism throughout Poland's history, so a Jewish intellectual was more likely to receive support from his or her colleagues in 1967-1968.

Furthermore, there is the question of attachment, which Zofia Radzikowska and Joanna Sobolewska make particularly clear. I was reminded of a sad scene in Julian Schnabel's film *Before Night Falls*, an adaptation of Cuban poet and writer Reinaldo Arenas' memoir of the same title. Having suffered brutal political repression and imprisonment at the hands of the Castro dictatorship for his homosexuality and for having published his work abroad without the regime's consent, Arenas spent the last ten years of his life in exile in the United States. There, however, he was miserable, living in poverty, ignored by New York's literary elites, and never feeling at home in American society, which he criticized for its consumerism. In a scene towards the end of the film, Arenas, played by Spanish actor Javier Bardem, is in a hospital, without health insurance and dying of AIDS. A nurse tells him that he will be going home. "To Cuba?" he asks.

Regardless of the hostile political, social, or economic circumstances, people often feel an attachment to the land that they know, to its history, culture, and language. Apparently, this can be true both of a homosexual and dissident in Castro's Cuba and of a Jew in Poland during the time of political anti-Semitism that has since become known as "Moczarism" (*moczaryzm*).

## VII. The End of Communism and the Revival of Jewish Life in Poland, 1989 – Present: A Festival of Freedom

Joseph Stalin famously compared bringing communist rule to Poland to saddling a cow.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, communist rule in Poland frequently met with resistance. In 1968 Polish students and intellectuals engaged in large-scale protests against the cancelling of performances of a play by Adam Mickiewicz. Two years later, Polish workers' protests in the Baltic port of Gdynia were violently suppressed.<sup>95</sup>

However, in the late 1970s several forces were at work that led to the Polish people's largest, and ultimately successful, rebellion against communism. In the 1970s, Władysław Gomułka was replaced by Edward Gierek as the head of Poland's communist regime. Gierek ushered in a brief period of prosperity fueled by loans from the West. However, this inevitably ended and led to austerity measures. In 1976, the brutal repression of workers' protests led to the formation of the Workers' Defense Committee (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*). Furthermore, in 1978 a Pole was elected pope; John Paul II's triumphant visit to his homeland the following year gave the Poles a sense of freedom and courage.<sup>96</sup>

In 1980, a labor union called Solidarity (*Solidarność*) that was bound to change the world was formed by workers in the Gdansk shipyards and was led by a charismatic unemployed electrician named Lech Wałęsa. Gradually, it developed into a millions-strong nonviolent national movement fighting for national liberation. Communist Party members defected to Solidarity in huge numbers. This was the only independent organization in the entire Soviet Bloc. Already fighting a front in Afghanistan, the Soviets, led by a senile Brezhnev, did not want

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<sup>94</sup> Quote in: Patryk Babiracki, *Soviet Soft Power in Poland: Culture and the Making of Stalin's New Empire, 1943-1957* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 237.

<sup>95</sup> Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 1107.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 1107-1108.

to open another one in the West, so they asked Poland's communist leaders to take matter into their own hands. Thus Poland's caudillo General Wojciech Jaruzelski staged a coup in 1981 and banned Solidarity.<sup>97</sup>

Eventually, however, martial law was lifted. Solidarity continued its struggle, and on February 6, 1989, the communist junta decided to open up round-table discussions with Solidarity's representatives. The regime agreed to hold semi-free elections, which were ultimately held on June 4 (in a bitter irony of history, that same day the People's Republic of China brutally suppressed student protests in Tiananmen Square). Solidarity was triumphant, winning ninety-nine of the 100 seats in the Senate that the communist regime let it compete for and all seats in the Sejm (the lower chamber of Poland's Parliament) it could fight for. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev made it clear to General Jaruzelski that he would have to respect the results of the elections. Soon, the first non-communist government in post-war Eastern Europe was formed in Poland.<sup>98</sup> "On the fourth of June 1989, communism ended in Poland," the Polish actress Joanna Szczepkowska famously announced on state television.<sup>99</sup>

The success of the Polish opposition led to a ripple effect across Eastern Europe, and soon popular protests led to regime change across the former Soviet Bloc. British historian and journalist Timothy Garton Ash, a chronicler of the dramatic events of 1989, put it in this way to Czechoslovak dissident and poet Vaclav Havel, who would soon become the nation's first postwar non-communist president: "In Poland [the end of communism] took ten years, in

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 1108.

<sup>98</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 606-607.

<sup>99</sup> As quoted in: Mihaela Kelemen and Monika Kostera, eds., *Critical Management Research in Eastern Europe: Managing the Transition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 217.



Hungary ten months, in East Germany ten weeks; perhaps in Czechoslovakia it will take ten days!”<sup>100</sup>

The return of democracy and the free market in Poland, as well as its reorientation to the West, led to a revival of Jewish life in Poland. Many of the leaders of this revival, such as Stanisław Krajewski and Konstanty Gebert, were active in Solidarity in the 1980s. Since 1989, many synagogues have been reopened for services, and many new communities have been formed, such as the dynamic progressive Beit Warszawa, whose membership numbers around 400. Many Polish writers of Jewish origin, such as Michał Głowiński, began to openly write about their Jewish origins and experiences during the Holocaust. Meanwhile, there has been a surge in interest in Jewish studies in Poland, with institutions such as the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw and the Department of Jewish Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow growing rapidly in prominence. Jewish publications such as the cultural monthly *Midrasz* have been established. To a large extent, non-Jews have contributed to the revival of interest in all things Jewish. For example, the Krakow Festival of Jewish Culture, first held in 1988, was the brainchild of Janusz Makuch, a Gentile, while most of the 20,000 participants of the festival each summer are not Jewish.<sup>101</sup>

A look at the estimates of the size of Poland’s Jewish community in the *American Jewish Yearbook* is quite telling. The *Yearbook* estimates Poland’s Jewish community in 1966, on the eve of the anti-Jewish purge, at 30,000, according to the country’s Jewish leaders.<sup>102</sup> By 1979, according to a later edition of the *Yearbook*, its number had fallen by four-fifths, to just 6,000.<sup>103</sup> In the 2008 *Yearbook*, however, we read that “estimates of Jews living in the country ran as high

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<sup>100</sup> As quoted in: Jan T. Gross, “Present at the Miracle,” *New York Times*, July 22, 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/22/books/present-at-the-miracle.html> (accessed April 8, 2018).

<sup>101</sup> Polonsky, 814-817.

<sup>102</sup> Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb, eds., “Poland,” in *American Jewish Yearbook 1967* (68), 390.

<sup>103</sup> Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb, eds., “Poland,” in *American Jewish Yearbook 1979* (79), 256.

as 20,000.”<sup>104</sup> In other words, according to the *American Jewish Yearbook* Poland’s Jewish population more than trebled between the 1970s and 2000s, and has reached at least two-thirds of its size before the 1967-1968 purge.

The numerical revival of Jewish life in Poland to a large extent results from Polish Jews publicly embracing their origins. What caused them to do so?

“We all felt freedom [after the fall of communism]. Really,” Katarzyna Meloch tells me. “This was, in fact, a physical feeling of freedom. We felt free to say everything about ourselves. Nothing was embarrassing, and furthermore, our Polish environment wants to listen to us. [...] We really experienced the regaining of freedom in Poland in a fantastic way. This was something like a festival. Suddenly, everyone was able to speak the truth. Maybe this also affected Polish-Ukrainian relations, although I did not follow this and don’t know, but it enormously affected Polish-Jewish relations. Suddenly there are people [in Poland] who want to deal with this. Now, there is an entire movement of historians, writers, and people of culture who are steeped in this topic. This is fantastic. I also work with a magazine that is edited by a man who has no Jewish roots, but is completely fascinated with these topics. [...] This is not a rare case, because I have a friend who comes from a peasant family outside Lublin and who devoted much of his time to Jewish matters and is now writing a book about us.”<sup>105</sup>

As I wrote in the previous chapter, under communism Katarzyna Meloch was part of the Polish intellectual elites that were largely untouched by anti-Semitism. However, she did not discuss her Jewish origins at all. When I asked her if her non-Jewish husband knew she was a Jewish girl who had survived two ghettos, she said that she simply did not know. People simply

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<sup>104</sup> Daniel Singer and Lawrence Grossman, eds., “Poland,” in *American Jewish Yearbook 2008* (108), 515.

<sup>105</sup> “The Reminiscences of Katarzyna Meloch,” January 8, 2018.

did not talk about their past.<sup>106</sup> (Undoubtedly, however, the fact that every single one of my narrators has said that anti-Semitism has been declining in Polish society since 1989 made them and other Polish Jews, such as the above-mentioned Michał Głowiński, more likely to publicly discuss their origins.)

While Katarzyna Meloch does not mention this explicitly, undoubtedly one salient aspect of the “festival of freedom” that made many Poles interested in Jewish history, as Meloch has herself noted, was the end of communist censorship. This fact is especially evident in my interviews with Jan Woleński. He found out about his Jewish origins in 1980, but was largely indifferent to this discovery. What, then, made Jewishness an important part of his identity?

In 2000, it was first alleged that Polish peasants murdered hundreds of Jews in the village of Jedwabne in northeastern Poland in the summer of 1941. Previously, the Jedwabne pogrom was widely believed to be the work of Germans. This allegation sent shock waves across Polish society, which associates the wartime fate of the Polish nation above all with heroic resistance to the Third Reich and great Polish suffering (an account that is not entirely inaccurate). The Institute of National Remembrance investigated the Jedwabne case and concluded that although the pogrom was inspired by the Germans, it was executed out by local Poles (however, the number of victims of the crime remains unknown, because Poland’s Jewish community opposes an exhumation of the victims’ bodies on religious grounds). The shocking revelations led to much soul-searching among Polish society and culminated with a public apology by Aleksander Kwaśniewski, the president of Poland at the time, in the name of the Polish nation in 2001.<sup>107</sup>

It was above all the public debate on the Jedwabne pogrom, which was made possible only thanks to the cessation of communist censorship, that brought Jan Woleński closer to his

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> The Institute of National Remembrance has published the findings of its investigations in two volumes: Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, eds., *Wokół Jedwabnego* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2002).

Jewish roots. Woleński was always completely indifferent to the Jewish religion: “I have been a non-believer since I was in high school, so the topic of Judaism does not exist to me,” explains. Woleński first felt closer to his Jewish roots when the controversy over the Carmelite monastery at Auschwitz erupted in the 1990s. Carmelite nuns had opened a convent at the former extermination camp to pray for the souls of those killed there (while Jews make up ninety percent of the camp’s victims, non-Jewish Poles are the second largest group of victims). Ultimately the nuns had to leave the camp, upon a demand by Pope John Paul II. Indifferent to the presence of the convent, amidst this controversy Woleński met an American rabbi who, it turned out, had been born in Radom, the same Polish city where Woleński was born. The rabbi explained to him that according to Jewish religious law Auschwitz is a Jewish cemetery. “I was so shocked upon learning this,” he explains, “that I decided to end with pretending to not being a Jew.”<sup>108</sup> Of course, Woleński does not mean that he pretended to not be a Jew in a literal sense; he never denied his origins upon learning of them, but rather did not associate himself with them.

Shortly after the Carmelite controversy at Auschwitz had ended, the public debate on the Jedwabne pogrom began. Woleński was invited to participate in a series of discussions on Polish-Jewish relations at the Center for Jewish Culture in Krakow, which only further strengthened his ties to Jewishness. He began to be invited to write more and more articles on Jewish matters for the Polish press. Sometimes there were hostile or anti-Semitic comments in the online editions of his articles. This did not discourage him from publicly identifying as a Jew. On the contrary, when I asked Woleński what it means for him, an agnostic atheist, to be a Jew, part of his reply was: “Being a Jew gives rise to certain challenges because of what other people think of Jews. I don’t want to tie this to any form of courage, bravery, or sacrifice, but if you

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<sup>108</sup> “The Reminiscences of Jan Woleński,” January 5, 2018.

decide to publicly declare yourself to be a Jew, you have to bear the consequences. Today, they aren't as dramatic as they used to be, but they're still there to the degree that there are still people who told me that they would never confess to being Jewish.”<sup>109</sup>

In addition to the end of communist censorship, which facilitated the public discussion of difficult or taboo topics in Poland, another aspect of the fall of communism that brought Jan Woleński closer to his Jewish roots was the reestablishment of civil society, which allowed civic organizations to flourish in Poland. “In 2007, the [Polish branch of] B'nai B'rith [an international Jewish fraternal organization; its Polish chapter was banned in the 1930s for its ties to freemasonry – F. M.] was reactivated. I was invited to collaborate in this effort, and as a lawyer I wrote the branch's statute. You could say that then I officially became a Polish Jew.”<sup>110</sup>

This renewed presence of international Jewish organizations in post-communist Poland played a leading role in Zofia Radzikowska's reversion to Judaism. After the fall of communism, the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, dedicated to rebuilding Jewish life in East-Central Europe, began to organize summer camps for Polish Jews to reclaim their identities. When Radzikowska told me that she was a participant in these camps, I asked her if her recent bat mitzvah, which she celebrated in Krakow's Tempel Synagogue in the fall of 2017, was born at the Lauder camps.

“Everything began for me thanks to Michael Schudrich [now the chief rabbi of Poland – F.M.] and Lauder. [The bat mitzvah] was like the culmination of this. I had been an atheist all my life, but then I started to come into the fold of Judaism. At the beginning there was Michael Schudrich. If I had met a different rabbi who maybe would have segregated people – there's a tendency among many people to segregate others, into categories of better Jews and worse Jews – I find this very annoying. [...] Michael accepted everyone. He was very open and inclusive,

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

not exclusive. What's more, he was a young person born in New York, but he understood us, the children of the Holocaust, and he did not purport to have an answer to every question. He believed that in light of [the Holocaust] we should just be silent and not try to have a clever answer for everything. He understood us because his family roots were from this part of the world, if not from Poland, then from Belarus or Ukraine," she explains.<sup>111</sup>

She continues about how the camps increasingly attracted her to Judaism: "I first started to become immersed [in Judaism] for social reasons because we received [...] transcribed texts, and we sang these prayers. I always loved to sing in Hebrew, so I sang these prayers and listened to lectures. I started to attend prayers and services, and it sucked me in, so at one point I came to believe. This was a strange process."<sup>112</sup>

Although Zofia Radzikowska has experienced a profound religious conversion after the fall of communism in Poland, my other narrators' religious ties to Judaism are much weaker. Jan Woleński describes himself as an agnostic atheist.<sup>113</sup> Likewise, Joanna Sobolewska calls herself an agnostic.<sup>114</sup> When I asked Katarzyna Meloch about her ties to Judaism, she replied: "I'm a little bit Christian and a little bit Jewish, because [...] I have been submerged in Christianity. It was only later when my grandchildren started to gamble on Judaism that I went to the other camp, but not because I was very religious. This is very difficult. I want to be buried at a Jewish cemetery, but that's all I know about Judaism."<sup>115</sup> Alfreda Zawada, meanwhile, goes to synagogue and says she believes in God, but not in an afterlife.<sup>116</sup>

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111 "The Reminiscences of Zofia Radzikowska," January 9, 2018.

112 Ibid.

113 "The Reminiscences of Jan Woleński," January 5, 2018.

114 "The Reminiscences of Joanna Sobolewska," January 4, 2018.

115 "The Reminiscences of Katarzyna Meloch," January 8, 2018.

116 "The Reminiscences of Alfreda Zawada," January 11, 2018.

All my narrators are active in Jewish life through organizations such as B'nai B'rith, the Jewish Community Center in Krakow, or the Association of Children of the Holocaust. However, only Alfreda Zawada and especially Zofia Radzikowska have ties to Judaism. Consequently, my small sample of narrators indicates that the renewal of Jewish life in post-communist Poland could be primarily cultural, rather than religious, in nature.

Alfreda Zawada is another one of my narrators who came closer to her Jewish identity after 1989 thanks to the flourishing of Jewish institutions in Poland. She is one of the most active members of the Senior Club (*Klub Seniora*) at JCC Krakow. For her, the club has proved to be a solution to the loneliness of old age and retirement. "I don't like to sit at home alone," she explains. "How long can you spend watching television? Previously, I used to read books, but now I can't because I'm going to be operated for cataracts. [...] I like this club. The atmosphere is good. The volunteers are great. When I come, they ask, 'How are you feeling?' It's so nice to hear."<sup>117</sup>

Joanna Sobolewska also describes the revival of Jewish life in Poland primarily in terms of institutional renewal. When I asked her if Jewish life in present day Poland is more vibrant than it was between 1968 and 1989, she replied: "Definitely. [...] Back then there were no JCCs or these types of organizations, or even the Schorr Foundation. There was the Jewish Historical Institute [...] but apart from that, there really wasn't a place where you could go with Jewish matters. [...] [In Warsaw], there's a JCC; there are two synagogues. We could even say that there are more than two synagogues, because I think that Beit Warszawa also has something of a synagogue. There's a synagogue or at least a place for prayer at Aleje Jerozolimskie (Jerusalem Avenue). There's a progressive synagogue, and there are also the [Hasidic] Lubavitches. [...]"

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<sup>117</sup> "The Reminiscences of Alfreda Zawada," January 11, 2018.

There are Jewish organizations, so there is some Jewish life. There's our community and the Seniors Club and the Social-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland [*Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce*], which is very vibrant. [...] Now there's a museum [the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews], which is really the center of Jewish life. Then there's the Szalom Foundation and the Jewish Theater. So there is some Jewish life."<sup>118</sup>

The fall of communism led to what Katarzyna Meloch has accurately called a “festival of freedom,” which suddenly made many Poles of Jewish origin comfortable in publicly discussing their wartime experiences. Furthermore, Polish society became increasingly interested in hearing about their experiences. The end of communist censorship made the discussion of controversial or taboo topics. Meanwhile, the fall of the Iron Curtain allowed many Jewish institutions, both Polish and international ones, to be opened or reopened, which brought many of my narrators closer to their Jewish roots. All this caused many Polish Jews, including all of my narrators, to come closer to their roots and reemerge at the surface of Polish society.

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<sup>118</sup> “The Reminiscences of Joanna Sobolewska,” January 4, 2018.



### **VIII. Some Preliminary Conclusions and Directions for Further Research**

For nearly a thousand years, Jewish civilization flourished on Polish soil. During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, rulers from England to Crimea persecuted and expelled Jews, while Polish kings and dukes gave them legal privileges and protections. Numerous religious movements, including Hasidism, were born in Poland, while Yiddish literature thrived in the country. Meanwhile, the number of Polish writers, scientists, statesmen, filmmakers, poets, and painters of Jewish origin is impressive.

Then came the cruel twentieth century, during which Polish Jewry was decimated twice. Between 1939 and 1945, the Third Reich killed the vast majority of Polish Jews. In the postwar era, meanwhile, most surviving Polish Jews left the country in several waves. Two of the most dramatic waves took place in 1945-1946 and 1967-1968 and are described in detail in my thesis. The former wave was to a large extent motivated by popular and violent anti-Semitism, while the latter was caused by official and largely non-violent anti-Semitism.

By the 1980s, it seemed a foregone conclusion that Polish Jews would simply be a culture with a rich past that would soon disappear, much like the Christians of North Africa or Asia Minor centuries before, for example. However, after the fall of communism in 1989 something remarkable happened. Thousands of Poles started to come out as Jews, publicly speaking and writing about their origins. Many synagogues were reopened and Jewish institutions were established. All of a sudden, it turned out that there were many more remaining Jews in Poland than anyone had expected. Why did they stay?

Although wide-reaching conclusions cannot be drawn from only five narrators, interviews with my narrators on these events allow for several tentative conclusions that can be investigated after conducting more research. First, they demonstrate that even during these two

waves of anti-Semitism, there were some islands of tolerance within Poland where Jews were isolated from the hostility. Historians agree that during the Holocaust Polish-Jewish relations varied, and geography was one major factor that determined the reactions of non-Jewish Poles to the Holocaust. For example, Polish-Jewish relations were largely negative in northeastern Poland, where the Germans succeeded in inciting the local population to kill thousands of Jews in pogroms in the summer of 1941. They were likely less than edifying around Kielce, the site of the infamous pogrom one year after the war, which for a long time was a bastion of the anti-Semitic right. By contrast, Polish-Jewish relations were relatively harmonious in Krakow, just as they were in Volhynia, where Poles and Jews faced two mortal enemies – German Nazis and Ukrainian nationalists – which led to a substantial amount of cooperation between the two groups.

My interviews seem to indicate that after the war Polish-Jewish relations varied based on geography as well. As anti-Jewish violence swept Poland in 1945-1946, there were outposts of tolerance where Jews felt safe enough to decide to stay in the country. Likewise, in 1967-1968 there were apparently parts of Poland where Jews were largely unaffected by the communist regime's persecution. What's more, even within a single city there could be different prevalent attitudes towards Jews depending on district or neighborhood. The reminiscences of Jan Woleński and Zofia Radzikowska about postwar Krakow, which indicate that although a pogrom occurred in Kazimierz in 1945, it was limited to just one district of the city and that Polish-Jewish relations in Poland's former capital after the war were overall good, are highly suggestive of this.

However, my narrators' experiences indicate that geography was not the only factor that determined the amount of anti-Semitism occurring in a place. This varied by institution as well.

Thus, for example, Joanna Sobolewska indicates that while a major anti-Jewish purge occurred at Warsaw University, where many academics were deprived of their jobs solely on account of their ethnic origins or criticism of the regime, in 1968, at the same time no such purge occurred at the National Library, just a couple miles away.

As I have shown in this thesis, both after 1945-1946 and after 1967-1968, approximately half of Poland's Jewish community at the time stayed in the country. Thus this could indicate that these oases of tolerance could be much larger than one could expect. Furthermore, it is likely that these areas of Poland untouched by the anti-Semitism of 1945-1946 and 1967-1968 are largely understudied, because most Jews who wrote about them emigrated, thus those more likely to discuss them were those who in all likelihood were affected. Meanwhile, those who stayed and were unaffected by these outbursts of popular and official anti-Semitism likely only wrote in Polish and did so only after 1989, and thus their experiences were less likely to become known to international audiences. The fact that the experiences of Polish Jews who stayed in Poland were less likely to become available outside Poland led to a one-sided view of Polish-Jewish relations prevailing internationally.

Frequently (although, of course, not always), Polish Jews who have emigrated from Poland carry with themselves bitter memories of hostility. Certainly, anti-Semitism was not the only reason why most Polish Jews left the country after the war. After the Holocaust, Poland was a virtual cemetery and many Jews were pessimistic about rebuilding Jewish life in the shadow of Auschwitz and Treblinka; the repressive communist regime and the great poverty in postwar Poland made emigrating to western democracies an attractive prospect; and the allure of Zionism undoubtedly led many Jews to immigrate to Palestine, later Israel. However, postwar anti-Semitism, whether popular or official, was one of the major factors in reducing Poland's Jewish

community after the war. Many Polish-Jewish emigrants remember this anti-Semitism, sometimes with great resentment. In one famous example, the Polish-born former prime minister of Israel Yitzhak Shamir once publicly said that “Poles imbibe anti-Semitism with their mother’s milk.”<sup>119</sup>

By contrast, the statements of Polish Jews who stayed in Poland tend to range from the balanced to the very positive. For example, when asked about the scale of the aid the people of Warsaw gave to Jews during the war, composer Władysław Szpilman, quoted earlier in this thesis, said in his last interview: “It was very large. Poland is not an anti-Semitic country. Those who say the contrary do not tell the truth and are doing a very bad thing that is hostile to Poland. Remember that taking part in saving Jews was punishable by death. Not everyone was capable of undertaking such a risk. Not everyone is born a hero. I was saved by at least thirty Poles, at least thirty who risked their lives.”<sup>120</sup>

Naturally, Shamir’s statement was offensive and unfair; no ethnic or national group sucks anything with its mother’s milk. People must be judged on an individual level, not by their passport or ethnic background. However, it is difficult to deny that there was widespread anti-Semitism in twentieth century Poland. It is also logical that those Jews who left Poland were often those who were most likely to experience the worst of it and most likely to leave. Yet this perspective of an emigrant slightly obscures the full picture of Polish-Jewish relations, which also includes the largely positive experiences with non-Jewish Poles of Władysław Szpilman or most of my narrators. Although the great majority of Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust left Poland, a significant minority stayed, and only after 1989 did it become clear that the size of

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<sup>119</sup> As quoted in: Anshel Pfeffer, “Shamir Was Right about One Thing,” *Ha’aretz*, September 30, 2013, <https://archive.is/20130930154348/http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/shamir-was-right-about-one-thing.premium-1.449177> (accessed April 15, 2018).

<sup>120</sup> „Człowiek musiał być silny”.

that minority was greater than anyone had previously thought. As I showed in a previous chapter, right after the war the rate of Jewish emigration was much lower in Poland than in neighboring Slovakia, for example. Polish-Jewish relations in the twentieth century are a complex topic that frequently leads to emotional polemics. For an accurate picture, it is advisable to read and listen to the testimonies of and conduct oral history interviews with both those Jews who left Poland and those who stayed, both those who have bitter memories of Polish anti-Semitism and those who are forever indebted to Poles for saving their lives.

These are some tentative conclusions that can and should be tested on a larger sample. An additional hypothesis that is worth testing is Katarzyna Meloch's suggestion that those Polish Jews who received aid from non-Jewish Poles during the Holocaust were more likely to stay after 1945-1946 and 1967-1968. Three, possibly four, of my five narrators did receive aid from Polish Gentiles during the war, although more interviews with Jewish Holocaust survivors who stayed in Poland are needed to establish such a correlation. Likewise, the postwar experiences of Alfreda Zawada, a member of Poland's working class, with anti-Semitism, which are very different from those of my other four narrators, all members of the intelligentsia, indicate a need for more working class narrators in a larger sample size to see if there is a link between class and Polish-Jewish relations.

All five of my narrators have strong links to Poland's Jewish community, even if they are not necessarily religious in nature. Alfreda Zawada and Zofia Radzikowska are among the most active members of JCC Krakow, showing up there almost daily. Joanna Sobolewska is the president of the Association of Children of the Holocaust, of which Katarzyna Meloch is an active member, having co-edited several books published by the association. Meanwhile, Jan

Woleński is one of the co-founders of the reactivated Polish branch of B'nai B'rith and has published numerous articles on Jewish affairs in the Polish press.

Their experiences are probably much different than those of Poles of Jewish origin without close ties, or any ties, to the Jewish community. Undoubtedly, there are many such people in Poland; they might even constitute the majority of Jews living in Poland. Between 1968 and 1989 they certainly constituted the great majority of Polish Jewry, as evidenced by the jump in the number of self-identifying Jews in post-communist Poland. In fact, most of my narrators had absolutely no links to the Jewish community before 1989. Did Poles of Jewish origin who have a weak identification with Judaism experience anti-Semitism after the war? How did they survive the Holocaust? Did they ever consider emigrating, especially during the waves of Jewish emigration in 1945-1946 and 1967-1968? These are some questions worth asking them.

In addition to some further directions for research in the field of Polish-Jewish studies, my work also has some more universal implications for scholars dealing with such topics as emigration and identity. In our interview, Zofia Radzikowska said that in addition to not feeling threatened in 1968, she also felt a great cultural and sentimental attachment to Poland and could not imagine leaving. Likewise, Joanna Sobolewska, who also was unaffected by the purge in 1968, was discouraged from leaving by the difficult prospects of the life of an immigrant. These statements help us to understand more broadly why some people choose to stay in a country even amidst political repression or popular hostility.

The reemergence of Poland's Jewish community after 1989, even if the size of that community is small compared to its past glory, and the coming to the surface of thousands of Poles with their Jewishness after the collapse of the communist regime, is one of the most

unexpected and inspiring developments in recent Polish-Jewish history. In writing my thesis, I have spoken to a mere handful of them. However, much of what they said challenged many of my assumptions and led me in surprising directions. For example, having read about the Krakow pogrom of 1945, I was greatly surprised to learn from Jan Woleński and Zofia Radzikowska that postwar Krakow was a city relatively free of anti-Semitism. Likewise, the great difference in postwar experiences of anti-Semitism between working class and intellectual narrators indicates a possible link between class and Polish-Jewish relations in the postwar era that is worth studying in greater detail. Some of what my narrators said could force the revision of some seemingly axiomatic truths related to the history of the Holocaust, the history of postwar Poland, and interethnic relations in Poland. I hope that I have successfully mapped out some possible suggestions for future research for scholars in the expanding field of Polish-Jewish studies, including myself.

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