

UNWANTED SURVIVORS

This can only be imagined, because without imagination, there is no empathy.

A gloomy, yet spring day in a gloomy place, the headquarters of the Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego [Public Security Office on ul. Śląska. A twenty-year-old officer is completing an interrogation report with a pre-war fountain pen.

Name: "M., Maria M".

Place and date of birth: "Warsaw, 1925".

They were around the same age, although the officer thought to himself that the suspect looked at least ten years older. He kept that observation to himself.

Place of residence: "I am registered in Katowice, at the Conservatory building."

Since when have you been living with Edmund Ź. in Częstochowa? "From 1942, in Częstochowa since 1944."

What did you do during the occupation? "What everyone did, I traded lard, meat, cheese."

Did you collaborate with the Germans? "No."

The interrogation, which took place on 25th April 1945, ended there. The officer informed the suspect of the decision to hold her in temporary detention. In a dismissive tone, he added that she could file a complaint if she wished. The woman was escorted out. There was no need to rush. The knowledge, passed on by the experienced "security officers", indicated that, before the next interrogation, the suspect should be broken. Let her sit, let her confront her own fear, let her try to guess what we have on her. The next interrogation was scheduled for 2nd May.

The suspect was brought from the detention centre in Zawodzie. Routine questions again – name, date and place of birth, place of residence, etc. Then the officer put down his pen and, in a less formal tone, suggested, "Well then, tell us about Edmund Ź. Since when did you know him, what connected you..." The story was disjointed. Sentences began and stopped abruptly. The statements seemed to lack emotion.

"I met him in 1942. I was in the ghetto, there was the extermination. I managed to survive. I hid, it was difficult. From April 1943, I lived with Edmund. I helped him with his business, cleaned the shop and the apartment. We were lovers. I had a child with him, but it died after the birth."

"Did you know that Edmund Ź. collaborated with the Germans?"

"No. He never involved me in his affairs. I was not his wife, just his servant and lover. The conditions forced me to, as a Jew. I wanted to survive."

The suspect signed the completed minute with a trembling hand. She was taken back to Zawodzie. By the decision of the head of the Security Service, the case was closed, and the interrogation minutes were archived. They might prove useful in the future. Experienced "security officers" taught that possessing information means power.

On 8th May 1945, a day celebrated as "Victory Day" in some countries, the Jew Maria M. was released from the detention centre in Zawodzie. She had regained her freedom¹. She became one of the survivors, trying to rebuild the normality of her life amongst the ruins and graves of her loved ones. She had to forget, to erase twenty years of her life.

She was 14 years old when the war destroyed normality. As she matured, she learned that she was not an ordinary human being, but a creature of a lower kind. What did archaic moral commandments mean when survival was the only thing that mattered? She was just like an animal trying to survive, chased down by hunters in winter. Escape the bullet, find food, survive another night... After all of this, the hardest question was, "For what? Is life really worth surviving at any cost?"

Those who fell became heroes. The dead were surrounded by respectful remembrance. The survivor was suspicious. They were supposed to have died, but they lived, and there was no justice in that. The most venomous form of antisemitism did not appear in open forms. It was felt in the words of "folk wisdom", spoken with an air of experts on the subject, "If Hitler killed six million Jews, he must have had a reason for it." Similarly cruel was another assumption, "Since she survived, there must have been some reason for it."

Reading the minutes from Maria M.'s interrogation, we can, and even must, use our imagination. We do not know where or with whom she sat in the cell. Maybe there were *Volksdeutsche* women, maybe a thief or a prostitute with pre-war experience, maybe a courier supporting the "Polish fascists", maybe a peasant woman defending her property and her daughter with a picket fence against the greed of the people's militia.

We know, or should know, that in front of such an audience, Maria M. had to conceal who she was and what charges were laid against her. A Jew, collaborating with the Germans, was the "morally" worst thing. Yet, at the same time, it justified "our" sins. "We" suffered under terror. "We" tried to live as humans under that terror, defending our own freedom. "Our" loved ones died in the uprising.

Edmund Ż. was not fighting. He was doing what most of his compatriots were - engaging in illegal trade, made possible by corrupting the German occupiers. But no one demanded more from him. The case was different for the Jewish woman - instead of dying with dignity, she "survived for some reason".

The survivors were not greeted with flowers. After all, who was supposed to do that, since their families, loved ones and friends had been exterminated? Survivors did not return to their own homes, because they no longer existed. They found rubble or new occupants. They did not express gratitude or enthusiasm for the new government. Most often, those who ruled Poland were indifferent to them because, by losing their loved ones, losing entire neighbourhood communities, they had lost the basic connections which had tied them to the country, called the "Fatherland".

Concerned, the authorities reported about the problems regarding the survivors. An important issue was counting them, because without recording names and places of residence, it was impossible to plan for provisioning, accommodation and employment.

On 22nd January 1945, the new authorities, operating in the pre-war town hall, issued certificates to Józef Goldberg, residing at ul. Garibaldi 26, Salomon Weissner, residing at al. NMP 16 and Abram

¹ The matter is described in record of IPN No. 023/1039.

Sułkowski, residing ul. Śląska 12, authorising them to create a census of the Jewish population for provisioning purposes. The chosen three were pre-war Częstochowa resident. Unfortunately, they belonged to the minority among the survivors, who had come to our city. In 1939, there were 28,486 Jews (of Jewish nationality or faith) registered in Częstochowa. But by 1945, only 1,518 people, Jews with pre-war registration, were counted.

The city mayor informed the Kielce Provincial Administration of the situation². Up to 12th January 1945, there were about 5,000 Jews in the HASAG camp. After 12th January, some had been transported westward towards Lublińiec, and a certain group had escaped and had returned to Częstochowa. According to the Town Hall officials' observations, in January, 1,500 people, from the Górny Śląsk labour camps. According to the city mayor, by the end of January 1945, about 6,000 Jews were residing in Częstochowa.

Here, administrative problems arose as a significant portion of them lacked personal identification documents. In the Częstochowa ghetto, registration and the issue of identification cards were conducted until 12th September 1942. On that day, the last civil status act was issued. After that, the ghetto was liquidated and the records were lost. Those who survived, those who were needed for slave labour, were only assigned a number, and names were recorded only for the purposes of camp registration - most of these records did not survive.

Without an ID, to the authorities, a person did not exist. It was impossible to plan for provisioning and housing. Without official confirmation of identity, one could not be employed, attend school or run a business. The Town Hall's Registration Office struggled with this problem until April. Due to necessity, liberal principles were adopted, defining identity based on the individual's declaration.

This liberalism was criticized by the UB (Public Security Bureau), as it was pointed out that this made it easy for former Nazi perpetrators, collaborating *Volksdeutsche* and "Polish fascists" to assume new identities. However, even the UB could not propose a better system for registering the population, especially since the Jews were not unique in this regard. There was a group of 20,000 Warsaw residents, who were expelled from their city after the Uprising, as well as a large influx of people returning from forced labour, concentration camps and prisoner-of-war camps. Assigning the task of conducting the registration, to the selected three pre-war Jews, was a sensible solution to a difficult problem.

It was also informal approval for the re-establishment of the self-governing Jewish Community Council (Gmina). This pre-war gmina had been a religious institution. In this sense, its continuation became the Religious Jewish Association, which was formed in 1944 with the consent of the "Lublin government". A religious gmina, affiliated with the Association, was established in Częstochowa on 25th April 1945. The organisational committee comprised chairman Noe Edelist, with committee members Ch. Landau, Weisser, Izaak Zender, L. Reicher, Dorfgang, Rosezweig, M. Hassenfeld, Koniecpolski, Granek, and Rabbi Elias Wisers³.

On 7th May, the Częstochowa Association appealed to the Town Hall for the allocation of premises, for religious purposes, in the building at ul. Garibaldiego 18 (the site of the former *mikvah*). The previously-existing synagogues - the Old Synagogue on ul. Nadrzeczna and the New Synagogue on ul. Wilsona Street - had been destroyed during the German occupation.

² State Archives in Częstochowa. Collection ZMCz 2/281 Jewish Committee.

³ Ibidem, ZMCz 2/282.

The re-establishment of the religious gmina was not a priority for the new authorities, who had declared the creation of a secular state. A Jewish committee was formed within the State National Council (Krajowa Rada Narodowa - KRN), established by Stalin and led by Adolf Berman. After the creation of the "Lublin government", the KRN was supplemented with representatives of Jewish political parties (Poalej Syjon Left, Ichud, Bund). In the autumn of 1944, a temporary Central Jewish Committee was formed as a platform for cooperating with the emerging political parties and social organizations.

Following the liberation of Polish territories from German occupation, this model was transferred to the level of cities and counties. In Częstochowa, a District Jewish Committee was established and, in August 1945, they were allocated, as their headquarters, a villa at ul. Jasnogórska 36. In January 1946, the District Jewish Committee (OKŻ) was responsible for 1,417 people and, by June 1946, this number had risen to 2,167.

This number did not correspond with that of Jewish survivors. It was a time of migration. Survivors from the HASAG camp were returning to their cities and those released from German concentration camps were arriving. There was also "repatriation" from territories occupied by the USSR - in May 1946, 408 people arrived from the east and, in June, 561 "Jewish repatriates".

Not all survivors wanted to engage in public life. Some considered it safer to declare themselves as Poles, while others felt no connection to either Jewish religion or nationality. The OKŻ had a material argument, as it distributed aid received from American and Western European donations for Holocaust victims through its structures.

Jews were returning to cities and Częstochowa, in this respect, differed from the villages in the surrounding rural districts. In the villages of the Częstochowa county, only eight Jewish families returned to their homes, including four in the Grabówka community and three in the Lipie community. This inability to return to the villages, as well as the isolation of Jewish community life in Częstochowa - relying on their own Jewish welfare institutions, schools and cultural events - resulted from a wall of indifference, and even hostility, towards the survivors. Or perhaps it stemmed from the perception of such antisemitic sentiments that were emerging in Polish communities.

To understand this, one must again supplement facts with imagination. Already, during World War I, psychiatrists noticed the pathological phenomena related to battlefield stress. This topic was researched and is now considered part of the cost of war violence. Studies, though limited, were also conducted on the psyche of former concentration camp prisoners. In 1945, the Polish Psychological Society tried to tackle the problem of the stress effects caused by the occupation terror - about 3,000 young people, aged 15-25, were studied, each of whom had lost someone close during the war. However, neither in Poland nor in other countries were studies conducted on the effects of stress on Jewish survivors, who had lost all their loved ones.

Surviving the Holocaust is like withstanding several years in trenches under constant enemy artillery fire - but even worse, because in the trenches, you know where the enemy is, you can shelter from them and your comrades will not shoot you in the back. A hunted animal has no safe hiding place. A hunted animal cannot trust anyone, even fearing betrayal from those closest to them. Are we able to see the world through the eyes of a hunted animal? The Częstochowa ghetto had no wall. It was not difficult to escape from. But then what? The fear and sense of helplessness were deepened by the information - true or false - that reached them.

Ruta Lewandowska was detained and handed over to the Germans by Polish residents of Wyczerpy. She was sentenced to be executed. Four residents of the ghetto, who had been buying food in Mstów, were executed in 1942 by the Polish community. The 24-year-old Lejb Gellert's explanation, that he wanted to get bread for his two-year-old child, was not accepted. There were stories of a group of young people, who escaped into the forests near Koniecpol and were shot by a forest unit of "Polish fascists". Girls were raped and stripped of all their clothes in a forest near Żarki. The fear of the hostility of Polish neighbours was a bigger wall than the border of the ghetto. Almost every survivor, even when this became possible thanks to Polish help, carried the memory of the real, murderous manifestations of local antisemitism. Those, who hid Jews, were more afraid of their neighbours than of the "remote" German gendarmes.

This was the way that the world looked, because war and terror do not build virtue, but rather they demoralise. When people are killed *en masse*, the death of an individual loses its significance. Survival, saving one's own family, became the value for both Poles and Jews. In this "strategy", Jewish fugitives from the ghetto represented a threat to the Poles. So as to survive, Jewish refugees had to steal food, and they were seen by rural communities as harmful robbers. Those hiding Jews risked not only their own families, but the entire village community and, in the eyes of their neighbours, they were a source of danger.

Hiding Jews also had a material dimension, as the prevailing poverty required calculating the costs of their upkeep and food. There were situations where this was approached in a "transactional" manner. An experienced smuggler, from the border region near Przystajnia, recounted how the best business was smuggling food from territories, annexed by the Reich, and selling it to the residents of the ghetto - for a loaf of bread, one could bargain for a gold ring.

A Jewish woman, hiding in Częstochowa, working in trade like Maria M., shared a story about a train to Kielce filled with "smugglers". There was homemade alcohol, cheerful songs, antisemitic jokes, and stories treating Jews as "dishonest competitors", because, according to these tales, the prices of meat, bought from peasants, were inflated because of them.

The "transactional" nature also characterised the case of the murder of Abraham Kapłan which, after the war, became the subject of a court trial. Kapłan, who had been hiding in Boronów from 1943, paid for his stay by handing over 2,000 kg. of celluloid. After a year, the people organising his hiding, concluded that their financial resources had run out. Kapłan was staying with the P. family - poor farmers. When P. learned that he could no longer count on money, he was faced with a "diabolical" dilemma. He could no longer hide Kapłan, because he did not even have enough bread to feed his own children. But he could not throw him out and tell him to go elsewhere to find another hiding place either. If Kapłan was caught by the Germans, he could give away those hiding him. In order to protect his own family, P. murdered Kapłan, beat him to death with a club and buried him in the basement⁴.

This was how the world looked, destroyed by war. Antisemitism existed even before the war, not only in Częstochowa, but also in Kłobuck, Przystajnia and Truskolasy, where antisemitic pogroms and riots occurred. During the occupation, it was turbocharged. The "gadzinowy" (propaganda) newspaper, but still read by Częstochowians, *Kurier Częstochowski*, spread venom, dehumanising Jews. Street posters and museum exhibitions proclaimed that Jews, like rats, were carriers of typhus. This incitement was effective. Polish hooligans participated in the burning, demolition and looting

⁴ Jarosław Kapsa, *Częstochowa. Inne opowieści*, Częstochowskie Stowarzyszenie REGION, Częstochowa 2008, p. 90-92.

of the New Synagogue on 25th December 1939. The "law-abiding" Germans sentenced one person to death for this act, while eight Poles were sent to a concentration camp⁵.

The fear of the survivors towards the Polish environment was understandable. At the same time, it was fuelled and exploited by politicians, who had come to power in the "new Poland". In the Central Jewish Committee (CKŻ), two action strategies prevailed. The first, associated with the traditions of the Zionist movement, argued that, given the hostility of the Polish environment, there was no possibility of rebuilding life "on cemeteries". The goal of the actions was to find the survivors and lead them to the Promised Land, to Israel. The second, which led to the creation of a Jewish faction in the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) and later, in the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), created an image of Polish nationalism - only communists were the force protecting survivors from the Polish "darkness". It is difficult to argue with historical reality.

In 1946, the Promised Land did not yet exist. There was no state of Israel and the "enlightened" and democratic government of Great Britain, in the name of "realpolitik" in the Middle East, blocked the influx of Jews into Palestine by any means, including criminal methods. Zionist parties, needing fighters, recruited survivors, who were willing to fight for their state by force. There were not many such people in Poland after the horror of violence. For the survivors, the dream of "peace and quiet", of safety in their own home, was more important than dreaming of the Promised Land. As for the communists...

To become a communist, one had to renounce their nationality and religion. "Jewish communism" is a construct of nationalist antisemitism. The Jewish society, due to its historical experience, became extremely capitalist and liberal. The dream of the majority was to run their own business, to afford their own home, workshop, sewing machine or anvil. Most were religious, seeing faith and ritual as an essential part of their identity. So, how could an ideology that mocked religion, was hostile to private entrepreneurship and justified the theft of private property attract them?

Regardless of the feelings of the "silent majority" of survivors, the two doctrines described above dominated the Jewish committees. The material assistance provided by the Central Jewish Committee (OKŻ) was controlled by the Zionists. They created and maintained charitable kitchens, nurseries and kindergartens for children, care for the sick and elderly, as well as camps and scout troops for the youth - while also ensuring the isolation of the Jewish community from the Polish environment.

In Częstochowa, there were no influential Zionist activists. The environment became subject to external interference, directed from Łódź and Warsaw, deliberately inflaming isolationist sentiments. Isolationism was also fuelled by the local Polish Workers' Party (PPR), spreading fear of the "Polish fascists" and "antisemites" from the National Armed Forces (NSZ). In propaganda, every case of a crime committed against Jews was consciously linked to the national underground in the region. Left-wing "Bund" agitators attributed the murder and robbery in a train near Koniecpol to the NSZ⁶. In reality, it was a crime committed by a drunken officer of the Polish People's Army (LWP).

The case of the murder of Jewish residents of Przedbórz, a flagship accusation attributed to the NSZ unit "Żbik" (W. Kołaciński), was also ambiguous. On the night of 27th-28th May 1945, soldiers

⁵ Stanisław Rybicki, *Pod znakiem Iwa i kruka. Fragmenty wspomnień z lat okupacji*, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warsaw 1990, p. 54.

⁶ This is the version presented by M. Edelman in conversation with Hanną Kral. *Zdążyć przed panem Bogiem*, Warsaw 1977.

associated with the "Żbik" unit attacked, robbed and carted, to the forest, nine Jewish people, almost all of them survivors from this town. In the forest near Przedbórz, they were murdered. In the 1940s, simply belonging to the "Żbik" unit could result in the death penalty or long prison sentences. No one was convicted for the crimes in Przedbórz⁷. The main perpetrators were a former UB officer and a local militia officer, who were aided by local UB officers and, after the crime, were protected as "informants".

The impunity of the perpetrators of the Przedbórz massacre was not exceptional, when we look at the prosecution of those responsible for the murders of Jews during the occupation. In theory, the legal regulations, issued by the "Lublin government", were strict. Collaboration carried the death penalty, resulting in the persecution of civilians. Similarly, the criminal laws of the Underground State imposed the death penalty on "szmalcowniki" (blackmailers). The limitations associated with the occupation's terror can explain the low effectiveness of the Underground State's enforcement of punishments. However, after the war, the prosecution of "szmalcowniki" was similarly limited. Nearly 50% of cases brought against those accused of assisting in the genocide of Jews ended in the acquittal of the perpetrators⁸.

Neighbours testified about the perpetrator of the Przedbórz massacre, a former UB officer, stating that, during the war, he robbed and handed over "four Jews, who were staying in Biały Ług", to the Germans. "His wife was a bandit. They lived in the countryside. When the Germans came, she would invite them for tea, shoot them, and throw them into the well. She was a communist, and so was he. After the war..."⁹.

It was easy to direct accusations of antisemitism. The "national" conspiracy press, both during the occupation and in the post-war period, was overflowing with pre-war anti-Jewish content. The mentality of the soldiers, recruited from the peasant masses, reflected the mindset of the perpetrators of the pogrom in Przytyk. During and after the war, there were also crimes motivated by antisemitism. However, nothing was clear-cut or black-and-white. It was not only Julian Tuwim who wrote to Bierut asking for clemency for the "żbikowiec" [a member of the *Żbik*, a code name for a Polish Home Army secret police unit] who, during World War II, had saved the poet's mother. In cases handled by military courts against soldiers of the anti-communist resistance, similar requests from Jewish people have been preserved, stating that the accused had helped them during the Nazi terror.

The communist authorities wanted to present themselves as the power of the people, working for the people. And the people were what they were, soaked in traditional antisemitism, demoralised by the war atmosphere of disregarding human life. Referring to the words of Czesław Miłosz, the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) became the heir to the National Radical Camp (ONR), because history "runs from this changing, on what stones it rolls".

In the name of "people's justice", a revolution in property matters was introduced. Property, belonging to people of German nationality, was confiscated, even if it had been legally owned by

⁷ Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Terror w Przedborzu, noc z 26/27 maja 1945*, [www.academia.edu/40117272](http://www.academia.edu/40117272/Terror_w_Przedborzu_noc_z_26_27_maja_1945) › *Terror_w_Przedborzu_noc_z_26_27_maja_1945*, lecture 10/11/2024.

⁸ Andrew Kornbluth, „*Jest wielu Kainów pośród nas*”. *Polski wymiar sprawiedliwości a Zagłada, 1944–1956*, „Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały” 2013, No. 9, pp. 157-172.

⁹ Wojciech Zawadzki, „*Pogrom*”, „*terror*”, czyli *mord*. Komentarz do artykułu Joanny Tokarskiej-Bakir „*Terror w Przedborzu, noc z 27/28 maja 1945*”, „Przedborski Słownik Biograficzny”, <https://psbprzedborz.pl/pogrom-terror-czyli-mord/>, lecture 10/11/202

them before the war. Contrary to the provisions of the land reform decree, houses and property of dispossessed landowners were taken. In violation of the Lublin Manifesto, not only were large factories nationalised, but also small businesses.

The property of victims of Nazi terror, including Jewish property, was also not protected. In Częstochowa, the intentions of the “people's government” collided with pre-war bureaucratic and judicial tradition. In Municipal Court records, documentation remains regarding cases related to the restitution of property.¹⁰ These cases were usually handled quickly and routinely - an application to the town hall in March 1945, followed by the case being sent to court.

An application by Alfred Abram Kromołowski to the District Starost, regarding the return of the property at ul. Nadrzeczna 4, owned by Jakub Kromołowski's father, with heirs Henryk and Abram, was reviewed by the War Compensation Commission and sent to the District Court. The ruling from 21st April 1945 was that the property should be returned. Regarding an application to restore the property of Moszka Wolman at ul. Kozia 13, on 9th April 1945, the District Court ruled to restore the property. There as a similar ruling from April 1945 regarding the return of Załmie Glikson's property at ul. Narutowicza 6 and, on 24th April 1945, to return Dawid Zylberg's hosiery factory at ul. Garibaldiiego 7/9 - the factory had been taken over by the Germans in 1940.

After obtaining the ruling, Zylberg could not enforce it due to the resistance of the administration of the city mayor, Jan Wolański (a communist of Jewish descent). After overcoming the opposition, he only held the property for only a year. In 1947, the factory was again nationalised. Similarly, the heir of Grosman could not recover his button factory. Under pressure from trade unions, the authorities “expropriated” the manufacturer.

The routine of the court sometimes clashed with a lack of empathy towards the survivors. An example of this was the prolonged case concerning the return of a piano to Rojza Gliksman. Gliksman, forced to hide during the occupation, entrusted her apartment at ul. Dąbrowskiego, along with its furnishings, to the K. couple for safekeeping. He did not have to sell his property - he had savings and jewellery, which allowed him to secure material support for hiding his family.

Gliksman's daughter did not file for the return of the apartment and furniture, not even the valuable mirror and cupboard. She only wanted to recover the piano, as the instrument reminded her of the good times of family happiness. However, the K. family claimed that the piano belonged to them, presenting witnesses, who testified that Gliksman had sold it to them for 3,000 zł. The District Court ruling was to return the piano to Rojza Gliksman and, after an appeal, this decision was upheld by the appellate court.

The argument that “we deserve it” because “we helped them survive” appeared in many disputes over liquid assets. It was not acknowledged that, for the survivors, sentimental value was more important than material value - a piano, a book, a painting or an ordinary trinket were the only symbols restoring the memory of a murdered father, mother, sister...

The restoration of properties concerned the city. The situation was more difficult in the countryside. The fear of neighbourly antisemitism meant that survivors did not return. Local authorities treated Jewish properties as abandoned property and sold them to new owners. In Olsztyn, this included:

¹⁰ State Archive in Częstochowa, collection Z 617 – Częstochowa Municipal Court.

- a house, on the market square, belonging to Judka Koziwoda, transferred to the Municipal Cooperative in 1946;
- a house on ul. Kościelna, owned by Załma Brocławska;
- a house at Rynek 5, owned by Gołda Ekstein - also transferred to the cooperative
- private individuals bought the house of Zełma Braclawska at Rynek 10, the house of Wajskop on ul. Żwirki and ul. Wigury Street,
- the house of Horowitz on the same street, and
- the house of Hofniger on ul. Sienkiewicza¹¹.

This was not just a change of ownership, but also an erasure of traces left by the pre-war Jewish inhabitants. Today, in Olsztyn, it is impossible to find the site of the Jewish cemetery. It is also difficult to understand who built the houses that adorn the Rynek of this tourist centre.

The real policy of the new communist government was in direct contradiction to the dreams of most survivors. At the same time, through social engineering efforts, a belief was created that only the communists were able to protect Jews from Polish antisemitism. This type of propaganda overlapped with the existing stereotype, in Polish society, of the "Jewish communism" (żydokomuna). Images of Jews in the UB (Security Office), Jews leading the PPR (Polish Workers' Party) and Jews occupying leadership positions in state institutions appeared in publications of the "underground" anti-communist resistance. These ideas were the subject of discussions and gossip. They were so strong that, as evidenced by the settlement speeches in 1956, even members of the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) and UB officers believed in them.

Contemporary historical studies also point to a significant proportion of Jews holding high positions in courts, the prosecutor's office and especially in the UB, compared to their percentage in the population. However, in Częstochowa, this thesis about "Jewish communism" had weak support. In the judiciary, an example of such a "Jewish communist" could have been Arnold Geisler¹². He was a judge with pre-war experience, from a family of glassworks owners, and had been saved by the Jastrzębski family, who were involved with the AK (Home Army) and NSZ (National Armed Forces). After the war, he returned to work in the court and, by the late 1940s, became the president of the Criminal Division. Memories of Judge Geisler say that he consciously excluded himself from political cases. For this reason, he was forced to resign from leading the division and later retired.

The Częstochowa PUBP and MUBP established initiative groups sent from the Lublin region, none of its members being Jewish. The heads of the offices were Poles born in the borderlands (Władysław Działosz, Wincenty Podlubny). In the 1940s, there was not a single high-ranking Częstochowa "security officer", who identified as being Jewish. The stereotype of the "Jewish-communist", persecuting Polish patriots, does not have a basis in our facts.

However, there was visible involvement of the Jewish community in strengthening communist power - especially when the authorities required it (the 1946 referendum, the 1947 elections). The degree of involvement varied, depending upon the attitude of individuals.

The most active in organising the public life of Częstochowa Jews were the couple Jadwiga and Jerzy Brenner. They treated ritual gestures towards the authorities as a forced duty. Jadwiga ran an orphanage and occasionally organised there "evening gatherings" to promote the new government.

¹¹ State Archies in Częstochowa, collection PPRN 62/1592

¹² Bogdan Jastrzębski, *Opowieści rodzinne*, Wydawnictwo Dom Książki, Częstochowa 2002, p. 32.

Similar propaganda events had to be occasionally organised by Brenner within the OKŻ, who ensured the participation of representatives, not only from the authorities, but also from Soviet troops at ceremonies commemorating war victims, funerals of exhumed bodies, the placing of memorials at execution sites, etc. These were specific services that allowed for gaining material opportunities to assist the survivors.

The couple, Dorota and Marian Hassenfeld¹³, did not engage in the activities of the OKŻ. Both identified with Polishness and had been part of the assimilated intelligentsia before the war. Dorota, a volunteer nurse from the Polish-Bolshevik war, a graduate of the Faculty of Law at the University of Warsaw, had operated a law office in Częstochowa, with her husband, since 1934. She was involved in left-wing activities, defended political prisoners and sympathised with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). During the occupation in 1941, she had escaped from the ghetto, hid in Warsaw, serving as a nurse in the Warsaw Uprising.

Her husband, Marian, also a graduate of the University of Warsaw, before the war, specialised as a counsellor working for businesses and associations. He was vice-president of *Towarzystwo Dobroczynności dla Żydów* (Charity Society for Jews) and was the initiator of building a Jewish high school. Together with his wife, he hid in Warsaw, working with the *Rada Opieki nad Żydami* (Jewish Care Council).

In February 1945, the couple returned to Częstochowa and opened a law office. Both handled cases in the District Courts relating to the restitution of property to Jewish survivors. Marian became involved in the activities of the *Izba Przemysłowo-Handlowa* (Chamber of Commerce and Industry) and, together with Juliusz Braun, was an initiator of founding the *Wyższa Szkoła Handlowa* (Higher School of Commerce). He became a member of the Industrial Commission at the Municipal National Council.

At the same time, working, among others, with Jan Pietrzykowski, he co-founded the District Commission for Investigating Nazi Crimes. Dorota focused her social involvement on defending children and women. She co-founded the *Towarzystwo Pomocy Dzieciom* (Children's Aid Society) Society for the Assistance of Children, as well as the *Liga Kobiet* (Women's League). In 1953, she was elected to the Municipal National Council (MRN), where she chaired the social aid committee.

The involvement of Leon Bojm¹⁴, also a graduate of the Faculty of Law at the University of Warsaw, had a different character. He had become involved in communist activities before the war, when he was practising as a lawyer in Kowel. Struck off the list of lawyers for his communist affiliation, he re-applied and completed pedagogical studies in Lwów. During the Soviet occupation in 1940, he worked in that city as a Russian language teacher. After the Germans entered in 1941, he went to Częstochowa "on Polish papers". He worked in HASAG, engaged in secret teaching and was active with a communist organization.

After the war, in February 1945, he was appointed to the Municipal National Council (MRN) as a representative of the Jewish community. On behalf of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR), he supervised the organisation of the District Jewish Committee and promoted the PPR's political line of

¹³ Adam Kasperkiewicz, *Hassenfeld Dorota* [biogram], *Hassenfeld Marian* [biogram], [in:] *Adwokaci regionu częstochowskiego. Słownik biograficzny*, ed. A. Kasperkiewicz, J. Sętowski, Wydawnictwo Muzeum Częstochowskiego, Częstochowa 2014, pp. 93–97.

¹⁴ Wiesław Paszkowski, *Bojm Leon* [biography], [in:] *Adwokaci...*, pp. 50–51.

"productivisation" of Jews. He opened a law practice and also participated in cases relating to the restitution of property to survivors.

In addition to his legal work, he became involved in party activities and, from 1945, was a member of the PPR's City Committee. Following the formation of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), he was considered one of the most influential members of the City Committee and also a Stalinist dogmatist. In 1956, during the period of political reckoning, he was accused of not only of dogmatism, but also of corruption. Removed from power and publicly discredited through criticism, he decided to emigrate to Israel.

Everyone chooses their own path in life and everyone is responsible for it. There was no single model of Jewish involvement in supporting the new authorities. There were different attitudes and different motivations. It was also evident, among the Brenners and the Hassenfelds, that they believed in the immutability of historical fate and, thus, only by cooperating with the new government could one ensure the realisation of matters important for the general public - especially the protection of children, who had survived the horrors of the war.

There was also fear fuelled by, yet feeding off, the post-war atmosphere. Antisemitism and post-war demoralisation were palpable. The latter deprived people of a sense of security. Robbery attacks were part of daily life, with several fatalities recorded each week. The banality of evil revealed itself on the ruined, unlit streets, where thugs with weapons in hand "asked" for watches. This was how the survivor Jakub Jakubowicz met his death, shot on ul. Wilsona by a youth from Kielce.

His death, although accidental, became part of the "offensive of fear", which emerged after the June 1946 referendum. It brought a terrible harvest, known as the "Kielce pogrom". It is difficult to prove whether the events in Kielce were a deliberate provocation, who was behind them or who benefitted from them. The perpetrators are responsible - murder cannot be defended by theories of provocation. However, the facts confirm the "conspiracy theory". Attempts to incite anti-Jewish pogroms occurred not only in Kielce, and they referred to a similar absurd rumour, dating back to the Middle Ages, about ritual murder committed on children. The pogrom in Kielce took place on 4th July¹⁵.

In Częstochowa, the press reported that, on 14th July, a drunk man in Raków was offering children candies. The militia detained him, fearing he was a sexual deviant. A crowd surrounded the detainee, asking if he was Jewish and if he had intended to abduct a child to turn into matzah. The next day, on 15th July, at around 8:00 p.m., a crowd, estimated by the press at 1,000 people, gathered in Zawodzie. To calm the situation, patrols from the 1st and 3rd police stations were sent. The cause of the incident was a rumour that a Jew had tried to abduct a child to take to the quarries. The crowd was shouting slogans like "kill the Jews".

The Jewish suspect turned out to be an ethnic Pole and, in the process, another Polish woman with a Semitic appearance was beaten. On 19th July, Genowefa J., residing on ul. Berka Joselewicza, reported to the police station the disappearance of her eleven-year-old son, Edward. The son returned home in the morning, saying that he had been abducted by Jews and locked in the basement of the building at ul. Garibaldiego 28. Genowefa J. spread this information in the street and, once again, a bloodthirsty crowd gathered, demanding the execution of the "murderers of Christian children".

¹⁵ The Częstochowa event is described in: J. Kapsa, *Częstochowa. Inne opowieści*, pp. 113–114.

Once again, the intervention of the Civil Militia (MO) proved effective. The interrogated boy admitted that some unknown men gave him money, in exchange for which he was supposed to spread the story that he had been kidnapped by Jews.

Especially this last piece of information points to an attempt at deliberate provocation. Fortunately for our city, the effectiveness was shown not only by the militia. Following the Kielce pogrom, Bishop Kubina made public appeals, including one signed jointly with the city's mayor, condemning the pogrom and highlighting the criminal nature of spreading rumours about ritual murders. With this appeal, the Bishop of Częstochowa earned our lasting gratitude. He saved the honour of our city¹⁶.

Survivors accepted, with gratitude, Bishop Kubina's stance. But the events on the streets were a fact and, even if there were provocateurs, there were also people ready to be provoked. This was no longer fear fuelled by communist propaganda, based on unverifiable information. This was the sight of a thousand people shouting "kill the Jews" and ready to act on it.

Within a month of the Kielce pogrom, sixty Jewish families had left Częstochowa. There was also a noticeable increase in transactions involving the sale of Jewish properties. The wave of departures lasted until 1947. By 1949, only 649 people, identifying as Jewish origin or religion, remained in Częstochowa¹⁷. Worse still, most of them isolated themselves in the "ghetto" of their own community, avoiding involvement in the life of the city.

After 1946, there was a process of erasing the memory of the Jews of Częstochowa from the collective consciousness. When recalling the war period, the trauma and terror directed at Polish families were acknowledged. Monuments were erected to Polish victims, naming those murdered in places such as the Wieluński Market, Rędziny, Przyrów and other execution sites. Jewish victims were only represented by numbers, occasionally presented as a backdrop to Polish memory.

Traces of the Częstochowa, Koniecpol, Kłobuck, Krzepice and Żarki ghettos were erased. Execution sites were unmarked. There was no attempt to show empathy for the victims, to recall their names, faces or dreams. Survivors became inconvenient witnesses. They survived, though they were meant to die, and now they want to bring forth the truth that had been pushed out of our consciousness. Therefore, they were met with the slogan "Zionists to Siam"¹⁸, which was implemented in 1968.

¹⁶ Bishop Kubin's speeches are published in, among others, *Biskup Teodor Kubina (1880-1951). Listy pasterskie – orędzia – odezwy*, ed. M. Duda, Częstochowa 2023.

¹⁷ Andrzej Szczypka, *Żydzi w pierwszych latach po II wojnie w regionie częstochowskim*, https://www.czystochowajews.org/wp-content/uploads/szczypka_pol.pdf, accessed 10/11/2024.

¹⁸ The official name of the Kingdom of Thailand until 11th May 1949. During the antisemitic campaign of March 1968, banners with the slogan "Zionists, go back to Siam" were used during workplace assemblies and on other official occasions. This was not intended to be a witty play on words - people using such slogans did not understand the difference between Siam (Thailand) and Zion (the Promised Land).