Borderlands of Discourse: Polish Writing on Rescue Activities Related to Jews during WWII, 1945-2011

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I dedicate this work to the memory of those
Who, with the help of their Neighbors, met a squalid Death
And so could not dignify
The white Pages of the Nation’s History
ABSTRACT

Borderlands of Discourse: Polish Writing on Rescue Activities Related to Jews during WWII, 1945-2011

A thesis presented to the Department of History

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
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This thesis examines the dominant approaches taken by historians to the subject of Polish rescue activities related to Jews during the Second World War. I ask how the “negative” spectrum of behavior toward Jews during the war (blackmail, denunciation, and murder) was displaced by the “positive” spectrum of successful rescue activities driven by noble intentions. This study is an in-depth examination of various themes, motifs, stylizations, and omissions of the Polish historiography from 1945-2011. I examine popular historical writing and contrast it with contradictory information found in personal documents of the wartime period (testimonies, memoirs, studies). As part of the continuum of these patterns, I also discuss artistic representations found in feature films. I conclude that these approaches functioned to deflect negative phenomena in order to sustain a narrative of Polish behavior that reflected positively on Polish-Jewish relations during and after the war. Thus, the historiography was part of a larger pattern to rehabilitate “the good name of Poland” in relation to the Holocaust.
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We, Polish Jews, growing wild in forests, feeding our terrified children on roots and grass; we crawling, crouching, bedraggled and unkempt, armed with an antique shotgun obtained by some miraculous feat of begging and bribing.

– Julian Tuwim, *We Polish Jews*

The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which it is very hard to eradicate.

– E.H. Carr, *What is History?*
I. Introduction

General Introduction

In his magisterial study of postwar Europe, the late Tony Judt wrote that recognition of the Holocaust is “contemporary Europe’s entry ticket” to the modern world.\(^1\) Since the collapse of Soviet Communism, the question of the Holocaust’s “bystanders” has taken on new proportions as European societies grapple for a changing identity. In particular, Europe’s rescuers of Jews, the “Righteous among Nations,” have played an integral role in this process. In post-Communist countries, the subject of the rescue of Jews has begun to take on political and ideological significance. The historian Joanna B. Michlic writes how this growing interest “takes on a universal and transnational form in which the rescuers serve as models for contemporary young Europeans,” as well as on local form.\(^2\) In the case of contemporary Poland, she sees rescue as a complicated historiographical process treated in various ways: 1) as part of “the new European project on democratic citizenship education and the new investigation embedded in critical history writings” and 2) as a reflection of “patterns of thinking about and manipulating 

\(^2\) Joanna B. Michlic, ""I will never forget what you did for me during the war:” Representations of Rescuers and Relationships Between Rescuers and Jewish Survivors in the Light of Correspondence to the Central Committee of Polish Jews and the Joint, 1945-1949," *Yad Vashem Studies* (2011): 1-2. This paper will appear in the forthcoming volume of Yad Vashem Studies, Fall 2011. All quotes are cited with the author’s permission.
rescuers for political, social and moral aims.” In Poland, the publication of Jan Gross’s Neighbors (2000) served as a catalyst in the national debate surrounding Poland and the Holocaust. The publication and ensuing debate contributed to the larger process of European re-examination of the role “bystanders” played in the implementation of the Holocaust. As a consequence, rescue activity became an area open to ideological influence on the one hand and, on the other, to new research informed by critical history writing.

Yet ideological influences on writing on rescue activity are not new in the historiography. What changed were the historical circumstances. This study is an in-depth analysis of historical writing on the subject of rescue of Polish Jews from 1945 to 1989. I examine the “canonical” works of Polish rescue and extrapolate various approaches and themes that dominate the historiographical landscape. As a study of collective memory, these works include both historical and popular history writing. Particular attention is paid to the way historians of Poland used Jewish memoirs and testimonies to construct a picture of Polish-Jewish relations during the war. As a general rule, the historical treatment often sought to ‘domesticate’ the past into a form of memory compatible with the deep-rooted national narrative of heroism, pride, resistance, and martyrrology. These central works on rescue regularly deflect discussions of blackmail and denunciation. In a number of instances, the scholarly


publications often engage with Jewish survivor memoirs, but in a way that ignores the negative material or co-opts the memoir in such a way as to leave the dominant narrative of universal Polish help firmly in place. In short, Polish historians’ encounter with Jewish memory found itself unable to confront its content.

In his discussion of the relation between Jedwabne and Polish history, Jan T. Gross wrote:

This so-called question of Polish-Jewish relations during the war is like a loose thread in the historiography of this period. If we grasp and pull it, the entire intricately woven tapestry comes undone. It seems to me that anti-Semitism polluted whole patches of twentieth-century Polish history and turned them into forbidden subjects, calling forth stylized interpretations whose role was to cover, like a fig leaf, what had really happened.4

My goal in this thesis is to locate the “loose threads” in the dominant Polish historiography of rescue activities and to pull them out to reveal the “stylized interpretations” that covered up entire regions of “forbidden subjects.” This thesis asks how negative phenomena of the environment of rescue – namely blackmail, denunciation, and murder – disappeared from historical treatments of wartime reality in occupied Poland. The paper aims to show how these negative phenomena came to occupy the margins of the story of rescue.

Michlic identifies three dominant tendencies in the historiography of rescue in the pre-1989 period: 1) “to underscore the large number of rescuers,” 2) “to downplay or ignore the low societal approval of rescue activities,” and 3) “not to differentiate among the various categories of rescuers, protectors, and helpers and

their motivation.” According to Michlic, while these tendencies largely crystallized in the 1960s “in the climate of a potent fusion of communism with ethno-nationalism,” they were already deeply embedded in writing of the 1940s.5 This approach proved to have a powerful hold on the historical imagination. Drawing on this approach, I take the analysis to a deeper level, by showing how Polish scholarship reacted to the negative spectrum of Polish behavior and developed a number of approaches that functioned to deflect instances of this negative behavior toward Jews from collective memory.

I also examine a regional case study to show how a historian, using various means of evasion, reconstructed Polish-Jewish relations during the war. By focusing heavily on memoirs and testimonies, my examination draws on political, historical, and cultural studies. Consequently, the work represents a contribution to the ongoing debate on the treatment of eye-witness accounts in historical reconstruction. It is a contribution to a study of how ideology shapes historical writing.

I touch upon how at present some historians challenge these assumptions and others seek to recycle previous approaches with minor modifications. These “schools” of historical writing represent opposing conceptions of national honor. In this light, the approach that dominated scholarship from 1945-1989 sought to save national honor by silencing or marginalizing voices from the past that were perceived to “blacken” the national reputation. Writers in the “critical” tradition,

5 Michlic, “”I will never forget what you did for me during the war:” Representations of Rescuers and Relationships Between Rescuers and Jewish Survivors in the Light of Correspondence to the Central Committee of Polish Jews and the Joint, 1945-1949,” 3.
who challenge this conception, can be seen as responding to a similar civic calling, but believe that the correct response is to expose these chapters to historical scrutiny. This duality of vision points to a transition in historical consciousness and national identity.

**Organization**

The Introduction consists of a broad exposition of the significance of rescue to current scholarship and my contribution to it. I then discuss the case of the “bowdlerization” of the memoir of Calek Perechodnik and the ensuing controversy. This serves as a point of departure to the larger argument that the way a primary source is “presented” can influence its meaning and interpretation. I then relate this phenomenon to the way the subject of the rescue of Jews by Poles has been shorn of its concomitant environment and reduced to its “positive spectrum” of noble and altruistic rescue. I then briefly discuss my methodology, the use of eye-witness testimonies, and a historical backdrop to the writing under investigation.

In Part II, I begin by discussing how Polish works on the study of Polish-Jewish relations have presented historical facts in a way that “softens” the negative spectrum of behavior. Specifically, I discuss *Righteous among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews, 1939-1945* by Władysław Bartoszewski and Teresa Lewinówna and its treatment of a primary source, Emmanuel Ringelblum’s *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*. I then proceed to an examination of some of the
central themes, motifs, arguments, and approaches situated within this genre of historical writing.

Part III examines some of the approaches and thematic innovations in the field of rescue in the last decade. I point out how the works of scholars belonging to the critical history of writing challenges and overturns the assumptions examined in Part II.

Part IV looks at a case study of Radomyśl Wielki and Mielec County to show how one local historian, Jan Ziobroń, constructs a favorable depiction of Polish-Jewish relations during the war through a one-dimensional presentation of rescue. Although published in 2009, the work recycles the postwar approaches by ignoring the negative evidence and selective quotation of survivors’ narratives. I supplement this study with my own archival research and a fuller use of various sources to build a more accurate picture of rescue in Mielec County.

Part V examines the continuity of basic categories, depictions, and approaches to the subject of rescue in 3 Polish films—Andrzej Wajda’s Samson (1961), Agnieszka Holland’s Angry Harvest (1985), and Krzysztof Kieślowski’s Decalogue, Part 8 (1988)—which span the period from 1961-1988.

Section VI concludes the findings of this study.

The Bowdlerization of History?

In 1999, historian David Engel criticized the published memoir of Calek Perechodnik. Perechodnik was a Jewish policeman in the Warsaw ghetto. In the belief that, as a policeman, he would be able to protect his wife and child from
extermination, he brought them to the ghetto’s main square. Although he was assured by the commandant of the Ghetto Polizei that his family would be protected, the train went to Treblinka, where his family died. His memoir is characterized by an uncompromising treatment of German, Polish, and Jewish attitudes during the war. Engel argued that the Polish publication of the memoir Czy ja jestem mordercą? (Am I a Murderer?) extensively interfered with the original manuscript by means of various expurgations and omissions “in accordance with present sensitivities, prejudices, and psychological demands.” In effect, Engel charged that the editors had bowdlerized a historical document and committed “vandalism” to Jewish memory. Zbigniew Gluza, the chairman of the Karta Centre publishing house, took these charges quite seriously and published a more objective version of the memoir as Spowiedź (Confession). In an interview with Rzeczpospolita, Gluza stated how previous editors were simply unprepared for the memoir and, subsequently, “toned down” the content almost unconsciously: “I think that both the first (unknown) and the second editor of Perechodnik’s report were weighed down by the burden of the pain that comes from reading it. That they were not guided by ideological or ‘national’ censorship. I have the impression that it was not conscious, but rather reflexive.”

Gluza also reflected on the impact of the publication of Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors*, particularly the testimony of Szmul Wasersztajn, who claimed that the murder of the Jews of Jedwabne was carried out principally by local Poles, not Germans. Historians had previously treated the testimony with skepticism. Gross himself claimed that it took him 4 years to fully grasp the significance of what Wasersztein was really saying. Gluza went on to point to the change in historical receptivity that *Neighbors* set off:

we must prepare ourselves for the fact that these messages may contain things that we are not ready to accept. I have experienced this myself....Now I see how many things I failed to grasp at first. Partly because they were softened, flattened, but also because neither my sensibilities were ready to accept them. I have the feeling that only now, after the debate around the crime in Jedwabne, have I become the kind of reader on whom Calek Perechodnik was counting, and am able to keep company with such an oppressed person as he was then.¹⁰

Indeed, the Jedwabne debate had, and continues to have, long-reaching consequences on historians and the Polish public. Gluza places his finger on a compelling phenomenon of historical perception: the existence of a “sensibility” not capable of accepting the raw contents of evidence, which works to “flatten” or “soften” the information in order to make it more palatable.

The story of Perchodnik is a good illustration of a larger process of internalized censorship in Polish writing on rescue. The mechanism described by Gluza can be generalized to the way in which historians filtered writing on rescue. Almost systematically, historians looked at the evidence, but did not register the

¹⁰ Ibid., 602.
negative aspects. Whether this process was reflexive or overtly political depended largely depended on the writer. In the end, the product bore the same stylized hallmarks of representation.

**Toward a Comprehensive Depiction of Rescue**

The shift in collective perception discussed by Gluza compels us to reconsider the ways in which rescue has been viewed from 1945 to 2011. Let us briefly sample the comprehensive environment of rescue as depicted by Jewish survivors. On November 12, 1947, returning from hiding in Dąbrowa Tarnowska, Izak Stieglitz wrote the following testimony for the Jewish Historical Commission in Kraków:

In 1942, Rywka Gluckmann with two sons was hidden by Michał Kozik in Dąbrowa Tarnowska...The farmer [gospodarz] sheltered them from 1942 to 1944 (about 3 months before the entry of the Red Army), for as long as it was worth his time. When the money ran out, Kozik murdered all three with axes [sic]. Jews hiding out across the road....heard the screams of the murdered and the next day they learned that the Gluckmanns are not alive.

Stieglitz, a local of the region, also documented the following:

Bronisław Przędział, a young man, was the terror of Jews in Dąbrowa Tarnowska. After their expulsion, some Jews hid in the woods beyond Dąbrowa. Przędział.... would go to the woods and capture hiding Jews. For every Jew that he brought to the Gestapo, he would receive 2 kilograms of sugar from the Germans. This was well-known in Dąbrowa.11

11 Archives of the ŻIH (AŻIH), Izak Stieglitz, Testimony, collection 302, file 3419. The ŻIH documents discussed in this study were consulted at the United States Holocaust Museum (USHMM).
Ignacy Kotlarski, who escaped the Warsaw Ghetto in an attempt to reach the Soviet Army, spent the war years wandering through villages and small towns without a permanent shelter. He wrote:

The Germans allotted special rewards of items, which at the time were in demand, for delivering Jews and the death penalty for hiding Jews. Poles adapted themselves to this with indifference, there were countless instances of sheltering Jews and also their handing over into German hands, most frequently with the aim of plunder. I know of an instance of murdering a Jew for the purpose of robbery. A farmer from…killed a Jew in order to rob him and reported it to the gendarmerie. Quite common were instances of Poles sheltering Jews until they extracted all of their valuables and money, and then handed them over to the Germans. In the village of Swieck…the previous village-head [soltys]…along with other farmers, sheltered Jews and later took all of their property and turned them over to the Germans.\(^\text{12}\)

Józef Nachman Kazimierski escaped into the woods upon his arriving at Treblinka. “We entered some forest and I ran away. I was able to find some sort of railroad station where a Christian woman gave me her ticket,” he wrote. Similarly, Salomon Podchlebnik, escaping from Belżec, encountered a peasant woman who enthusiastically offered bread and butter. On the other hand, his next encounter with the local peasants met with hostility: “Peasants voluntarily refused to give us bread, even in exchange for money. We had to obtain bread by force.” In the next village they met a farmer whom they had known prior to the war: “He was happy to see them, kissed them, and allowed them to sleep on the hay in the barn.”\(^\text{13}\)

These are by no means exceptional stories, but quite typical themes of survivor narratives. Again and again, we see both rescue and denunciation

\(^{12}\) AŻIH, Ignacy Kotlarski, 301/2962.
\(^{13}\) AŻIH, Salomon Podchlebnik, 301/10.
coexisting—often within a single testimony. The milk of human kindness often flowed together with the tears of betrayal. Help and betrayal were not separate phenomena—both constituted fundamental aspects of the environment of rescue. Yet in the last six decades, Polish scholarship only addressed Polish-Jewish encounters primarily through the prism of cooperation and positive experiences of rescue. The negative spectrum of behavior remained on the margins of Polish scholarship and memory. What we find is a much broader process of bowdlerization of the phenomena under investigation. This also had an effect on the style of historical presentation. In the case of historians who included Jewish survivor testimonies and memoirs into their discussion, the use of memoirs is selective and manipulative of the evidence. Eye-witness testimony is presented and framed in a way that reduces significance of negative Polish attitudes and behaviors and pushes blackmail and denunciation beyond the pale of serious investigation.

Methodology & Sources

My method is to review the major canons of the literature of rescue and to extrapolate specific approaches, motifs, narratives, and strategies in dealing with the “difficult” past of Polish rescue of Jews during the Second World War. The texts under consideration include Assistance to the Jews in Poland, 1939-1945 (1963) by Tatiana Berenstein and Adam Rutkowski, The Forest of the Righteous: Pages from the History of Rescue of Jews in Occupied Poland, 1939-1945 (1968) by Szymon Datner, Righteous among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews, 1939-1945 (1969) by Władysław Bartoszewski and Teresa Lewinówna, and He Who Saves One Life (1971)
by Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki. Where possible, I contrast the scholarship with Jewish both published and unpublished personal documents (testimonies and memoirs) and studies. I pay close attention to the way historians framed, selected, or manipulated the primary sources within their presentation and argument. The published studies and memoirs include Emmanuel Ringelblum’s *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War* (1974), Oskar Pinkus’s *The House of Ashes* (1964), and Samuel Gruber’s *I Chose Life* (1978). The testimonies are taken from the collection held at the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (AZIH), which were available to me at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). This collection includes approximately over 7,000 testimonies, most of which were deposited in the early postwar period in Poland, from 1945-1947.


**Historians & Survivor Testimonies**

The silence of Polish scholarship regarding negative acts committed against Jews must be understood within the general academic climate of the early postwar decades. At this time, survivor testimonies were regarded as factually unreliable and overly subjective. As Omer Bartov points out, until the last two decades, historians were trained to work with documents that “carry an official stamp, that were
produced at the time of the event by competent and responsible officials.” In the context of the Holocaust, this means that the most “objective” scholarship is regarded as that which relies primarily on German sources. As Bartov states, Jewish testimonies have only been taken seriously in the context of postwar German courts, but were not used by historians to reconstruct the Holocaust.

In the case of Poland, the main body of eye-witness accounts includes the 7,000 testimonies, primarily collected from 1945-1947. These are deposited with the Archives of the Jewish Historical Commission (AŻIH). The majority of these early postwar testimonies are written in Polish a minority of these are written in Yiddish and Hebrew. This was part of the larger effort by ŻIH main to preserve a record of the gruesome events of the Holocaust by research, documentation, collection of evidence, and publications. These documents were available to scholars for over 50 years, but only in the last decade do we see a serious and systematic engagement with their contents.

More recently, historians are overcoming this resistance and are finding ways of weaving testimonies and memoirs into the historical narrative. Perhaps the most dramatic example of the challenges posed by using survivor testimonies is the case of Szmul Wasersztajn’s testimony (from the same ŻIH pool of sources) in Gross’s Neighbors, mentioned above. Wasersztajn’s “revelation” so challenged the

15 Most of depositions of the 301 collection consist of a hand-written account (without any order or sequence imposed by ŻIH), typed transcriptions, and any related documentation. However, many do not include typed transcriptions. Many of the Yiddish documents remain untranslated (apart from summaries in the ŻIH catalogs), apart from individual historians who translated them independently.
framework of the accepted historiography of the occupation in Poland that Gross formulated a “New Approach to Sources” to studying the Holocaust:

When considering survivors’ testimonies, we would be well advised to change the staring premise in appraisal of the evidentiary contribution from a priori critical to in principle affirmative. By accepting what we read in a particular account as fact until we find persuasive arguments to the contrary, we would avoid more mistakes than we are likely to commit by adopting the opposite approach, which calls for cautious skepticism toward any testimony until an independent confirmation of its content has been found. [emphasis in original] 16

This brought the author no shortage of objections from the scholarly community. Historians thought that this approach amounted to a jettisoning of all standards of scholarly objectivity and an open season on subjectivity. In the polemics on Neighbors, a common “response” to Gross’s proposition was taken from a statement by Samuel Gringauz published in 1950. Gringauz was himself a Holocaust survivor, so the point of view was seen to carry a mark of authenticity. He charged that Holocaust survivors suffered from a “hyperhistorical” complex, which concentrates historical relevance on Jewish problems or local events under the aspect of personal experience. This is the reason why most of the memoirs and reports are full of preposterous verbosity, graphomanic exaggeration, dramatic effects, overestimated self-inflation, dilettante philosophizing, would-be lyricism, unchecked rumors, bias, partisan attacks, and apologies. The question thus arises whether participants of such a world-shaking epoch can at all be its historians and whether the time has already come when valid historic judgment, free partisanship, vindictiveness, and ulterior motives is possible. 17

16 Gross, Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland: 92.
Yet as Gunnar S. Paulsson states, the method proposed by Gross—namely, beginning an investigation from the perspective of the victim—has become standard in the writing on the Holocaust. The testimony-based approach is appropriate to the Holocaust, because in many instances, the trail of evidence is slim. In short, researchers must work with what they have. This goes against the previous method favored by historians (like Raul Hilberg), which focused on the mechanism of destruction—seen from the point of view of the perpetrators—more than the victims. Historians are continually developing ways of working with eye-witness testimonies in a way that does not compromise objectivity, but rather contributes to a richer picture. For example, one approach is the “triangulation method,” used by Jan Grabowski in his recent detailed study of the fate of the 277 Jews who sought shelter among peasants in the County of Dąbrowa Tarnowska. This method consists of reconstructing the wartime reality by placing testimonies from various sources alongside each other. In his particular study, Grabowski used Jewish survivor testimonies (AŻIH) and postwar trials from Poland, survivor testimonies from Israel, and German wartime documentation, as well as postwar trials. This method allows the evidence to be corroborated against itself. Various approaches exist to allow historians to successfully use eye-witness testimonies for historical reconstruction.

**Historical Background**

In the immediate postwar period, there was an attempt by a “self-critical” group of Polish intellectuals to examine Polish-Jewish relations during World War II. It flowered very briefly from 1945-1947, to be finally suppressed by the imposition of the Communist regime at the end of this hiatus in 1948. From 1949 to the 1980s, a “monolithic” official Communist representation reigned, one generally characterized by “narratives of symmetry between fates of Poles and Jews, and the solidarity and unity of the great majority of Polish society.” Crucially, it was “the only publicly available source of historical knowledge” about the subject. Amid the general distortions and omissions in the historical record, a number of motifs emerged. One such motif was the treatment of anti-Jewish acts by individuals and military and civilian organizations as a socially marginal problem, one outside of an otherwise “healthy social fabric” and found in other Nazi-occupied countries. Another motif emerged in the treatment of issues surrounding anti-Jewish beliefs and attitudes among various segments of society during the war, as well as indifference and passivity toward the genocide of Jews. These were attributed to “external” factors (fear of German retribution), never to “internal” factors, such as

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the continuity of pre-war attitudes and beliefs. Additionally, the Communist narrative built on the legacy of Polish romanticism by depicting Poles (now ethnically defined) as both heroes and victims. Further, the persistence of the myth of Judeo-Communism as an explanatory model for all anti-Jewish acts within national mythology has been examined as an underlying factor in much of the debate.

Yet perhaps no event had a greater impact in politicizing the course of Polish-Jewish relations at this period than the March ’68 campaign. The campaign, already started in 1967, was a well-orchestrated response to the Soviet withdrawal of all diplomatic relations with Israel after the Six Day War. Part of the offensive required that factory workers across Poland were forced to publicly denounce Zionism. The crisis led to the suppression of student strikes by security forces across the country and repression of the Polish dissident movement. The subsequent purges within the communist party, led by Interior Minister Mieczysław Moczar and his “Partisan” faction, resulted in an actual expulsion from Poland of thousands of Jewish professionals, as well as the suppression of student strikes by security forces in all major academic centres across the country and the subsequent repression of the Polish dissident movement.21 These events would cast a dark shadow over the

scholarship on Polish-Jewish relations. As we will see, they would play a crucial role in creating a specific set of stereotypes and myths in the story of Polish rescue.
II. Polish Scholarship, 1945-1989: Pulling at the Threads

...on the list of “victim rescuers” Kozaczki [a local historian] included a certain Michał K., who – according to the amateur historian of Dąbrowa – supposedly hid 10 Jews. In fact, Michał K. hid 3 Jews, but he bashed them to death with an axe in late Fall of 1944, when their money ran out for further payment of their stay.

– Jan Grabowski, Judenjagd

The Presentation of the Evidence

In many ways, the canonical text on Polish rescue activities is the collection of accounts edited by Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna (or Lewin). It was published originally in Polish in 1969 by a Catholic publisher, Znak, as Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej (He Is My Fellow Countryman). The English-language translation, with additional accounts and documents, was published in the same year as Righteous among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews, 1939 – 1945. The editors brought to the work a sense of authority and authenticity. As a member of the Polish resistance, Bartoszewski took part in many of the underground organs and for a time was imprisoned in Auschwitz concentration camp. From September 1942, Bartoszewski worked alongside of Zofia Kossak-Szczucka on behalf of the Front for the Rebirth of Poland in the Provisional Committee for Aid to Jews (Tymczasowy Komitet Pomocy Żydom) and its successor organization, the Council for Aid to Jews (Rada Pomocy Żydom), better known by its code-name, Żegota. Żegota was a Polish resistance organization (which included Jewish representatives) whose objective

was to help Jews during the Holocaust. Bartoszewski remained a member of Żegota until the Warsaw Uprising. Lewinówna came from a family of Polonized and assimilated Jews and was raised as a Catholic. She survived the war with the help of a network of Polish acquaintances. Her brief story is included in the book.

The editors of this popular and influential collection of documents state at the outset that their goal is to let the documents speak for themselves. In particular, the documentary approach takes precedence over analysis, because the savagery of the war years led to “situations which are extremely difficult and hazardous to interpret.” They argue for the methodological advantage of a full disclosure of the documentary evidence:

instead of narrating, summarizing, reporting, interpreting, and evaluating, we have turned over these pages to the heroes of those events, those who helped the people, those who were helped, and those who were eye-witnesses of that help. We have made no secret of the fact that we were also guided by the thought that documents bear much more credibility than do elaborations. We are not entering into polemics with the authors of recent books, which either as a result of unfamiliarity with the subject or because of deliberate ill will, have libeled Poland and the Polish people. It is our desire merely to set against the unwarranted accusations made in those books the truth of facts and documents, constituting an unquestioned scholarly source, and narratives which depict the actual conditions of the occupation in all its complexity.  

In particular, the selection of testimonies, or “narratives,” allegedly follows the same holistic logic:

23 The fact that Kossak-Szczucka—who regarded Jews as an ideological enemy of Poland, but nevertheless argued in favor of assisting them—was one of its founding members is often silenced.
In selecting the narratives, we tried to make as representative a compilation as possible, one that would illustrate the maximum number of different behaviors, situations, motives behind the help, ways and means by which this help was provided, difficulties encountered, and the milieux involved.\(^\text{25}\)

Yet despite an expressed commitment to a non-polemical and objective method, a one dimensional representation of rescue is constructed. What sustains Bartoszewski’s argument is the selecting and framing of the documentary evidence. Although priority is to be given to “texts from the rescued instead of the rescuers,” we learn little about the “maximum number of different behaviors” by hearing only the survivors.\(^\text{26}\) The selective approach is exemplified by the editors’ use of the Emmanuel Ringelblum’s monograph, \textit{Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War}.\(^\text{27}\) Ringelblum was a historian who—together with numerous other Jewish writers, scientists, and ordinary people in the Warsaw Ghetto—led an effort to document the destruction of the Jewish community of Poland during the war. The result of this project was the \textit{Oneg Shabbat} collection of diaries, documents, commissioned papers, and other materials. Ringelblum drew on these sources, as well as his own knowledge and experience, to write his study under the occupation. The work contains redeeming observations and profiles of courage, nobility, and humanity, as well as damning information about Polish attitudes and behavior.

\(^{25}\)Ibid., XIII.


during the war. Bartoszewski’s use of the monograph consists primarily in the use of the most optimistic chapter of *Polish-Jewish Relations*, entitled “The Idealists.”

Ringelblum’s approach in this chapter—brief profiles of various “idealistic” personages and their dedication to save Jewish lives—fits into the general style of cataloging preferred by the editors of *Righteous among Nations*. The book, tailored for a general readership, is 834 pages in length—as if the sheer encyclopedic weight of the work was designed to pulverize doubt. Yet readers familiar with Ringelblum’s full text will notice the glaring absence of the full scope of the writer’s observations. Taken by itself, the chapter on “idealists” says one thing about Polish rescuers, but a different picture emerges when the subject is viewed within Ringelblum’s larger discussion:

> Will it not be forever a disgrace that in a town like Czestochowa, for example, practically none of the Jewish inhabitants were saved, only because before the war hostile feelings towards the Jews were current in this town? Why has the Polish anti-Semitic press not stopped its incitement against the Jews even for a moment, and why does the Government press so rarely break its silence on the Jewish question, why does it take so weak a defense of the Jews? Why do the few idealists who defend the Jews and give them refuge so rarely meet with cooperation from the community or the great majority of the community?" [my emphasis]

The editors must have seen this and other passages, but chose not to include them, despite their professed commitment to “depict the actual conditions of the occupation in all its complexity.”

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28 Ibid., 226-245.
29 Ibid., 8-9.
Using similar editorial techniques, *Righteous among Nations* pushed to the margins the phenomenon of blackmail and denunciation and the role played by the Polish “Blue” Police. If we keep with Ringelblum’s study, we find that these aspects pervade his work. He wrote of the foothold the Germans found in Polish society in persecuting the Jews:

From the moment the Polish anti-Semites helped the Germans drive the hungry Jews away from the soup vats, the “street” became a link between the Polish anti-Semites and the Nazis. The “street” supplied them with steady prey. These professional informers made up the future teams of szmalcowniks and blackmailers who were to terrorize the Jews on the Aryan side and who, next to the police agents and the Polish police, were to be the Germans’ most faithful ally in their hunting down Jews. Their jeering laughter, their coarse jokes and sneers and even songs composed for the purpose—“Hitler kochany, Hitler złoty nauczył Żydow roboty” [Dear Hitler, golden Hitler—taught the Jews to work]….The street, from then on, became the realm of the anti-Semitic rabble, ruling there with the approval of the Germans.30

In the chapter “On the Aryan Side,” some 20 consecutive pages out of 40 are dedicated to a detailed discussion of blackmail. The extensive description—rich in social and cultural observation—is too long to quote here, but it is worth touching on a few themes. Ringelblum wrote about the deadly efficacy of the combined efforts of the szmalcowniks, blackmailers, Polish Police, agents of the criminal police, and Gestapo agents. He wrote of them not as isolated criminal individuals, but a ubiquitous presence: “The szmalcowniks collaborate with police agents, the

30 Ibid., 42-44. Szmalcownik was a popular name for blackmailers. The Polish word used during the war for a person who blackmailed Jews who were hiding or blackmailing Poles who hid Jews. It comes from the word szmalec, which is slang for money. Ringelblum distinguishes between the two in terms of their terrain: “The difference between the szmalcowniks and the blackmailers is that the former’s area of activity is the street and the latter’s is the flat...If the szmalcowniks are wasps that sting their victims, the blackmailers are vultures that devour them.” Yet the most devastating combinations, according to Ringelblum, were the “informers-police-blackmailers partnerships,” 126.
uniformed police and in general anyone who is looking for Jews. They are a real plague of locusts, descending in their hundreds and maybe even thousands on the Jews on the Aryan side.” Ironically, prisons could serve as much better havens than “living under the surface”: “Sometimes prison serves as a hideout. This is no fantasy but actual fact. A Jew is in a Warsaw prison as an Aryan on a criminal charge. Legal proceedings have been under way for a long time and are constantly being adjourned until... the end of the war.”

Szmalcowniks are Ringelblum reports the return of blackmailed Jews from the “Aryan” side to the Ghetto (when it still existed) for a “vacation” from the constant terror, hopelessness, and disappointment, with some who “kissed the earth of the Ghetto.”

What does Bartoszewski tell us about the above phenomena? According to him, various branches of the underground, via Special Courts that authorized executions of blackmailers, were “determinedly” in operation. These activities reflected the general opinion of the Polish population: “The Polish people looked upon blackmail as disgraceful, and this applies not only to people connected with the clandestine movement.” Further, presentation of the Polish Police is framed as another dimension of the “helping hand” offered to “their persecuted and expiring fellow countrymen.” The requirement to soften, reduce, or minimize negative tidings were part of the very politics of the publication of Ringelblum’s notes in the early 1950s. According to Joseph Kermish, the editors of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw “falsified” the 1952 publication “by means of a large number of omissions and alteration. They suppressed many facts and appraisals of Ringelblum

31 Ibid., 118-119.
that mentioned “bad” Poles who rioted, pillaged or murdered or who were just plain anti-Semites.” Even after the “Thaw” of 1956 in Poland, the Institute's following publications in installments from 1958-1959 (numbers 28-31 of the Bulletin) continued with mistakes and omissions. For this reason, according to Kermish, the diary of Mordekhai Tennenbaum-Tamaroff, who spoke openly about anti-Semitism in Poland, could not be published in the People’s Republic of Poland.

In short, the history of Polish historiography of rescue is also a history of discursive omissions, distortions, and falsifications. It is the story of a “diplomacy” of writing history. The methods of presenting, framing, excerpting, and selecting documents pertaining to rescuers were part of the larger discursive environment, which helped buoy the specific arguments which will investigate below. Many other popular historical works employed this approach. Let us examine the construction of these arguments in detail.

The Disappearance of Anti-Semitism under German Occupation

Situated within a favorable use of documents, Righteous among Nations set in place an important thesis regarding Polish-Jewish relations during WWII. In the introduction written by Bartoszewski (“On Both Sides of the Wall”), the author argues that wartime conditions had virtually eliminated anti-Semitism:

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32 Ibid., xxxii. Another notable example is the case of Zofia Kossak-Szczucka’s wartime leaflet “Protest.” Publications only included the first part, which called for sympathy for the murder of the Jews, but systematically omitted the second portion which maintained that, nevertheless, Jews were the ideological enemies of Poland.
The conditions of the German occupation led in general to a marked decline in the anti-Semitic sentiments which had existed in pre-war Poland. The common fate of the persecuted, suffering, fighting people helped to awaken a sense of solidarity and a will to help those who were dying. And although the views and prejudices formed before the war could not but affect the attitudes of people, on the whole they did undergo considerable modification.\textsuperscript{33}

In short, when the two ethnic groups had any contact, it was primarily motivated by mutual aid. This argument set the tone for much of the literature to follow and helped sustained related claims. The existence of “people who before the war had been regarded as anti-Semites,” some of whom worked for Żegota during the war—as Bartoszewski added—created the impression that a radical shift in attitude had taken place. Further, the argument served to neutralize evidence that anti-Semitism had somehow outlived the Holocaust and was a considerable force in the immediate postwar period. It also strengthened the concomitant contention that apart from marginal and criminal social groups, help towards Jews was well-nigh universal.

The wartime study, \textit{Polish-Jewish Relations}, suggested the existence of an opposite reality:

The Polish and Jewish people, co-existing for centuries, had conflicts and quarrels such as occur between neighbours in economic, cultural matters. But the question is permissible whether everything that divided us should not have been forgotten, in face of sufferings so extraordinary, suffering unparalleled in world history? Should not the abyss opened up by the evil agency of the Nazi monster have been bridged over?\textsuperscript{34}


\textsuperscript{34} Ringelblum et al., \textit{Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War}: 8-9.
During the war, the Polish government was aware of disturbing news that segments of Polish society found themselves in agreement with Nazi policies toward Jews. The Polish Courier to the Government-in-Exile, Jan Karski, wrote in his report of February 1940:

While one has the sense that it would be advisable were there to prevail in the attitude of the Poles toward [the Jews] the understanding that in the end both peoples are being unjustly persecuted by the same enemy, such an understanding does not exist among the broad masses of the Polish populace.

Their attitude toward the Jews is overwhelmingly severe, often without pity. A large percentage of them are benefitting from the rights the new situation gives them. They frequently exploit those rights and often abuse them.

This brings them, to a certain extent, nearer to the Germans...

‘The solution of the Jewish Question’ by the Germans – I must state this with a full sense of responsibility for what I am saying – is a serious and quite dangerous tool in the hands of the Germans, leading toward ‘moral pacification’ of broad sections of Polish society...

However, although the nation loathes them mortally, this question is creating something akin to a narrow bridge upon which the Germans and a large part of Polish society are finding agreement.35

Accounts immediately following the war, before Communist ideology clamped down on the discussion, tried to deal with the “difficult” subject of Polish reactions to the Holocaust. For example, the Catholic writer Jerzy Andrzejewski wrote in 1947:

For all honest Poles, the fate of the Jews going to their death was bound to be exceedingly painful, since the dying...were people whom our people could not look straight in the face with a clear conscience. The Polish nation could look straight in the face of Polish men and women who were dying for freedom. It could not do so in the face of the Jews dying in the burning ghetto.36

35 Jan Karski, Report, 269.
Thus, Bartoszewski’s argument could assuage the Polish conscience. It is no surprise then that his work was “‘hijacked’ by the communist ethno-nationalist regime as a tool of disseminating an idealistic vision of a noble Polish nation helping the Jews,” as Bartoszewski admits in his new expanded edition that appeared in 2008.37

**The Reception of Rescuers after the War**

Bartoszewski’s argument would also function to neutralize attempts to understand Polish rescuers’ fear of revealing their rescue activities to their neighbors after the war. An example is the memoir of Oscar Pinkus, *The House of Ashes*, published in 1964. It is but one of numerous examples of memoirs that depicted the social stigma associated with sheltering Jews—something that would be suppressed throughout scholarship for decades. When Karbicki—the paid ‘rescuer’ of Pinkus and 6 other Jews was sheltered by a Polish peasant, Karbicki, in the village of Siedlce —learns of mounting German and Italian defeat toward the end of the war, he shares the news with the Jews. This moment is depicted with great poignancy:

> That evening, with the farmer’s rough hand pressed warmly in mine, I spun the threads of a long, long dream. I was raving about the moment when we would leave the shed; the moment when we would move into his house and look freely into the sun; the moment when we would all sit down at one table and have the feast of liberation we had been planning; the moment when we could announce our common triumph over the Germans and misery and death. Karbicki was silent. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and shook his head. And when I waited for his bubbling joy, expecting him to share my

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37 Joanna B. Michlic, “I will never forget what you did for me during the war,” 3-4.
enthusiasm about this great miraculous moment, Karbicki said in a sad voice: "...and when this war does end, I don’t want...I don’t want anyone to know. I don’t want you to leave in daylight. Who knows what people might do? I am just a peasant and don’t understand things, but there are bad people. You will leave at night. You will go down the trail, the same way you came.\(^{38}\)

According to the editors of *Righteous among Nations*, it was Poles who collaborated in the process of capturing the Jews who were “outside of their own society,” not those who assisted in their rescue.

### Rural Rescue vis-à-vis Urban Rescue

Discourse on rescue frequently assumed that few significant differences existed between urban and rural areas. The example of rescue in urban centers of Warsaw and Kraków cast a long shadow on the way rescue was understood in all of occupied Poland. This is tied to the presence of another area of emphasis—the preference of studies of collective, as opposed to individual, rescue efforts. This is evident in the well-developed and more serious literature of Żegota, whose operations were most extensive in cities.\(^{39}\) This approach is particularly strong in *Righteous among Nations*, whose editors had an intimate knowledge and experience of both Żegota and urban rescue. The tendency to give priority to institutional and

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organizational structures (including Catholic organizations and military formations, such as Armia Krajowa and Armia Ludowa) had a major weakness when it attempted to present individual help, often remaining on an abstract level deprived of nuance and social history. What we find are rather flat and colorless depictions. Here, the advantage of using eye-witness testimonies becomes apparent, as such accounts are usually rich in cultural observation and detail—thus, contributing to a fuller social history of occupied Poland.

In most accounts, the countryside constitutes a short chapter of the larger story. Righteous among Nations touches on the subject of rescue in the countryside very briefly.\textsuperscript{40} Out of approximately 800 pages, no more than 30 specifically address “rural aid.” While “rural conditions provided a fair opportunity for survival,” at the same time, the “peculiar traits” of the rural community led to “many a human tragedy.” The editors explained: “This was a small, self-contained world, in which everybody knew everybody else and his daily doings....ancient enmity or a controversy over a plot of land could lead to blind, uncontrolled hatred.” This characterization of peasant relations suggested that only if Jews fell into this “web” of ancient grudges, could something sinister happen. The editors add that the difficulty lay in the fact that Jews were “easy to tell from the Polish community and with little ability for rapid assimilation which might help gain them at least partial legalization.” The section includes brief stories of heroic rescue (3 are told by ethnic

\textsuperscript{40} Bartoszewski and Lewinówna, Righteous among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews, 1939-1945., 453-473.
Poles and 3 by Jewish survivors). Only in one description do we hear a of a “local commandant of the Polish ‘blue’ police in the German service, who terrorized the locality, displaying equal zeal in hunting Jews and independence fighters.” Otherwise, in the Righteous among Nations, the countryside is just one more setting where the heroic Polish struggle for Jewish lives against the Germans took place.

A similarly one-dimensional treatment of the countryside is found in Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki’s He Who Saves One Life. The author had a long history in the Polish Army and played an influential role in the Home Army during the war. Like Bartoszewski, Iranek-Osmecki was deeply involved in Poland in the underground movement. The fact that this generation was a part of the events under description should also be kept in mind in thinking about the trajectory of the historiography. In He Who Saves One Life, the author tried to reconstruct the experience of Jews hiding in the countryside:

The sheltering of Jews in Polish villages was similar to that of the city. Sheltering Jews in villages was more difficult than in cities, because a new arrival immediately caught the attention of the locals. The German police made incursions into villages in order to squeeze out of the peasants quotas of grain and cattle; often, villages were the object of police and military raids in tracking down partisans. For this reason, in as much as they betrayed a Semitic look and did not have Aryan papers, it was necessary to prepare for them hiding places and shelters of all kinds.

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41 Two of these cases take place in Mielec County, an area I will discuss in more detail in the case study section below.
42 Bartoszewski and Lewinówna, Righteous among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews, 1939-1945., 604. The story in question is that of Tadeusz Seweryn describing the “traitor” Józef Kubala who “personally broke the head” of a sheltered Jewish woman and handed her to the Germans. Franciszek Zająć, the rescuer (who liked to shelter Jewish women), was sent to Dachau, where he died.
Thus, the situation of Jews seeking shelter in the countryside was perceived to be not unlike that of the city, but more challenging. Difficulties arose from the fact that Jews could not easily “blend in” with the local population. It was difficult to remain anonymous, as one could do in cities. Further, it was easier for local Jews to find shelter in rural areas: “Jews who had ties to the village, often family ties as they owned their workshops prior to the war, found help and shelter among the peasants more easily than foreign Jews.” Yet, as we have seen in the example of Izak Stieglitz, local Poles were perfectly capable of denouncing or murdering local Jews.

In discussing the difficulty of seeking shelter in forests, Iranek-Osmecki explains the difficulty in terms of Jewish character. He cites Moshe Kahanowitz in explaining why Jews were particularly unsuitable to survival in forests:

> The Jews of Eastern Europe constituted a prominently urban element, and their contacts with villages, roads, and forests were very rare. Jews knew that forests contained various savage animals and never counted on the possibility settling the woods with people, including women, children, and the elderly....Why look for death in the unknown thickets of the forest, when death could arrive with little effort in the ghetto.\(^{44}\)

Iranek-Osmecki also recruits Israeli author Abraham Zwi Baron to support this perspective:

> Jewish town life, especially customs tied to Jews’ diet and their type of work, did not create a manly type of human being capable of maintaining the physical skills required for life in the woods... For

\(^{44}\)Quoted in ibid., 61.
many generations, the Jew was educated as a pacifist, and the army life and war were under no circumstances desirable.45

The Jewish urban personality is seen as the primary reason for an unwillingness and inability to survive in rural areas. The attitude of the local population also assumes a secondary place: “Moreover, Jews were afraid of the local population, which was unfriendly toward them, and from whom Jews could not expect help.” (It is not clear here why in the context of dwelling in forests Jews could expect “unfriendly” peasants, but in villages, this was allegedly not the case). Finally, the wild and illegal means of survival used by Jewish groups contributed to the failure of survival in forests. These Jews are described as “living as cave men” in their underground lairs and “wild forest groups” who supported themselves by robbing local villages. Because “these excursions were done without any scruples,” it is no surprise that “peasants were unfavorably disposed to the dwellers of the forest shelters” and, consequently, had to guard against attacks on their food supplies.

To sum up, the author argued that most Jews—historically ill-equipped to survive in rural and wooded settings—preferred the shelter of the ghetto to the risks of the outdoors. When they did decide to escape ghettos—that is, if they were able to evade German patrols and unfriendly peasants—they joined other Jews in forest shelters. However, the primitive conditions often reduced these refugees to a roaming tribe that depended on robbing the local peasants of food, which, in turn,

45 Ibid., 61. A more accurate depiction of Jewish sheltering in forests can be found in Allan Gerald Levine, Fugitives of the Forest (Toronto: Stoddart, 1998).
created antagonism between the two groups. In short, the Jews bore some responsibility for their own inability to survive on the “Aryan” side.

**The Prevalence of Altruistic Help**

A recurring stylization of the literature on rescue is the altruistic rescuer whose help is disinterested. If money is accepted, it is solely for the purpose of funding the living expenses of the rescued. Another influential work on rescue, *Assistance to the Jews in Poland, 1939-1945* (1963), by Tatiana Berenstein and Adam Rutkowski contributes to this pattern. The authors suggest the possibility of financial motivation, but quickly retreat: “There were, of course, those who smelled profits in the ghetto order. But there were many more, honourable men and women who said good-bye to their friends as they departed for the ghetto with unfeigned sorrow.”46 Even the historian Szymon Datner—who was well-aware of the “dark” aspects of wartime Polish-Jewish relations—limited his investigation to the well-worn categories of the genre in his authoritative study, *Las Sprawiedliwych. Karta z dziejów ratownictwa Żydów w okupowanej Polsce*.47 According to Michlic, he too “paints a one-sided, idealistic portrayal of Polish society.”48 His work provides an uncomplicated catalogue of Poles who rescued Jews for humanitarian reasons, as well as those who were murdered for their efforts.

48 Joanna B. Michlic, “I will never forget what you did for me during the war,” 4.
On the other hand, memoirs and testimonies are a rich source of information regarding the varieties of motivation that contradict the monolithic claim of altruism. Let us return to Iranek-Osmecki’s *He Who Saves One Life*. The author states that “Help was often given disinterestedly by peasants,” but qualifies this with the statement that “there were cases in which they took a lavish ransom.” As an example of the dilemmas raised by shelter in the countryside, he uses the memoir of Oscar Pinkus, whom we have already briefly met above. However, the choice of using the memoir of Pinkus to demonstrate the thesis of general altruistic help is ill-suited for the purpose. The contents of the memoir do not harmonize with the benign statements offered by Iranek-Osmecki. The only way to do this is to selectively quote and misrepresent the memoir, a method we have seen at the outset of this section.

In the original, Karbicki’s motivation is profit. Sheltering the Jews was for him something of a high-risk gamble. The farmer’s attitude undergoes a change toward a more sympathetic outlook, but the baseline of profit remains intact throughout. Pinkus calls the farmer’s motivation “greedy courage.” He points out that Karbicki, his wife, and three children were extremely poor: “The whole family was clad practically in rags; the house was bare and cold. His wealth consisted of a cow, two pigs and several sheep... He did not even keep a dog and he could not afford a well. This was the way he had lived before the war.” Thus, according to Pinkus, when he agreed to shelter the Jews, “he realized that this was his chance to make money and nothing else. “The motive force of our present relationship was money
and nothing else,” he wrote. The peasant used his new investment opportunity with great skill:

Initially he asked 300 zlotys a week but he later turned out to be a master of financial doubletalk with few scruples against lying or breaking promises...And so, instead of the 300 zlotys we ended up paying 1,000 zlotys per week. Furthermore, he asked that we pay him for the entire winter in advance...We suspected that he wanted the money first in order to kill us later. Such things had happened before....But we could not afford to worry about it and tried as best we could to parry his various financial schemes...When Yankel [another member of the group] arrived, Karbicki demanded an additional 150 zlotys weekly for his presence, even though the original agreement had, obviously, included him.

However, Karbicki's willingness was often contingent upon the political forecast and the amount of payment. When these proved unfavorable, Karbicki often asked the Jews to leave. In one of these low periods, Pinkus writes that Karbicki “thought that the farce went on too long for he came in and asked us to go away. This time he did not hide his intentions and offered no excuses...[he tried] to convince us that we ought to quit, that it made no sense to go on.” After time, this had become something of a routine: “To force us out of the shelter Karbicki again resorted to starvation. He refused to give us bread; all we got was soup once a day....the farmer yelled that we go away, that he had enough of us.”49 But Pinkus and the others learn to hold out during these threats. However, when their money begins to be depleted, they fear that if they run out, no options for survival will be left. Thus, they decide to drastically reduce their payment amount and discuss this with Karbicki. After 15 months of sheltering the group of Jews, the farmer—although he “sincerely wanted

to pull us through the war”—refused the terms of the proposed agreement. “But I can’t keep you for nothing,” he groaned.50

Iranek-Osmecki admits that Karbicki gave shelter “not from humanitarian impulses but for money,” but attempts to justify the high payment and rough treatment:

A few morgens [morga, a unit of arrable soil] of land was not enough to feed his [Karbicki’s] wife and three daughters, so that the high payment for sheltering Jews and rendering of services was a cause of frequent disputes and haggling, which Pinkus attributes to Karbicki’s greed. This situation even led to a termination of sheltering Jews. However, the threat was justified. The sheltered Jews proved unloyal to Karbicki. They broke a fundamental condition of their agreement, in that their hiding place would remain a secret. On numerous occasions, Karbicki found Jews visiting the dugout at night. The danger was blowing the shelter’s cover and the extermination of the entire Karbicki family. But in this regard, the sheltered Jews were eventually disciplined (my emphasis).51

In short, Karbicki was poor and had the right to ask for more money. However, this statement ignores the fact expressed in the memoir that the Jews could not simply rely on the farmer and trust him to the letter. A successful survival strategy required that Jews maintain a network of communication with fellow Jews, especially as stories of peasants handing over Jews to the Germans for vodka were in circulation in the memoir. In addition, the historian does not state who it is that would discover the shelter, especially as the Karbicki’s house was somewhat removed from the village and the Germans did not regularly pass by it. Here, as elsewhere, Iranek-Osmecki reduced the complexities of rescue. He is unable to accept the testimony on

50 Ibid., 220. At another point, he wants to take the group back for whatever amount of money they can afford, believing that “American Jews would repay him for it,” 223.
51 Iranek-Osmecki, Kto ratuje jedno życie ... Polacy i Żydzi, 1939-1945., 58-59.
its own terms, but attempts to “sculpt” it by selective quotation in some areas and filling in blanks with his own interpretation or justification. In the final analysis, the result is an attempt to master Jewish memory in order to fit a pre-existing narrative of disinterested Polish aid.

This discussion of the memoir demonstrates how testimonies can help to fill in the cultural history of individual help—in this case, the countryside. In another memoir, Samuel Gruber’s *I Chose Life*, the author had various encounters with peasants as a member of a partisan group. He wrote about the attitude of some peasants to Jews:

the peasants in the area became increasingly hostile. Most of them were wealthy but did not take kindly to the idea that they should be called upon to feed Jews. More often than not, our men approaching a farmhouse would be met by ferocious dogs. Some of the peasants organized themselves into a self-defense force to keep the Jewish partisans away. In one village the peasants set the church bell ringing to alert the Germans. Soon we were losing people almost every day; the Poles were turning them over to the German authorities. Eventually instead of fighting the Germans, we were forced to fight Poles who made common cause with the Nazis when it came to killing Jews.

These documents often reveal a rich tapestry of behaviors and attitudes that urban and institutional approaches lack.

52 Where he was trained, incidentally, by Mieczysław Moczar.
Discourse on Polish rescue often had to deal with the question of the attitude of the Home Army toward the Jews. Survivor testimonies and memoirs often featured this theme. How did Polish scholarship seek to normalize negative information about the Home Army? In the case of *Who Saves One Life*, we again see a selective quotation from Oscar Pinkus’s material, in a quite lamentable way, which probably stemmed from Iranek-Osmecki’s own experience in the Home Army and his strong identification with it. The most explosive material in the memoir is the allegation that the Home Army actively murdered Jews. These sections comprise some of the most tragic and reflective sections of the narrative. However, in Iranek-Osmecki’s handling of the document, the Home Army appears in an unambiguously positive light: the Home Army produced Aryan documentation for Jews, persistently attacked the Germans and their accomplices, and executed a number of Polish spies and denounciators. In addition, the strength of Polish partisan units was such that Germans were afraid to enter the local forests, which—in this case—made survival easier for sheltering Jews. Iranek-Osmecki emphasized Pinkus’s praise of the Home Army for assassinating Germans, spies, collaborators, and informers.54

This much Pinkus indeed wrote in his memoir. But he also said much more. In the original narrative, Pinkus alleged that the Home Army of this region had an anti-Jewish agenda. In one example, it is suggested that the Home Army may have been responsible for the death of Shymeluk, one of the members of the Pinkus group:

Next day we learned that Shymeluk had been shot in Wolki. And it was not the Germans who killed him. Shymeluk had gone to Wolki for food one night and did not return. At first the farmers denied that he had even been in the village but eventually we learned that he had been killed by “the boys.” “The boys” were the AK, the Polish underground. Shymeluk was in a farmer’s house when the AK arrived. They took him with them, and although there was no direct proof that they killed him, it remained a fact that Shymeluk never returned from that trip.\textsuperscript{55}

Thus, the testimony points to the existence of both official attitudes to assist Jews and unofficial local attitudes to assist in their destruction. This is demonstrated in \textit{The House of Ashes} when Irka, a woman from the Jewish forest shelter, encounters the Home Army:

After an intensive interrogation they found out that she was one of a group of Jews hiding in the woods. But Irka, sensing danger, refused to divulge where the others were. She was assured by the AK that no harm would be done to the Jews, that indeed they were out to help them, and they offered to go to the woods without weapons and even showed her printed pamphlets in which the AK called for helping Jews.\textsuperscript{56}

When Irka refuses to divulge the information, the AK “resorted to violence, beating her with sticks,” and torturing her with “hot irons.” In this way, the Home Army eventually learns of the whereabouts of the forest shelter and visits the Jews:

A large crowd of peasants had followed the AK as they marched off with Irka to the pine grove; and so, in public, not only did the AK refrain from harming the Jews, but a speech was delivered encouraging them in their fight. The same night, however, not convinced by the speech, the five Jews in the pine grove abandoned their shelter....They had barely moved out when a troop of partisans returned, and without even looking threw a bundle of hand grenades into the shelter blasting it to bits.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 213.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 218.
Paradoxically, as it becomes more apparent that the German defeat is only a matter of time, the Home Army's anti-Jewish campaign became intensified. The unofficial script became a de facto policy toward the surviving Jewish remnants: “the killing of Jews became the AK’s regular policy that we came to know them [the AK] as the Murderers of Shadows; they who threw grenades into graves and killed cadavers. Heroes who executed ghosts.” The last portion of the memoir recounts numerous instances of this general pattern. The AK even settled scores with Poles who helped Jews survive. According to Pinkus, they murdered 'Wacek,' who helped them in various ways: “soon after liberation the glorious AK murdered Wacek for saving our lives....the AK did not think there was room for men like Wacek in its new democratic Poland." As the underground gained more confidence and attacked the retreating Germany troops, the attacks were also directed at Jews. Again, Iranek-Osmecki’s discussion of the memoir’s substantial discussion of the AK simply ignores the above negative spectrum of behavior in favor of a sanitized Polish narrative.57

Poland and the Death Penalty

On November 10, 1941, Hans Frank, governor of the General Government, introduced the death penalty to Poles who helped Jews "in any way: by taking them in for the night, giving them a lift in a vehicle of any kind" or "feed[ing] runaway...
Jews or sell[ing] them foodstuffs." The law was made public by posters distributed in all major cities.

In the discourse, few historical works resist the publication of the poster of the German order in the appendix. The imposition of the death penalty for Poles aiding Jews is emphasized as being unique to Poland among all Nazi occupied countries. It is interesting that such claims always appeared to look to Western Europe, never other Eastern European countries, which had a similar policy in place (Ukraine and Belarus). For example, Bartoszewski wrote:

In no occupied country in the West nor in any satellite of the Third Reich was there an official death penalty for helping Jews. Nor is there any information about any cases of such sentences being carried out on, say, Frenchmen, or Danes, arrested for hiding Jews.\(^58\)

This claim was not based in any fact, but an absence of a scholarly work that concerned itself with comparing the death penalty in other Eastern European countries. Further, the relationship between the Poles reacting to the fear of German consequences is direct. Yet, as we have seen, Jewish testimonies often introduce the existence of an intermediary party that caused fear: Polish neighbors and the collaborative Polish apparatus. Such over-emphasis on the death penalty often blurred the spectrum of motivation for sheltering Jews. Examination of the German decree is almost never integrated within the context of other punitive decrees which Poles often broke.

Discussion of the death penalty serves a paradoxical function in the discourse. It is used to justify why the majority of Poles would have been unwilling to help. At the same time, it is argued that the majority of Poles did, in fact, help. The frequent mention of the death penalty creates the impression that the death penalty was applied universally and consistently in all years of the occupation. Such a claim leaves no room for a nuanced understanding of the way that the death penalty was introduced and accompanying regional differences in occupied Poland. For example, the Warsaw “Proclamation” of September 5, 1942 from the SS and Police Chief (located in the appendix of Righteous among Nations), declares the death penalty but provides conditions for waiving the prosecution: “Anyone who has given assistance to a Jew, or is still doing this at the moment, and gives notice of this to the nearest police station or gendarmerie post by 9 September 1942, 4 p.m., will not be liable to criminal prosecution.”\footnote{59} In addition, some qualification should be made here between an offence punishable by death and its exercise. In Righteous among Nations, we find among various stories that exceptions existed.\footnote{60}

Finally, significant differences existed in the countryside, which was usually removed from close German scrutiny and where the capture of Jews was largely left in the hands of the local Polish collaborative administration.

\footnote{59}{Ibid., 640.}
\footnote{60}{Tadeusz Seweryn wrote that in Lack, ”many peasants were arrested for selling food to the Jews.” Ibid., 604.}
III. Turning the Tide: Poland’s New Historians, 2000-2011

As I mentioned at the outset, the turning point was in many ways the publication of Neighbors. The research of a generation of younger Polish historians, many of them affiliated with the Polish Center for Holocaust Research, has questioned the above assumptions. The new research has also introduced a new set of approaches and motifs in viewing the interactions of Poles and Jews in the context of rescue. The findings are showing that certain segments of Polish society were complicit in the third phase of the Holocaust. What this means is that when Jews were escaping ghettos and trains headed for extermination camps, they often sought shelter in the Polish countryside. The new research is showing that most of these Jews did not survive, largely because local populations assisted the Germans in finishing off these remnants.

IPN

At the same time, a second trend in scholarship has opened up, which in many ways tries to restore the above-mentioned mechanisms in a generally optimistic and benign depiction of Polish-Jewish relations. It is argued that help offered to Jews was a mass phenomenon, while blackmail and denunciation was
marginal and committed by the “dregs” of society. It is emphasized that Poland was the only country where Nazi authorities instituted the death penalty for any form of aid given to the Jews. The Catholic Church was pro-Jewish and played a crucial in saving thousands of Jewish lives. This approach, called the historical policy, is maintained by historians affiliated with the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). This approach paints a one-sided, idealistic portrayal of Polish society and tries to defend the good name of Poland at the cost of wartime realities. At the forefront is an instrumental use of the more than 6,000 Christian Polish rescuers of Jews honored by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem as “a tool to normalize the dark past, to claim that Polish anti-Semitism and nationalism did not have much of a damaging influence of Polish-Jewish relations.” It also depicts all rescuers as a “monolithic and altruistic group” that is said to be a “typical representation” of Polish behavior toward Jews during WWII.

New Approaches

Yet despite this effort to recycle outmoded approaches, the work of the “New Historians” is quickly changing the historical landscape. Many of these historians are affiliated with Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów (Polish Center for Holocaust Research), itself a part of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. These writers generally include Barbara Engelking, Jan

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61 The numerical estimates in previous decades are astonishing. The numbers of Jews who survived as a result of rescue ranges from 30,000-60,000 (Prekerowa), 100,000 (Szymon Datner), to 400,000 (Bednarczyk). The number of Poles involved in rescue activities spans 300,000 (Urynowicz), 3,000,000 (Bielawski), and 4,000,000 (Bednarczyk). The number of Poles executed for blackmail or denunciation: 343 (Datner) to 872 (Bielawski).
Grabowski, Jacek Leociak, Małgorzata Melchior, Andrzej Żbikowski, Marta Janczewska, Alina Skibińska, Monika Polit, and Jakub Petelewicz. A dramatic example of the challenge posed to this school of thought is demonstrated by a recent work by Jan Grabowski that systematically studies a particular county. A previous historical analysis of this region stated that a particular Pole sheltered 10 Jews. Grabowski’s research corrects both the inflated number and the false narrative: “[The Pole in question] did in fact shelter 3 Jews, but he killed them with an axe in the Fall of 1944 when their money ran out.”

In terms of sources, these historians have finally turned their eye on the thousands of Jewish testimonies. Jan Grabowski uses, what he calls, the “triangulation of memory” method. This means using 3 bases of sources against one another: 1) the survivor testimonies found in Polish and Israeli archives, 2) postwar Communist trials against ethnic Poles who cooperated in any aspect of the Nazi genocide of the Jews, and 3) German court files related to trials of German Nazis in the ‘60s and ‘70s. This method allows Grabowski to reconstruct the fates of some 277 Jews who sought shelter among peasants in a specific county, of whom only 38 survived. Another author, Barbara Engelking, has recently published a work which bases itself almost entirely on Jewish survivor testimonies.

Gunnar S. Paulsson argues for a reassessment of the dominant conception of Jewish-Gentile relations of “rare, altruistic ‘righteous gentiles’ reaching out to help

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63 Barbara Engelking, Jest Taki Piekny Sloneczny Dzien ... Losy Żydów szukających ratunku na wsi polskiej 1942-1945 (It Is Such a Beautiful, Sunny Day: The Fate of Jews Seeking Shelter in the Polish Countryside, 1942-1945), 1st ed. (Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011).
hapless victims.” In his path-breaking study, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940-1945*, Paulsson argues that the story of survival in hiding is one of “self-help,” characterized by “initiative, courage and endurance on the part of those who escaped.”

**Polish-Polish War for Jews**

In terms of new approaches, one scholar has argued that Polish rescue efforts should not be viewed within the dynamic of Polish-Jewish relations, but a Polish-Polish war for the fate of Jewish lives. Because in many instances Poles were not simply afraid of the Germans, but their own neighbors, this author suggests that some segments of Polish society wanted to see Jews disappear in the emerging world order, while others struggled against their own neighbors in keeping them alive.

**Paid Help: The New Paradigm of Rescue**

Scholarship has started to move away from hagiographic conceptions of rescuers, such as those of the “Righteous Among Nations,” and applied more analytical categories, such as disinterested help vs. paid help. Thus, one scholar finds that approximately 80% of the help offered was paid help, which contributed

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to the lowest survival rate of Jews. A minority of cases were those that were motivated by altruism, but the survival rate was much higher.\textsuperscript{66}

IV. A Case Study: Radomyśl Wielki in County Mielec and Its Environs

*If upon our entry into Poland we shall be able to win on our side through the Jewish Legion the Jews of one synagogue, the peasants will not doubt our success, for knowing the foresight of the Israelites, they will say to themselves: “Our success is assured because the Jews are joining the Revolution.” And we shall spread like lava with our continually growing Legion from synagogue to synagogue, from village to village, into the very depths of Poland and Lithuania.*

– Adam Mickiewicz, 1855

A Brief History of Radomyśl Wielki

In many ways, Radomyśl Wielki represented a typical Galician town of Poland. It is located in Mielec County of the Subcarpathian Voivodeship. Its evolution is similar to other small towns in southeastern Poland. In 1581, at the request of a nobleman, Mikołaj Firlej, King Stefan Batory conferred town rights on the settlement. In this way, Radomyśl became an economically attractive private town, which stimulated further growth of the Polish and Jewish townspeople. Generally, Jews preferred private to royal towns. Private towns were more attractive economically, whereas royal towns tended to be less desirable as competition was stricter, animosities were more dangerous, and Church antagonism was stronger. For more on the difference between private and royal (crown) towns, see Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). 44-47.

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67 Adam Mickiewicz to Armand Lévy, Mickiewicz’s companion in the attempt to organize a Jewish Legion within the Polish Cossack troops in the Ottoman army during the Crimean War. Quoted from Abraham G. Duker, *The Mystery of the Jews in Mickiewicz’s Towianist Lectures on Slav literature* (New York1962). 26.

68 Generally, Jews preferred private to royal towns. Private towns were more attractive economically, whereas royal towns tended to be less desirable as competition was stricter, animosities were more dangerous, and Church antagonism was stronger. For more on the difference between private and royal (crown) towns, see Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). 44-47.
Radomyśl in Yiddish) were trade and artisanry, which included banking and the running of mills, breweries, and inns. Some Jewish families even cultivated land. Hasidism took root during the political crisis of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that led to the Partitions. In 1765, the first rabbi and tzadik, Dawid Hakohen, settled in Radomyśl. Subsequently, Radomyśl became known as the “Capitol of the Torah” in the 18th century.

The growing anti-Semitism of the late 19th century gave rise to various political groups.⁶⁹ Many of the town’s Jews joined the Legions of Józef Piłsudski in the fight for independence. Pogroms that followed the aftermath of the First World War strengthened the spectrum of political parties and youth movements of interwar Poland. Of these, the Zionist Organization had the biggest following. According to Nowy Dziennik (New Daily), the first Zionist Polish-language journal, Radomyśl held a celebration on behalf of Theodore Herzl in 1925.⁷⁰ Portraits of Herzl were displayed in windows and the singing of the Hatikvah could be heard. The second largest political influence was played by the leftist Poale Zion movement. The Orthodox Zionism of the rightist Mizrahi Party, as well as the Revisionist Zionists (founded by Ze’ev Jabotinsky), had some pull. Its youth movements appeared to have been particularly active. In 1934, Bnei Akiva, the Mizrahi youth movement, organized a meeting of local Zionist groups from the

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⁶⁹ Isidore Miller, the father of American playwright Arthur Miller, immigrated with his family from Radomyśl to the United States at the height of Eastern European immigration. The bulk of information about Radomyśl is taken from Jan Ziobroń, Dzieje Gminy Żydowskiej w Radomyślu Wielkim (Radomyśl Wielki, 2009), 18. The Radomyśl Wielki online Yizkor book can be found at H. Harshoshanim, "Radomysl Rabati ve-ha-seviva; sefer yizkor; Radomysl Wielki and Neighborhood, " http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/radomysl/Rad003.html.

⁷⁰ Dzieje, p. 40.
northern region of Tarnów. The Betar youth movement of the Revisionist Zionists organized courses in Hebrew, Palestinian geography, and the history of Zionism, as well as a scouting group that aimed to build the physical strength of its members. In the spirit of its dedication and militancy, the leader of Betar, Avigdor Eisland, left for Palestine in 1934. Radomyśl also established its own Jewish soccer club, the “Maccabees,” which owned a sports stadium (Its goalie’s name was Jankiel Gross).

Thus, on the eve of the Second World War, Radomyśl Wielki was in many respects a typical town in southeastern Poland. The majority of the inhabitants was Jewish and represented the wealthier elements of the overall population, which settled around the market square. In 1939, the population numbered 4,190.\(^71\) Sixty percent of these inhabitants, or 2,517 citizens, were Jews.\(^72\) With the exception of the Bund (which had less success in smaller towns in Poland), Radomyśl Wielki embodied a fair spectrum of secular Jewish affiliation and identity.

On September 7, 1939, a Polish military unit from the 10\(^{th}\) Cavalry Brigade, commanded by Col. Stanisław Maczek (later General), entered Radomyśl. The 10\(^{th}\) Cavalry Brigade was the only fully operational Polish motorized infantry unit during the German invasion of Poland. Today, it is considered by some to be the only Polish World War II military unit not to lose a single battle. The Nazis dubbed the unit “the black brigades.” The troops were stationed on the market square in a building (kamienica) that housed the town’s pharmacy of a Jewess, Klara Appel-Brand. The

\(^72\) Dzieje, p. 50.
local historian of these events, Jan Ziobroń, writes that the Jewess went out of her way to provide for the troops. In addition to a provision of medicines from her pharmacy, Klara and other locals prepared dinner for the upper military echelon of the brigade. Tables were brought out into the market square, white table-cloths were laid out, and dinner was served. In his memoir, Gen. Maczarek recalled this event as the first decent meal from the start of war. Some of the officers stayed with the deputy-mayor, Jeremiasz Leibowicz, while the Colonel and his closest associates stayed in the pharmacy building of Klara Appel-Brand. A few days later, the Polish troops retreated in the direction of Rzeszów.

The situation changed radically when the Wehrmacht entered the region. Following a series of tortures and persecutions of Jews in the market square, the Germans ordered the establishment of a Jewish Council (Judenrat) on January 25, 1940. Jeremiarz Leibowicz accepted the role of its leader. One of the Council's responsibilities was to supply labor camps with male workers between the age of 12 and 60. The closest camp from Radomyśl was Pustków, near Dębica.

The annihilation of the town’s Jewish population began on July 19, 1942. On this Sunday, any Jews capable of physical labor were sent to the ghetto in Dębica. Other Jews were sent to a labor camp in Mielec, were they worked in an airplane factory. When the Dębica ghetto was liquidated, most of its population would be transferred to Majdanek concentration and extermination camp. The town's remaining Jews (500) – mostly the elderly, children, and the sick – were rounded up at the market square by units of the German SS and the Polish Blue police. They were taken to the Jewish cemetery of Radomyśl on 20 horse-drawn carts. At the
cemetery, where two large ditches were dug earlier, two German executioners awaited their arrival. From morning to night, 500 Jews were ordered to strip naked, pass their clothes and valuables to the Germans, and line up in front of the ditch in groups of 5. They were then shot in the back of the head and thrown into one of the two ditches. Only six Jews were promised survival by deportation to the ghetto in Dębica in return for digging the ditches, arranging the Jewish bodies in layers, and covering them with lime. The Germans did not keep their word and they ordered the remaining group to dig a final ditch, shot them, and ordered three Poles from a nearby house to bury the bodies.73

At the scene of the execution, in the afternoon, one of the two Nazis was reported to have experienced shock from the hundreds of shootings. He sat at a table and had a drink of vodka to steady his nerves. From this position, he shot his next victim. The bullet struck a part of the victim’s spine in such a way that the person was paralyzed and the muscles became stiffened. The victim’s body remained locked in standing position. Dumbfounded, the German ran up to the standing body and fired all emptied all bullets in his rifle’s cartridge. Yet the body remained standing. Terrified, the German threw his rifle and began running off, but his partner stopped him and pushed the standing corpse into the ditch. In order to complete the day’s task, the rattled German had to be replaced by another soldier.

73 The three Poles were Józef Szęszoła, Józef Sabaja, and Andrzej Świątek. Of these six Jews, “Herszel” (or “Hersiek,” no one in Radomyśl can remember his last name) regained consciousness while buried underground and was able to dig himself out. Herszel survived for a period of time by being sheltered by a Pole, Wojciech Grzech, in the village of Dąbie-Zagrody until someone notified the Germans. Grzech’s home was surrounded by the Germans. Grzech and Herszel, along with two other Jews, were shot. The story was retold to Jan Ziobroń by the son of Józef Szęszoła. Dzieje, p. 101.
A few hours later – the story goes – Rudolf Zimmerman, the Nazi police commandant with a reputation for cruelty, arrived at the cemetery with a replacement. He was accompanied by his wife. Among the hundreds of Jews awaiting execution was Klara Appel-Brand, the pharmacy owner. At the graveside, she had disobeyed German orders by refusing to take off her clothes, tore up whatever paper currency she had, and threw her valuables into the grass. For this, she was beaten to the point of losing consciousness. As further punishment, she was to be a “witness to the entire murder of the Radomyśl Jews and to be shot at the very end.” Appel-Brand had known Zimmerman from prior to the war. Zimmerman was a Volkdeutsch from nearby Czermin in Mielec County. She begged him to have pity on her by putting her out of her misery. She could bear no more and wanted to be shot. Zimmerman appeared happy to oblige. After hearing his subordinate’s report, he pulled out his gun and personally shot her on the spot.

The Righteous of Radomyśl Wielki

In Ziobroń’s text, Klara Appel-Brand figures as a sort of Jewish hero and a Polish “patriot.”74 This has lineages to a conception of “Polishness” rooted in the Romantic nationalist tradition – one’s ethnic background was not important as long as one assisted the struggle for an independent Poland. Throughout the text, Ziobroń reminds his readers of the many links that joined the Polish and Jewish communities of Radomyśl. He evokes a number of these figures in reconstructing

lost identities and a forgotten communal camaraderie. The Jews who in some way contributed to Poland’s resistance against the Nazis hold a special place in this narrative. Those who had connections with the Polish community also stand out. Ziobroń is conciliatory in his desire to depict Polish-Jewish relations. It is not entirely known if the facts of the above narrative are accurate, but it is sufficient for the purposes of this essay to examine how certain Jewish identities functioned within the larger Polish narrative of the early 20th century, particularly as this related to the Polish countryside.

In the aftermath of the Jedwabne debate, which opened the door for scholarly treatments of Poland’s “dark history,” Ziobroń’s perspective can be categorized into the “moderate apologetic” tradition of Polish historians toward their own history.75 Polish readers can learn a great deal from his book about the hitherto buried cultural life of their Jewish neighbors in Radomyśl Wielki. Jan Ziobroń has been something of a lone figure in his long-standing commitment to memorialize the life and death of the Jewish community of his home town. A local historian, he is currently the President of the Society of Friends of Radomyśl Wielki, who has brought together many of the former Jewish inhabitants and organized numerous commemorations. In 1985, he initiated plans to commemorate the Jewish cemetery and its victims of July 19, 1942 (he designed the monument himself). Even in his

75 Antony Polonsky and Joanna Michlic list three fundamental categories of perspective toward the “difficult” past: 1) self-critical, 2) moderate apologetic, and 3) radical apologetic. These are also based on Andrzej Paczkowski’s typology. The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland, Antony Polonsky and Joanna Michlic (eds), (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2004), pp. 32-33.
advancing age, he is actively working to commemorate other relics of Jewish life (such as the mikvah) and takes visitors (some from Israel) on guided tours.

Ziobroń lists 4 Poles who received the “Righteous Among the Nations” medal from Yad Vashem for their assistance to Jews:

1. Florian Szczurek from Janowiec – shot for sheltering Jews (medal accepted by his daughter Julia Bielat).
2. Jan and Karolina Kilian and daughter Genowefa Ćwik from Pień (medal accepted to daughter).
3. Stanisław and Maria Pachoł from Zdziarzec (medal accepted by Sylwester Pachoł).
4. Bronisław and Władysław Kryczek from Żarówka (medal accepted by daughter Janina Cichoń).

A total of 3 Poles killed for providing shelter to Jews are listed in the narrative: Florian Szczurek, Wojciech Grzech (for sheltering “Herszel”), and Kazimierz Ziobroń (mentioned in passing for “dying for the Jews”). In the village of Podborze, 23 homes were burned down as punishment, although no one was executed. These constitute positive acts toward sheltering Jews during the German occupation; no significant discussion of negative acts, particularly in terms of numbers, is presented.

76 Dzieje, pp. 62, 64, 93, 101.
77 The Germans punished the town, because someone notified them that Jan and Karolina Dudek were sheltering Szymon (Sima) Siekfriet, his wife, two sons (Leon and Roman), and a daughter. Three motorcars full of Germans armed with machine guns arrived at the house of the village administrator, Michał Pająk, and forced him to point to the residence of the Dudek family. But as someone had warned the Dudek family in advance, the Germans arrived to an empty house. All that remained of the Jews were a few Jewish texts and a sewing machine. The Polish neighbors were interrogated (two were badly beaten and attacked with dogs) and the village administrator was placed against the wall and threatened with execution. The Germans then began burning the 23 houses, starting with the house of the Dudek family. The Dudek family was arrested, but was released when a German colonist (Volkdeutsch) from nearby Goleszów intervened on their behalf. Only the son, Roman, survived the war. Dzieje, pp. 87-89.
Readers will notice the nostalgic nature of Ziobroń’s narrative, which guards against the intrusion of facts which compromise the positive image he creates. He writes, “For ages, coexistence between Jews and Christians in Radomyśl Wielki was favorably disposed and it is still good. Friendships established in former times still continue today.” He traveled to France and Israel to meet with survivors from Radomyśl, as well as hosted a number of them in his home town. He admits that he has little patience for discussions of Polish anti-Semitism in the “mainstream media”:

I am surprised, and I do not think I am alone, when the mainstream media says or writes about Polish anti-Semitism. I am particularly irritated when I hear that outside of Poland there is talk of Polish concentration camps and Poles, who murdered and handed over hiding Jews to the Germans.78

Cherished family anecdotes exert influence on his perspective. Although he was only 5 years of age when the murder of the Radomyśl Jews commenced, he recalled how – in peaceful times - the town’s Jews passed by his window to a local pond as part of a celebration of Yom Kippur and that prior to the war, his neighbors were the Jewish Fajt family. Ziobroń writes warmly of how the Fajts helped shelter his father, a Lieutenant of the Polish Army when Rudolf Zimmerman and the German Gestapo came looking for him, in the early stage of the war.

78 Jan Ziobroń, Dzieje Gminy Żydowskiej w Radomyślu Wielkim (Mielec: Zakład Poligraficzny, 2009). 80-82.
Outside of Memory: Blackmail, Denunciation, and Murder

Yet, the question is permissible of how representative the Ziobroń attitude was to the situation of the Jews. While it might be contrary to the conciliatory tone of a work on the town’s Jewish heritage to discuss aspects that are likely to bring a sense of shame to the current inhabitants, one wonders about the continuity of negative attitudes and acts toward Jews among rural areas of Poland during the war. What can we infer from the statistics? Ziobroń estimates that approximately 250 Jews sought shelter in the countryside, mostly in the villages of Dulcza Mała, Dulcza Wielka, Jamy, and Radgoszcz. When deportation actions were at their height, many Jews from as far as Kraków sought shelter in the woods of Dulecki Forest (*las dulecki*) which ran through these villages.\(^{79}\) When in 1944 the Soviet Army began advancing into Poland, the remaining Jews were trapped in the Dulecki Forest, which was in the hands of the Germans. On November 27, 1944, without any further way of obtaining food, the surviving Jews (numbering 47) decided to cross the front line into lands liberated by the Soviets. When the Germans spotted them, they began firing at them. The disoriented Soviets thought the Jews were advancing Germans and also fired at them. In addition, the Jews entered a minefield in the neutral territory as they crossed into the front. According to Ziobroń, 7 died of wounds in

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\(^{79}\) The author’s family connection to this region and a handed-down anecdote is worth mentioning here. My great grand-mother, Józefa Gancarz, of Dulcza Wielka is said to have sheltered 3 Jewish men from Kraków in the attic of her home. According to this story, Józefa was afraid that someone noticed the Jews and told the men to seek shelter in the house of her female friend down the road (many men were either deported to labor camps or were serving in the Polish Army at this time). Shortly after, the Germans, tipped off by someone, surrounded her friend’s house. The men ran out the back door, but were gunned down by the Germans. The identities of the Jews remain unknown. The story itself is somewhat buried in our family lore, perhaps on account of the fear associated with sheltering Jews after the war. See Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation.*
Soviet hospitals. Thus, it would appear that only 40 survived (this has to be inferred as Ziobroń does not provide an estimate). None of the survivors returned to their native town.

Assuming Ziobroń’s figures are correct, what were the circumstances of the approximately 200 Jews who sought shelter in the area of Ziobroń’s investigation? How exactly were they discovered by the Germans? How does a historian reconstruct the fates of these individuals given the limited base of documentary evidence? First, one place to start is to gage the perceptions of peasant culture toward Jews. The gap can at least be partially filled by a sociological study by Alina Cała that sheds light on the peasant world-view in terms of Polish-Jewish relations. The study is based on questionnaire surveys conducted in 1975-1978 (94 interviews) and 1984 (90 interviews). Although the studies do not pertain specifically to Radomyśl, its focus on southeastern and eastern villages and towns is sufficiently close for our purpose.

On a general level, Cała sees “strangeness” as a significant feature of traditional peasant culture. Jews appeared to occupy a central place in this relatively open category, which could be populated by various explanations and associations. While Polish-Jewish writers such as Julian Tuwim and Antoni Słonimski of the Skamander literary group confronted the rising tide of nationalism and anti-Semitism in the interwar period via various publications, such as Wiadomości

\[80\] Alina Cała, The Image of the Jew in Polish Folk Culture (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1995).

\[81\] Cała’s surveys were conducted in villages and towns of the following provinces: Krosno, Rzeszów, Przemyśl, Zamość, Chełm, Bielsk Podlaski, and Łomza.
such influence did not penetrate the world of peasant culture. The Bund, too, had less success in smaller towns, *shtetls*, and villages. Cała argues that anti-Semitism was really a product of the city that trickled down to towns and villages through printed propaganda. As most peasants were illiterate, cultural information was propagated by “the rural intelligentsia and the small-town ‘elite’: the schoolteacher, apothecary, mayor, and policeman” and “members of the lower-middle class who had to compete with the Jewish shops.” To Cała, anti-Semitism is related to social class:

> The occupations of those who declare anti-Semites were: the director of the local health service, a nurse, a female schoolteacher, a saleslady (whose parent had run a shop), a woman owner of a photo shop, and a retired official.⁸²

Given the people in positions of authority who denounced Jews in the discussion above (policemen, village-heads, and gamekeepers), this gives us a partial understanding of such behavior. Cała provides another link by showing attitudes toward authority figures. She notes a tendency toward authoritarianism, which leads “to the approval of violence and indifference to other people’s wrongs,” as in the following:

> Before the war they [the Jews] ran the show. They were lords. When a Polish policeman in our town killed a two-year-old Jewish child, they really raised a shout! They dragged him through the courts until he received a long jail sentence.⁸³

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⁸² Cała, p. 30-31. Priests are not included in this group, because as a group they represent “very diverse views, ranging from hostility to pietistic philo-Semitism.”

⁸³ Cała, pp. 60-61.
If the peasant world-view was distinct from that of the local “elites,” then it cannot be solely represented by an analysis of the prevalent literature. For this reason, Cała tries to uncover the folk myths that constructed the peasant understanding of their world, particularly conceptions of Jews.

Cała’s interviews reveal deep misunderstandings and confusion on the part of Polish peasants about Jewish culture. Much of it was undoubtedly an extension of the general Polish ignorance in these matters. Most of the interviewed subjects were tone-death to the varieties of Polish-Jewishness. With some individual exceptions, Jewish identity remained locked for Poles in a number of stereotypes. These were primarily rooted in conceptions of what it meant to be a “good Pole.” In many cases, a Jew was “good” in so far as he or she was a “good” and “patriotic” Pole fighting for the independence of Poland. Generally, “bad” Jews are those associated with, or responsible for, Communism. As one half-Ukrainian from Lubaczów remarked to Cała, “A Jew could not be a good Pole. Nor a Pole a Jew. Nor a Ukrainian a Jew.”

Similarly, a woman from Jarosław stated:

A Jew could not be a good patriot. If he were a good patriot, the Germans wouldn’t have killed them. A Jew, each one of them, is a wanderer. I heard about the Wandering Jew, but I never met him.

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84 Cała, p. 41.
85 Cała, ibid. Peasants used explanations of the Holocaust in ways that allowed for a continuity between their “folk” understanding of the world and larger historical events, even years after an event. Another interviewee described the expulsion of Jews in 1968 resulting from the Communist “anti-Zionist” campaign in the following way: “In 1968 they (the Jews) left Poland, for cooperatives had already been set up, a private business man no longer had any life and they couldn’t trade. The Jew can’t live without trade,” Cała, p. 27. In terms of the Holocaust, a similar explanatory mechanism was used by a Polish acquaintance of mine, Jan Tomaszewski, who lived in Radziłów at the time of the destruction of the town’s Jewish community on June 22, 1941. Although he was 8 years old at the time and was not a first-hand witness to the event, he imbibed the town’s collective lore of the pogrom. On this account, the Jews were lined up against a barn, while Poles were given rifles by the Germans with the order to shoot the Jews. When no one on the Polish side wanted to fire, the Jews
A more ambiguous reflection of Jews in the context of Polish culture was articulated by a retired notary from Przeworsk:

One Jewess here pretended to be a Polish woman, she didn’t observe their holidays, only ours – the others had a go at her. A Jew could be a good Pole. I was in German captivity... There were a dozen or so Jewish officers: physicians, lawyers. They had their own feeling of Polishness. They felt themselves Poles of the Mosaic faith like Słonimski, Grydzewski, Bidenthal. They did not make a contribution to Polish culture – this was a break from the Polish spirit... Jewish culture is two thousand years older. A contribution to literature was made by Szymon Askenazy, Marceli Handelsman. Adam Michnik is a Jew, Modzelewski also... We didn’t take up their shrewdness, though.86

It is in the narrative of Poland’s struggle for national liberation that “memorable” Jews such as Klara Appel-Brand – hosting Col. Stanisław Maczek and other military brass from the glorious 10th Cavalry Brigade – find special recognition in the story of Radomyśl during WWII. Jews who didn’t clearly fit this mold, even if assimilated and secular, remained largely invisible and alien.

A second set of sources are the thousands of survivors testimonies deposited from 1945-1947 in the ŻIH archives. A number of these testimonies discuss attempts at survival in Mielc and neighboring Dębica Counties. Helena Aussenberg spent much of her time in the village of Dulcza Mala. For two months, she stayed with a Polish friend, “Kulpa.” When his neighbors began to blackmail him for

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86 Cała, ibid.
sheltering Jews, he was afraid and Aussenberg continued her wandering through the countryside. On two occasions, even Jews who had built bunkers for themselves in forests refused to take Aussenberg in. At one point, “village boys on horseback organized a raid on us.”87 Peasant raids are a common theme of Aussenberg’s testimony. At another point, the local peasants, who “received guns and surrounded us,” shot the Spatz family of 12 and Aussenberg’s father. This hunt lasted until nighttime.88

Michał Pinkas of Dąbrowka, who was 11 years old in 1942, sought shelter with a peasant. At night the peasant was robbed. The next day, he reported the event to the Polish police—he also mentioned that there is a Jew on his property:

One time a farmer let me spend the night, but at night he was robbed. He sent for the police and also let them know that there is a Jew with him. In the morning, they would not let me leave, at every step they guarded me. The police arrived, the farmer led me out.89

However, the young Pinkas was able to escape. Dawid Wasserstrum (8 years old in 1941) how the locals “spied on us and brought the police to the forest.” Wasserstrum’s family kept some belongings with Poles, “but they did not want to return them.” In the final months prior to the entry of the Soviet Army, the Wasserstrums wondered from one peasant household to the next:

87 AŻIH, 301/3215, p. 5.
88 Ziobroń includes another, shorter testimony by Aussenberg from 1945, which he attached to the appendix of his book, but did not discuss its negative aspects. He complains of debates in the mass media of Polish anti-Semitism and of Poles killing and denouncing Jews to the Germans. Although he was only 5 years old at the time of the events, he assures the reader that Polish-Jewish relations were quiet and benign, p. 82-83, 189-194.
89 AŻIH, 301/767, p. 2.
A peasant woman let us stay with us, but either she or the neighbors notified the village-head [wojtą] and he called my mom, but did not do anything and sent her back. Then we left that village and went to another one, to a peasant woman who kept us for three months. Then she chased us out and we were homeless once again. No one wanted to take us in, we walked from house to house and after a long wandering some women took us in.\textsuperscript{90}

Rachela Ladner was initially sheltered by a Pole. She received an “Aryan Kennkarte” and recruited another Pole, “Baran,” to bring her to the train station in Nisko. He did this, but after 30 minutes returned with 4 policemen who arrested her. In jail, she was surrounded by female Polish inmates who “deliberately inspired in me a hatred of life.” In the morning, a policeman escorted Ladner to the Gestapo saying. She survived the remainder of the war in Plaszow concentration camp posing as a Pole. Another survivor, Regina Ladner, recalled how she and her daughters were able to survive with the help of “Dubiel,” a Polish communist they had known prior to the war. Dubiel was able to secure jobs for them under the pretense that they were Polish. Eventually, local Poles denounced Dubiel to the Gestapo and captured him. The village people then assumed that Dubiel was Jewish, because he maintained contacts with the Jews. As a result, “The entire village talked about me, that I am a Jew. One night, the farmer got into an argument with me and said that he is sure that I am a Jew. Instead of disagreeing with him decidedly, I said that if he does not like me, I can leave. After 6 months of work with this farmer, I changed into an unknown person.”\textsuperscript{91} None of these testimonies make it into Ziobroń’s narrative.

\textsuperscript{90} AŻIH, 301/3866.
\textsuperscript{91} AŻIH, 301/2280.
A third body of sources includes postwar trials of both German and Polish perpetrators. My cursory research did not allow me to review the German postwar trials or the Polish trials based on the August decree. However, a compelling lead is provided by a letter from the Jewish Council in Mielec to the Jewish District Committee in Kraków listing 19 cases of suspected collaboration with the Germans in murdering Jews. The document, dated August 11, 1946, sheds light on a fuller scope of attitudes and behaviors toward Jews hiding in the countryside. It raises the question of whether the letter led to bringing the listed individuals to trial. Also, one wonders how often The Jewish Historical Commission was involved in initiating charges of collaboration in the Holocaust, which to me seems unusual. Let us examine its contents. Two of the cases pertained directly to Radomyśl Wielki and its environs:

1. “Two policemen, Lisiewicz and his son, who served in Radomyśl, shot several Jews, who hid themselves during the German occupation. Lisiewicz did it on his own initiative without an order, taking with him his son and teaching him how to hunt. The witnesses Einspruch Wolf and Majer Isler from Radomyśl Wielki depose that they were in Dulecki forest near Radomyśl Wielki and saw how Lisiewicz with his

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92 At this stage, I can only report that 6 cases related to assisting genocide of the Jews are located at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum: 3 pertain to individuals in the county of Dębica and 3 pertain to individuals in the town of Tarnów. Of the Mielec cases, the following is known: 1) Omelański Wincenty (in 1944, in Wola Wielka, the County of Dębica, on his own initiative organized the round-up for Jews), 1945-1951, pp.77, SSKKr 69, 2) Czaja Franciszek, Kramarczyk Franciszek (in 1944, in Wola Wielka, the County of Dębice, participated in the round-ups for Jews and, together with the others, seized two Jews, shot by the Polish police afterwards), 1945-1953, pp.132, SSKKr 288, and 3) Ożóg Józef (in 1943, in the village of Nockowa, the County of Dębica seized a hiding Jew, Motek Szuss and denounced him to Gestapo. Found not guilty), 1945-1946, pp.143 SSKKr 544. Collection RG-15.179M (Acc. 2010.226), Title: Sąd Specjalny Karny w Krakowie (SSKr), Special Penalty Court in Kraków, 1945-1946.

son met one by the name Sziendle Koch with a child and caught them. Sziendle begged him to spare their life and asked for mercy, reminding them of their acquaintance. He answered that today he knows nobody, shot her, her child, and another 3 persons: Chana Koch, Rosenberg Regina and Markus Ferderberg.

2. Stanisław Capiga, from Dąbia near Radomyśl Wielki, denounced to police Ichiel Wind and his sister Faiga, who hid herself at Wójcik in Dąbia near Radomyśl Wielki, he brought policemen, who shot them on the spot. Deposing witnesses: Józef Woliński, son of Stanisław, Doboszcz Józef both from Dąbia near Radomyśl Wielki, County Mielec.94

All cases are situated in Mielec County and a few occur in neighboring Dębica County (in one case, the county is not specified). The 19 cases contain allegations against a total of 27 Poles. According to this document, ethnic Poles are responsible for at least 53 Jewish deaths.95 One imagines that many Jews of the 250 figure provided by Ziobroń (a conservative estimate, it seems to me) perished in such a way. While Ziobroń largely depicts the Germans as the executioners and agents who themselves report to the location of the Jews (“the Germans surrounded the house," “someone alerted the Germans,” etc.), this document reveals a striking degree of independence from direct German authority. At times it is not clear if by “Police" is meant the German or Polish police units, but when the Germans are not mentioned it is likely that the Polish police are in question. If this is the case, then 5 of the 19 cases of denunciations and murders are committed directly by Poles or brought to Polish authorities, while 13 are implemented by the Germans (Niemcy, Gestapo, or Gestapowiec in Polish). Of course in all cases, the denunciations originated with the

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94 ŻIH Letter, Cases no. 17 and 19.
95 The number of Jewish victims is a conservative count. Where phrases such as “many Jews,” “a few Jews,” “several Jews,” “many others,” or simply “Jews” were used, I used a minimum number of 2.
Poles. In 2 cases, neighboring peasants are reported to either have refused to deliver a Jew to the authorities or implored a denouncing Pole to release the Jewish victim. But on numerous occasions, the accused peasants appear to act on their own initiative in denouncing or outright murdering of the Jews. There is little passive reporting to the authorities in the descriptions. In 7 of the 19 instances, Poles actively “took by force,” “violently caught,” “handed over” or “delivered” to the authorities, locked in a “cubby-hole” or “pigsty” until the authorities came, took on a “cart,” “brutally brought to Gestapo,” or “kept” the Jews for several days for the authorities.

In 4 instances, economic exploitation played a clear role in the motivation. Katarzyna Mazurowa “hid a Jewess, Lipka Grubner, from district Mielecki, took all of her property and jewelry and murdered her.”96 Jan Burek of Rydzów denounced a whole family (apparently twice) for sugar, a typical German reward:

During the occupation, a family Frymeta Mansdorf from Rydzów, from Mielec, Rachela Emer and her daughter Gola from Zwojsławie, hid themselves in an empty house in Rydzów. The house was the property of Guzicki from Rydzów. Jan Burek with his father detected them and by force took them to their home, later took a cart and brought to Gestapo. The implorations of their neighbors to release them did not help. He declared that he will receive for them sugar. The son of Frymet Mansdorf who also hid himself in Rydzów got information of this, and released them on the way, but later they were caught again during a manhunt, because Jan Burek denounced them.97

Andrzej Burdza blackmailed a Jewish family and delivered them to the village head (sołtys) when they had no money left:

96 ŻIH Letter, Case no. 1.
97 ŻIH Letter, case no. 6.
On February 1943, Burdza Andrzej from Rzędzianowice, knowing that my mother Rozalia Rosenbaum with two sisters and the youngest brother, hide themselves in the village, when he met one of them, started to blackmail them. When finally they lacked the money to pay themselves off, he entered in the night to an empty barn, where they were all hiding and took them by force to the Sołtys (the head of the village) Stanisław Rusek from Rzędzianowice, who shut them in a cubby-hole for the whole night. My mother on her knees begged him to spare her life, he, ignoring the entreaties, and on the next day in the morning no one from the peasants wanted to carry the family of Rosenbaum to death. Burdza Andrzej himself took horses from Sołtys and carried the victims to Mielec to Gestapo, where they were shot. Sołtys Stanisław Rusek assisted the Germans in exterminating Jews, also Antoni Łącz from Rzędzianowice.98

While material gain is a motive in a number of these, in others the reasons are not clear. Reporting on a Jew when one is seen appears as an automatic response. As in the case of Andrzej Burdza, we see a strange insistence to report the Jews. Descriptions of family units – two brothers, a father and son, husband and wife – destroying the lives of other family units are particularly harrowing. In the fourth example, two brothers rob the Jews before handing them over to the Germans:

Two brothers, Stanisław and Jan Paluch, the sons of Wojciech Paluch from Wola Płańska, were stealing from the Jews the clothes, money and delivering them to the Germans. Many Jews fell from their hands, whom they handed over to the Germans.99

Pre-war family knowledge also figures into many of the deposition summaries. The deposing parties (named in several places) enumerate the accused parties’ genealogies and areas of residence (in some cases down to the street names). In one description, a pre-war relationship, potentially tinged with class antagonism, serves as motivation for denunciation:

98 ŻIH Letter, Case no. 9.
99 ŻIH Letter, Case no. 10.
Józef Wyduch from Mielec, 3rd of May Street, was a helper of the coachman Cytryn Szymon, who hid himself together with his cousin in an empty barn. When Józef Wyduch got wind that his master lives and hides himself, he hurried to Gestapo and informed them, they caught and shot him.\footnote{ŻIH Letter, Case no. 5.}

Finally, the role and attitude of the Polish authorities should be discussed. A significant role in the capture and murder of Jews in the countryside was played by the Blue police (policja), gamekeepers (gajowy), and village-heads (sołtys). Jan Ziobroń mentions that the Germans and the Blue Police acted together in raiding Jewish shelters, partisans, and bandits in the forests. In some cases, the hiding Jews were forced to go into a precarious co-existence with local bands. One such bandit leader, Wojciech Idzik, initially protected the Jews, but when a notorious escapee from prison, “Kosieniak,” joined them, the situation of the Jews deteriorated. It appears that even the Germans had difficulty controlling the band activity under Kosieniak and were desperate enough to persuade a 20-year-old young man from Wola Wadowska, Stanisław Pietras, to kill him.\footnote{Dzieje, p. 64. As Pietras was not given a gun, he used an axe as a weapon. In the middle of the night, Pietras entered the house where Kosieniak and two other bandits were sleeping (after greasing the hinges and sharpening his axe the day before) and massacred all three with the axe. Stanisław Pietras is still alive and is something of a legend in the Radomyśl area.}

Ziobroń also reports that the local gamekeeper from Małec informed on the locations of sheltering Jews. With his help, a total of 30 Jews were caught and shot in a forest called “Koziołek” (bringing the figure to 83 Jews). Many similar raids continued, but they resulted in a diminished number of captured Jews, as Jews who had experience serving in the Polish Army trained the others in covering their
tracks, concealing shelters, making inconspicuous fires, handling weapons, and holding guard duty.  

The village-head in Ziobroń’s narrative appears as an unwilling participant in being forced to give directions to the home of the Dudek family, who sheltered Jews. This may very well have been the case. But the letter to the Jewish District Committee in Kraków includes two negative appearances of the village-head in the context of denunciation. We already saw how the enthusiastic Andrzej Burdza locks the Rosenbaum family and informs sołtys Stanisław Rusek of their location. Together – using the village-head’s horses – they deliver the Jews into the hands of the Mielec Gestapo, where they were killed. The second case involves Jan Smola, the village-head of Bielawy:

Jan Smola, son of Jadwiga, from Bielawy, parish Pilzno, County Dębica, spotted a Jew, Mechl Einspruch, from Bielawy, parish Pilzno, who hid himself before Germans. Jan Smola, who served as sołtys of Bielawy, and served the Germans, drove immediately to the police station in Pilzno, and came with policemen, who shot Mechla Einspruch. That happened in 1942. That deposes Izrael Einspruch, the brother of Mechl, who hid himself in the neighboring village, and succeeded in escaping to the forest.

In summary, Ziobroń’s narrative does not address the negative spectrum of acts committed against the Jews. As a genre of local heritage, it aims to construct a positive image Poles and Jews during the war and to downplay aspects of the war reality that compromise this image. In this light, it is similar to the argument found in Bartoszewski’s Righteous among Nations: a spirit of goodwill and mutual help, not

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102 The leaders of these groups were Jochanan Amsterdam, Abraham Amsterdam, Szyjek Zinger, and Naftali Falt. Dzieje, p. 64.
103 ŻIH Letter, Case no. 16.
anti-Semitism, were the primary features of Polish-Jewish relations during the war. In contrast, I have pointed to a documentary record that reveals evidence of Polish collaboration in the blackmail, denunciation, and murder of Jews in the County of Mielec. This evidence requires corroboration via further archival research, especially by looking into postwar trials based on the “August” decree. It would be worth investigating what effect of the letter to the Jewish District Committee in Kraków. Numerous postwar trials under the “August Decree” of 1944 (the first act of criminal law of the Lublin government, which specified punishment for the crime of collaboration) suggest that a trial might have been held in connection with the above allegations. If a similar trial took place for these suspects, it would be useful to see how the accused justified their actions. We still know relatively little of the peasant world and the impact on it of World War II, especially as it concerns attitudes toward Jews. It would be important to determine the primary political affiliations and influential newspaper circulations of the Poles from this area. Did nationalist and anti-Semitic parties, such as the National Democrats, make inroads in Mielec county and neighboring areas? What were the Polish counterparts to the Jewish youth movements in the 1920s and ’30s?

However, my brief study merely scratches the surface of the documentary record. Ziobroń has looked at much of the evidence – he includes two postwar testimonies from the AŻIH collection (Helena Aussenberg and Herman Amsterdam) – but does not discuss it in any sort of critical fashion. This suggests to me that Ziobroń, like many of the authors discussed above, is selectively using anecdotes to sculpt a pre-existing narrative. The author’s good intentions aside, what is
disturbing is that, although writing in 2009, such “reconstruction” draws on historical tropes that have largely been dismantled, or problematized at best. Finally, as a work committed to the heritage of the Jews of Radomyśl Wielki, Ziobroń’s historical “diplomacy” ultimately performs a disservice to its memory by self-serving inattention to the specific ways in which the Jews of this region, after 500 years of existence, came to a squalid end.
V. Depictions of Rescue Activities in Film

**Andrzej Wajda would like to make a movie about the Ghetto. He says he would use some footage from the archives and have Edelman tell the whole story in front of the camera... He would be speaking at the places where the events he was describing had actually taken place. For instance, next to the bunker at 18 Mila Street (today snow lay there and little boys were sledding)....So that it’s precisely in places like this, and in many others, that Wajda might shoot his movie. Only Edelman says that he would not utter a single word before Wajda’s cameras, because he could tell it all only once.**

– Hanna Krall, *Shielding the Flame*

**Overview**

In order to examine the continuum of representation, I will now extend this study to artistic depictions of rescue in feature films. Certain films, such as Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, Wajda’s *Korczak*, and Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*, have influenced the development of Polish-Jewish relations. In a review of *Shoah*, Jan Karski, wrote that the film is “unquestionably the greatest movie about the tragedy of the Jews that has appeared after the war.”¹⁰⁴ Karski wrote that the film was unique in its genre: “No one has managed to present the destruction of the Jews during World War II in such depth, with such blood-curdling brutality and lack of mercy for the viewer.” However, in not showing how “people, ordinary people, millions of people sympathized with the Jews or provided assistance,” he believed that the film suffered from a “self-limitation.” What was now needed was

a movie that will present a second reality of the Holocaust. Governments, social organizations, churches, people of talent and heart should find a form of cooperative effort in order to produce such a movie. Not in order to contradict that which Shoah shows but to complement it.105

As difficult it is to disagree with a noble personage such as Karski, I argue that in terms of Polish-Jewish relations, Shoah is a unique in the history of film precisely because it broke with the well-worn depictions of rescue. Like the popular historical representations examined in the previous sections, film treatments that preceded it (and others that would follow) were largely constrained and shaped by similar ideological considerations. As argued previously, scholarly ventures into the terrain of rescue activities rarely returned with negative tidings about wartime behavior. In terms of the question of wartime assistance, the state of affairs was opposite to that suggested by Karski. For the most part, films followed the development of historical writing. Yet some films challenged the accepted paradigm of rescue, although these went largely unnoticed.

This section will discuss the artistic representation of rescue in three feature films: Andrzej Wajda’s Samson (1961), Agnieszka Holland’s Bitter Harvest (1985), and Krzysztof Kieślowski’s Decalogue, Part 8 (1988). The reason for selecting these is that each one deals substantially and thematically with the subject of rescue of Jews by Poles. I believe that each film opens a window to the mentalité of the time

105 Liebman, Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah: Key Essays. 174.
vis-à-vis the question of rescue. Further, their release dates, 1961 to 1988, roughly span the period under investigation.\textsuperscript{106} Let us proceed.

\textbf{Samson: The Universal Victim of Communist Ideology}

Perhaps the first attempt at representing rescue in a feature film was Andrzej Wajda’s \textit{Samson} \textsuperscript{107} (1961). It was certainly “the first sustained address of ‘the Jewish question’” in the director’s ouvre.\textsuperscript{108} Wajda is unquestionably Poland’s leading director who established his artistic credentials with a trilogy of war films: \textit{A Generation} (\textit{Pokolenie}) (1954), \textit{Canal} (\textit{Kanal}) (1956), and \textit{Ashes and Diamonds} (\textit{Popiól i diament}) (1958). Wajda, who trained with director Aleksander Ford, soon became affiliated with the “Polish Film School,” an informal group of Polish film directors and screenplay writers active between 1955 and 1963, which was heavily influenced by the Italian realists. Working under Communist censorship, these artists found various means of opposing the guidelines of Socialist Realism, whose purpose was to further the goals of Socialism and Communism. Wajda made his reputation as a sensitive chronicler of Poland’s political and social history, often powerfully drawing out its tragic dimensions.

\textit{Samson} was an adaptation of the 1948 novella of the same title by the Polish-Jewish writer Kazimierz Brandys. The story was based on true events and both

\textsuperscript{106} A number of potentially relevant films were not available to me through the library system in the US. In particular, Janusz Kidawa’s documentary \textit{The Righteous} (\textit{Sprawiedliwi}) (1968), released in the midst of the “anti-Zionist” campaign in Poland would have been useful for analysis.

\textsuperscript{107} Andrzej Wajda, \textit{Samson}, (Facets Video, 2004), Videorecording (DVD).

Brandys and Wajda co-wrote the screenplay. The film’s protagonist, Jakub Gold (played by French actor Serge Merlin\(^{109}\)), is imprisoned during interwar Poland for the accidental manslaughter of a member of a nationalist and anti-Semitic gang of students. His friend and mentor in prison is Pankrat (Tadeusz Bartosik), a Communist—in line with Communist ideology, the only sympathetic and human voice in the film. During the war, he finds himself in the Warsaw ghetto. After his mother dies, he escapes and spends the remaining war years hiding on the “Aryan” side. He meets Lucyna (Alina Janowska), a young Jewish woman who also hides among the Warsaw population, but by assuming an “Aryan” appearance and mingling with Warsaw’s middle-class. Lucyna falls in love with Jakub, who briefly stayed with her. However, Jakub runs away from her apartment. When she believes that he has returned to the Ghetto, she resigns herself to the Gestapo with the words: “Ich bin Jüdin” [I am a Jewess]. Afterwards, Jakub is taken in by another prison cell-mate from the interwar perios, Józef Malina (Jan Ciecierski), who provides shelter in the cellar of the house. Malina’s niece, Kazia (Elżbieta Kępińska), falls in love with Jakub and deceives him about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Ghetto’s demise. Overwhelmed by the news and his guilt, Jakub flees the cellar and is taken in by a resistance group affiliated with the Communist People’s Army (Armia Ludowa), where he reunites with the friendly Pankrat. When the Germans raid the hiding place of the group, Jakub – in a symbolic act of the Biblical Samson – brings part of the building down, killing himself and his enemies.

\(^{109}\) Wajda sought a Jewish actor from Poland, but could not find one. Ibid., 163.
The film’s treatment of the Jewish theme was in line with Communist ideology. The postwar Stalinist regime was interested in painting prewar democratic Poland with a broad brush of anti-Semitism, nationalism, fascism, and capitalism. It also sought to elevate the role of the People’s Army and to downplay the significance of the Home Army, which in fact played a dominant role in the resistance movement. This set of political priorities was reflected in the film’s willingness to shine a light on the growing nationalism and anti-Semitism of prewar Poland, whose strength mounted from 1935-1939. The film opens with a depiction of the university environment, characterized by an atmosphere of *numerus clausus* and separate benches for Jewish students:

NARRATOR: He did not know that hatred was growing in those days. He did not feel its dark touch. He arrived equipped with school knowledge of human brotherhood. He didn’t think he was any different from the others. So far, he had no friends, but maybe he would have one someday. All that united them, or should have united them, the books they read, the heroes’ names, the land where they were born. He waited to hear their words to him...

CROWD: Beat the Jew!

Likewise, the attitude of people on the ‘Aryan’ side is largely hostile. When Jakub enters a building with a temporary Polish companion, Jakub’s ‘typically Jewish’ face alienates him from the population at large. Even his ‘friend’ turns on him:

COMPANION: You can’t stay here.  
JAKUB: Tell me what to do.  
COMPANION: You knew what you had to do on the other side of the wall!  
WOMAN: Let him go back across the wall!  
JAKUB: I can’t make it alone...  
WOMAN: Just look at yourself in the mirror and you’ll understand why he can stay and you can’t.
The film is heavy-handed in seeking to prove that only the Communists and the People’s Army were sympathetic to the Jews. We are also shown two representations of blackmailers. A common motif, or stylization, is the bickering “blackmailing couple,” which we will see repeated in other films. After word gets around that a Jew is hiding in the area, the couple appears searching for Jakub:

WOMAN: Well?
MAN: He’s not there. I searched the whole apartment. There’s no sign of the Jew.
WOMAN: You let them trick you.
MAN: I searched under the bed, and in the bed.
WOMAN: The bed…the bed is your specialty!
MAN: I looked in the closet!
WOMAN: Nobody hides the Jews for free! You can charge good money for this.

Wajda uses a similar trope in Holy Week (Wielki Tydzień)⁹⁹ (1995). In both cases, the domineering and scolding woman takes the lead in pushing the man to find or report a Jew. This suggests a particular stylization of historical representation. In Holy Week, when such a woman, Pani Piotrowska (Bożena Dykiel), realizes that a Jewish woman, Irena Lilien (Beata Fudalej), is being hidden by the Malecki family, she expresses her opinion to Anna Malecka (Magdalena Warzecha): “Everyone values their own life. One does not tolerate this abuse [the German occupation] so that, with all due respect, to die for the Jews.” Her anger at that the sheltered a Jewish woman increases when she realizes that her husband, Józef Piotrowski (Cezary Pazura), is attracted to Irena. She decides to report the Jew to the owner of the apartment complex:

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⁹⁹ Andrzej Wajda, Wielki Tydzień (Holy Week), (Poland: Heritage Films; Telewizja Polska; Canal Plus, 1995).
PIOTROWSKA: Am I supposed to wait with my hands folded until they [the Germans] destroy all of us for one of those? Oh no! I will not go to the Gestapo. I don’t want to have someone else’s blood on my conscience. Someone else will do it….If I’m not back in 15 minutes, take the cake out of the oven and mix the bigos.

In Samson, another blackmailer is shown after Jakub leaves the cellar and wonders around Warsaw. In Holy Week, the szmalcownik is portrayed in a vaguely criminal way, waiting under a bridge and pouncing on his Jewish prey:

BLACKMAILER: [pushing Jakub around] Well, dead man, no deal? You prefer the Germans? I know you have some money...
GROUP OF MEN: [indifferently observing] He’s a Jew catcher. He’s caught a Jew and wants to skin him alive.

This representation reinforces the argument made by historians in the postwar period that acts of blackmail and denunciation were only perpetrated by criminal elements—or “dregs”—of society, outside of the healthy body of society. It is interesting that while the Communist narrative sought to construct a monolithic anti-Semitic Poland, in this instance—by combining elements of nationalism and Communism—this representation rehabilitated the national image.
A number of writers have criticized the film’s construction of Jakub’s Jewishness. In fact, there is really nothing Jewish about the character of Jakub Gold. His meandering metamorphosis transforms him from universal victim to universal hero. He remains essentially a symbol, and a Christian one at that: his self-sacrifice is understood as redeeming the suffering of all innocent people. The final scene captures the universalist elements of his suffering:

NARRATOR: That will be the moment of your strength, the moment of your salvation. You shall shake the columns and bring your oppressors to their knees, for the death of the innocent, for all the evil you were made to suffer. Shake the columns!
Omer Bartov argues that the film makes the ‘Jew’ into a hero by “transforming him out of his Jewishness.” According to him, the film adds to the underlying biblical story of Samson and Delilah a “Catholic tinge” with “communist bravado.” Bartov sees Wajda as aiming to equate Polish suffering with Jewish suffering:

This is a running theme in Wajda’s films, namely, not only that Poles suffered under the Germans just as badly as the Jews, and that Poles helped Jews more than the Jews are willing to concede, but also that such help often entailed further tragedy for the Poles. Linking Polish suffering to Jewish suffering by way of showing the former helping the latter, and often showing the Jews’ ingratitude to the Poles, their indifference to Polish victimhood, and even their urge for revenge, is part of the discourse on the German occupation and the Holocaust. In this sense, Wajda reflects—through a variety of transformations dating back to postwar Stalinism, the “Thaw,” martial law, and finally post-communism—his nation’s sentiments, engagement, and apologetics about the fate of Polish Jewry.

In my view, Bartov is right about the general discourse of apologetics, but at the same time Wajda shows himself to be open to questioning this narrative. For example, in Wajda’s Holy Week, nationalistic elements sympathetic to Hitler’s destruction of Jews are openly shown in Zaleski:

ZALESKI: Of course, I know that to some ears this may sound...But remember what there was before the war. How did our streets look? This is why I am telling you that in this one aspect, we can be thankful to Hitler. He removed for us a difficult, and maybe even painful, dark job. Now there will virtually be no Jewish question. If Hitler didn’t do this, we would’ve had to handle the elimination of the Jews ourselves. And only after the war, of course. And all so-called “humanitarian” questions simply do not apply here. Poland must be free of the Jews! It is our national right. What is more, I have no reason to have pity on the Jews. They do not have any pity for us. If the Jews were in power, they would show us what they are capable of. Am I not right, Mr.

112 Ibid., 150.
Malecki?
MALECKI: Well, I have not heard the entire discussion, but the things that you are saying are nothing new.
ZALESKI: Of course! For some time now, the Polish nation is beginning to understand who the Jews really are.
MALECKI: Such opinions were very popular before the war among our fascists.
ZALESKI: You wanted to say “National Democrats” [narodowcow]
MALECKI: Isn’t it the same?
ZALESKI: No! I’m sorry...We know very well in what circles there is an attempt to discredit us as “fascists.” But after the war we will explain to the gentlemen [Panom] our differences.
MARTA: In concentration camps?
ZALESKI: Yes. If it will be necessary, then yes, precisely there. We will show the Jews and the Communists who we are.

_Bitter Harvest: Toward a Realism of Rescue_

The 1980s included a number of treatments of Polish rescue. An important contribution is _Angry Harvest (Bittere Ernte)_ (1985), by Agnieszka Holland. The film is based on a novel of the same title published in 1958. It was written by Hermann Field (a Massachusetts architect) and Stanislaw Mierzenski (a Polish journalist), while the two were imprisoned by the Polish government in the early 1950s.113 _Angry Harvest_ tells the story of Leon Wolny (Armin Mueller-Stahl), a local peasant, who shelters a Jewish woman, Rosa Eckart (Elisabeth Trissenaar). Rosa, her husband, and child are in a wagon headed for a concentration camp. As the train is passing through Silesia, Rosa jumps off and becomes separated from her husband. Leon, a middle-aged bachelor, finds Rosa in the woods and takes her in. Eventually,

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romantic feelings develop between the two. However, the relationship disintegrates when Leon’s sexual exploitation and insistence that Rosa convert in order for them to marry. The opportunistic Cybulski (Wojciech Pszoniak) appears throughout with schemes of profiting from the spoils of Jewish property. Herr Rubin (Klaus Abramowsky), a local Jew who owned a jam factory before the war, comes out of hiding begging Leon to buy his orchard for $1,000 (a fraction of its real value) so that he can pay his “rescuers” money for continued shelter. Leon refuses knowing that Rubin will eventually be caught and he will find a way to take over the orchard.

When keeping Rosa around loses appeal for Leon and the opportunity to marry up with Frau Kaminska (Tilly Lauenstein) presents itself, he tells Rosa to go to another shelter, which he has arranged for her. Seeing no way out of the situation, Rosa commits suicide in her cellar and Leon buries the body in a shallow grave in the same cellar underneath his house. Rosa’s real husband and Rubin’s daughter, Tuwa Rubin (Malgorzata Gebel), appear looking for Rosa. Leon lies that Rosa left a weeks ago, but in a pang of conscience, gives Tuwa $1,000 (in reality, compensating her for the orchard). In a twist of irony, the money saves Tuwa and Rosa’s husband’s lives and they move to New York. In a letter to Leon written after the war, Tuwa regards Leon as their savior: “I will never forget what a good man you are and that you saved our lives with the money. I will always tell my children about that.”

The director, Agnieszka Holland, was born in Poland in 1948 to a Catholic mother and Jewish father. She graduated from the Prague Film and TV Academy (FAMU) in 1971 and emerged from the milieu of directors, such as Andrzej Wajda, Krzysztof Zanussi, and Krzysztof Kieślowski, often collaborating with them. Unlike

*Angry Harvest* arguably represents the most critical approach to the subject at the time. Not surprisingly, it was a West German production. The 1980s were a time in Poland when the momentum of the Solidarity movement created an opening for exploring aspects of Polish history that were suppressed by Communist propaganda and scholarship. Unlike the socially “flat” depiction of rescue found in *Samson*, *Angry Harvest* addresses complex sociological, psychological, and moral aspects, which are only beginning to be unpacked by historians in the last 10 years.114 The world inhabited by Leon Wolny and the others is devoid of noble, heroic, or altruistic action. The audience enters a world of economic opportunism and scheming created by the vacuum of the Jewish community. Cybulkowski weaves in and out of the narrative with shady ways of adapting to the new “opportunities”:

LEON: But the right of ownership will always be Rubin’s.
CYBULKOWSKI: But there won’t be a Rubin anymore.
LEON: Why not? They say that he lives well-hidden?

114 Perhaps as a sign of the growing interest in rescue activities in Europe and the ongoing debate in Poland, Holland is currently directing another film *In Darkness (Ukryci)* (2011), which deals with the sheltering of Jews in Lviv. The story concerns Leopold Socha (Robert Więckiewicz), a small-time thief in Lviv, who sheltered a number of Jewish men, women, and children in the sewer system of Lvov for a year, before he was killed as a result of these activities.
CYBULKOWSKI: It’s sad to say, but they’ll catch them all. That’s for sure.

In this depiction, class emerges as a powerful agent in the peasant’s motivations. Leon uses prewar class relations to explain (or justify) his refusal to help Rubin:

LEON: Before the war, he [Rubin] was a big man in this region. He had a jam factory in the orchard. His daughter went to the high school. He sent his son to university. He rarely greeted me. Rarely. But now they all come to me, to Leon Wolny.... LEON: We were very poor. As a child, I didn’t even own any shoes. People always made me feel that I was just the son of a stable boy. All of them. All. Rubin, too. Especially Rubin. They despised me, because I had a different background. They thought that I was only interested in money, that I was a greedy farmer. But I know that if I didn’t have money, I would remain a nothing, a nobody.

Just as Leon looks down upon the Jew fallen from wealth, he looks up to Miss Eugenia Kaminska, a symbol of femininity to which he is attracted: “When I was a stable boy, I didn’t dare talk to her [Miss Kaminska], and today she can feel glad that I receive her.” In fact, hiding Rosa in his cellar provides opportunities for sexual advances undreamed of with Miss Kaminska. As he drunkenly gropes Rosa’s body, he says, “You know what the difference is between you two? I wouldn’t dare do this with Eugenia.”

Yet the film suggests that the biggest source of conflict was aroused by religion:

115 In the novel, the problem of marrying a “Jewess” is more developed: “it would be impossible to stay on here with her after the war. People would laugh at him for having married a Jewess; they’d say he hadn’t been able to get any other woman any more, or, worse still, that he had been forced to marry her....of course she would have to come over to the true faith,” Field and Mierzenski, Angry Harvest: 178; Jan Grabowski, „Chcę nadmienić, że nie byłem uświadomiony i wykonywałem zadanie jako żołnierz Armii Krajowej.” O wymordowaniu ukrywających się pod Raclawicami Żydów przez kompanię miechowskiej AK (“I want to mention that I was not instructed, but completed my task as a soldier of the Home Army.” The Murder of Jews Hiding in Raclawice by the Miechów Home Army Company) ” Holocaust. Studies and Materials (Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały) 6(2010): 207-31; Alina and Jakub Petelewicz Skibińska, "The Participation of Poles in Crimes Against Jews in the
LEON: It’s a disgrace not to know the Gospel.
ROSA: And you don’t know the Old Testament. That’s the origin of the faith. You speak with contempt about the Jewish faith even though it’s the basis of your religion. The Jews are the older brothers of your pagans.
LEON: Are you crazy!? What pagans?!
ROSA: What? You were pagans. All gentiles were pagans.
LEON: The Jews crucified our Jesus Christ!
ROSA: Your Jesus Christ was a Jew! A Jewish messiah, if you really want to think of it that way. The apostles were Jews. Your Holy Virgin Mary was also a Jew....[ironically] Jesus’ suffering. We Jews today have hundreds of innocent martyrs.
LEON: Shut your mouth!
ROSA: What right do you have to demand that I renounce my faith?
LEON: What right do you have to compare Jesus Christ to your Jewish riffraff?

It is not clear on what basis, experience, or anecdotes the two writers composed the story. But what makes the novel striking from the point of view of the historiography is that, although written in the 1950s, it addressed aspects of rescue that emerged only in the wake of the Jedwabne debate. Some scholars have documented cases of power dynamics between rescuer and rescued that led to rape, murder, and burial of Jews on the rescuer’s property. Jan Grabowski wrote that in the countryside, the practice of burying “rescued” Jews on the same property as a form of punishment for aiding Jews bordered on a “protocol”:

It should be mentioned that murdered Jews [who were denounced by Poles] were buried in Polish villages in various locations and there was a certain protocol tied to it. From a very general point of view, the distance of the site of burial from the house was inversely related to the trust enjoyed by shelterers in the village community. In cases of people “caught in the act” of sheltering Jews, the victims were ordered to bury the bodies in direct proximity to the house. In extreme cases,
corpses were buried underneath the clay floor [pod klepiskiem],\textsuperscript{116} in the house, as “punishment.” Sometimes murdered Jews were buried under windows. This constituted an expression of deep disapproval of the collective community for Poles who hid Jews.\textsuperscript{117}

Whether this is a remarkable coincidence of fact between a historian and two fiction writers remains unclear, but the moral significance remains striking.\textsuperscript{118}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{birthplace.png}
\caption{Against the historiographic current. Pawel Łoziński’s documentary, \textit{Birthplace (Miejsce Urodzenia)} (1992). The protagonist, writer Henryk Grynberg, learns that his father, Abram, was brutally killed by two peasants in order to take Abram’s cow, which was kept with peasants. Over fifty years after his father’s murder, Grynberg was able to draw on the locals’ knowledge and locate his father’s body.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{116} Klepisko refers to beaten clay used as a ground floor in the houses of poorer peasants.

\textsuperscript{117} Grabowski, ” „Chcę nadmienić, że nie byłem uświadomiony i wykonywałem zadanie jako żołnierz Armii Krajowej.” O wymordowaniu ukrywających się pod Racławicami Żydów przez kompanię miechowskiej AK [”I want to mention that I was not instructed, but completed my task as a soldier of the Home Army.” The Murder of Jews Hiding in Racławice by the Miechów Home Army Company] ”.

\textsuperscript{118} Pawel Łoziński’s documentary film \textit{Birthplace (Miejsce Urodzenia)} (1992) belongs to this grim genre that deals with the negative spectrum of behavior toward Jews in the Polish countryside. The camera tracks the return from the United States of author Henryk Grynberg, who wants to uncover the circumstances of his father’s death, when he sought shelter among the Polish peasants during the occupation. Grynberg discovers that his father, Abram, was killed by two Polish peasants in order to take possession of his father’s cow. At the end of the film, Grynberg meets one of the perpetrators and, with the help of local peasants, is able to locate and dig up his father’s remains. Filmed in 1991, the documentary was ahead of the historical curve in terms of what historians and the public was prepared to accept. Thus, the film was largely ignored. In many ways, \textit{Birthplace} belongs in the 2010s as scholars grimly confront the “Unrighteous.”
Decalogue 8: Rescue as Ethical and Existentialist Hell

Part 8 of Krzysztof Kieślowski’s TV mini-series Dekalog (Decalogue)119 (1988) was another important treatment of rescue in the 1980s. Early in his career, Kieślowski was known in Poland for his documentaries. The documentary style can be seen in his later fictional films. His commercially most successful films were The Double Life of Véronique (La double vie de Véronique) (1990), starring Irène Jacob, and the trilogy Three Colors (Blue, White, Red), which explores the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity symbolized by the French flag. Dekalog consists of ten one-hour films, each of which represents one of the Ten Commandments and their meanings within an interconnected fictional story set in modern Poland. Kieślowski and co-writer Krzysztof Piesiewicz used the story of Jewish rescue as a vehicle to examine the biblical commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." It tells the story of Elżbieta (Teresa Marczewska), who is researching the fate of Jewish survivors. She is visiting from New York and sits in on a lecture on ethics at the University of Warsaw, given by Zofia (Maria Kociałkowska). Elżbieta offers a moral dilemma to the class, which involves a Catholic couple, who has agreed to rescue a six-year-old Jewish girl from the Warsaw ghetto. When the Jewish girl and her caretaker arrive at the couple's apartment, the offer is turned down. The students are left to speculate about the possible motivations for the sudden refusal to take in the Jewish girl. It turns out that Zofia is the woman who turned down the girl. After the lecture, Elżbieta approaches Zofia and tells her that she is the Jewish girl. As Zofia explains the reason for this is apparent cowardice (someone had

betrayed Zofia's husband who was active in the underground and any Jewish child would have fallen into the hands of the Gestapo), her long-standing sense of guilt is cleared and Elżbieta's faith in humanity (and God?) is restored.

This episode is unique in that it treats the question of rescue not from a historical—but a deeply moral and existentialist—point of view, a hallmark of Kieślowski's films. The classroom setting reinforces the validity of each point of view in this “ethical hell” (the theme of the day’s class). According to Elżbieta, the decision of the couple to refuse the child must have been based solely on the tenets of Catholicism: “they cannot bring themselves to lie on behalf of the One they believe in, who orders them to be charitable, but forbids false witness. The false witness
they were about to commit consciously was incompatible with their principles.” On the other hand, other students continue along this abstract path:

FEMALE STUDENT: The motivation seems impossible. If they were true Catholics, such witnessing wouldn’t have been dishonest.
ELŻBIETA: It’s the only motivation I know, the evening seemed real enough.
ZOFIA: What other motivation could there be? What do you think?
ELŻBIETA: I do not know. I don’t understand. I can’t envisage any motivation justifying such a decision.
MALE STUDENT: Fear. If an hour earlier a Jewish child had been found in the house, its brains bashed out against a railing on the steps, and the family which hid it shot in the courtyard.
ELŻBIETA: Fear, yes. Do you think fear justifies it?
MALE STUDENT: I’m just suggesting a motive, not a judgment.

This philosophical treatment is both a strength and a weakness of the film. On the one hand, it shows some of the genuine ethical dilemmas involved in the question of rescue under the occupation. On the other hand, Decalogue contains universal stories for a universal audience. For this reason, the film’s abstract way of dealing with the subject borders on a tendency to overgeneralize the historical specificity. Needless to say, we now know that the spectrum of motivation for rescue ranged from humanitarianism to pure profit and exploitation, and some historians have argued that the latter constituted the majority of cases.
Conclusion

The above feature films represent a certain social history. Andrzej Wajda’s films, *Samson* and *Holy Week*, show a pattern of stylization in its treatment of blackmail and anti-Semitism. They show how, despite the emphasis on portraying prewar Poland as a monolithically fascist, anti-Semitic, and nationalistic, the Communist representation of wartime reality enabled the rehabilitation of the view that most Poles behaved nobly and heroically during the war. In *Samson*, only marginal criminal groups (which can be found in every society) were shown to be responsible for ant-Jewish behaviors. The Jewish characters are related by their general dependence on their rescuers and a lack of resourcefulness. Jewish women,
too, are stylized to a certain extent. In *Holy Week* and *Angry Harvest*, they are depicted as attractive, free-thinking, sophisticated, upper-class women (usually shown smoking a cigarette).

The films of the 1980s approached the subject from a different point of view. As Communist ideology was weakening its hold on the public and historical imagination during the growing strength of the Solidarity movement, film directors took the opportunity to explore Polish-Jewish relations from a non-ideological point of view. Kieślowski’s existentialist treatment in *Decalogue 8* mirrored the undercurrent of guilt connected with the question of rescue. It moves away from a historical treatment to a philosophical discussion that, on some level, distorted the historical specificity. Agnieszka Holland, on the other hand, although basing herself on a work of fiction written in the late 1950s, explored various social and cultural issues bound up with the history of Polish-Jewish relations. However, as the film was produced by a German company where the protagonists were understood as ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*), the film was not able to challenge the dominant perspectives embedded in the historiography. While each director pushed the boundaries of the theme in his own way, the films remained bound within deep-rooted categories of viewing rescue.
VI. Final Conclusion

In the current debate on Polish-Jewish relations, a common criticism of works on the “negative” spectrum of Polish behavior is that such depictions are “one-sided.” Writers who deal with this aspect are expected to show the “full” picture by “balancing” the discussion with noble and humanitarian acts of rescue. In light of the deep-rooted historiographical tendencies discussed in this paper, the exact opposite is the case. Writing on the subject in the last 65 years has been fundamentally concerned with the “positive” cases, yet charges of historical omission were never made. Thus, writers (usually researchers of the Polish Center for Holocaust Research) who finally carry out studies of blackmailing, paid help, and denunciation are beginning to dramatically break with previous limitations. At the same time, the historian David Engel criticizes the work of these scholars as not being sufficiently in conversation with the international community writing about the Holocaust.¹²⁰ Engel argued that the work remained self-absorbed and provincial in as much as it addressed a Polish audience. However, given the deep-rooted tendencies discussed above and their ability to return despite new findings, the criticism seems to me unfair. As the borderlands seep into the mainstream of memory, Poland will have to make a full reckoning with its past before it can look abroad.

The historical and public discussion on rescuers in Poland reflects Europe’s larger question it is asking itself about the kind of society it wants to become and the kinds of historical lessons it wants to sustain. In the case of Poland, rescuers have been viewed through two competing visions of historical inquiry and civic democratic responsibility. The aftermath of the publication of *Neighbors* revealed the crystallization of these two tendencies. Yet Gross, despite serving as the messenger of bad tidings and absorbing the abuse that this role evoked, remained optimistic: “We have reached a threshold at which the generation, raised in Poland with freedom of speech and political liberties, is ready to confront the unvarnished history of Polish-Jewish relations during the war.” Over 10 years later, with rescuers increasingly politicized, one can only hope that when the story of rescue will not be used as bandage for national wounds, but will be remembered it in its full “unvarnished” reality.
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