

# Holocaust survivors: A demographic overview

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## **Abstract**

Jews were an integral part of society in the Second Polish Republic. They had lived in the Polish lands for centuries, while remaining religiously, linguistically and culturally distinct. Some members of this community showed a tendency towards assimilation and acculturation. The co-existence of Poles and Jews was disrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War and the German occupation. The Germans strove to annihilate all Jews regardless of age or sex. Their policies resulted in the death of over 2.7 million Jews, pre-war citizens of the Second Polish Republic. Although 70 years have passed since the end of the Second World War, discussions still continue among historians as to the number of Jewish victims and survivors. Attempts are made to arrive at precise figures, insofar as this is possible. The aim of the article is to discuss findings to date and to highlight the problems encountered by scholars trying to estimate the percentage of Polish Jews who survived the German occupation. To illustrate the methodological difficulties, I use the example of the Jewish community of Kraków and the demographic changes that it underwent.

The military campaigns of the Second World War and the period of German and Soviet occupation caused changes in the ethnic structure of the Polish state. The multicultural, multiethnic and multid denominational Second Polish Republic became a thing of the past. As a consequence of the occupier's policies, 2.7 million Jews, pre-war citizens of Poland, lost their lives (Stankowski, Weiser, 2012, p. 38). Although over 70 years have passed since the end of the Second World War, historians are still trying to estimate the precise number of Jews killed. However, due to numerous limitations, especially the unavailability of sources, including those relevant to the demographics of the occupation period, scholars face a whole range of methodological problems.

### Research Landscape

The question of how many Polish Jews survived the Second World War and how Polish-Jewish relations unfolded during this period remains of interest to scholars and will surely continue to spark interest for a long time, not least due to the fact that many aspects of these relations remain unknown. The problem of the loss of Jewish life during the Holocaust has been examined, i.a., by Michał Borwicz, Teresa Prekerowa, Lucjan Dobroszycki, Józef Marszałek, Grzegorz Berendt, Albert Stankowski and Piotr Weiser, Elżbieta Rączy, and Jacek Leociak (Borwicz, 1981; Prekerowa, 1992; Dobroszycki, 1994; Marszałek, 1994; Berendt, 2009; Stankowski, Weiser, 2012; Rączy, 2014; Kalisz, Rączy, 2015; Podhorizer-Sandel, 1959; Leociak, 2006, 2009), and by different authors (for selected counties) in the book *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* (Engelking, Grabowski, 2018). The subject has also been investigated by scholars dealing with the Holocaust in the countryside (Engelking, Leociak, Libionka, 2007; Sitarek, Trębacz, Wiatr, 2012; Engelking, Grabowski, Ski-bińska, 2011).

On the other hand, the portrayal of relations between Poles and Jews in postwar historiography has been discussed, i.a., by Michael C. Steinlauf, Natalia Aleksium, Dariusz Libionka, Piotr Forecki and Elżbieta Rączy (Steinlauf, 2001; Aleksium, 2005; Libionka, 2008; Forecki, 2010; Rączy, 2017). Especially important in this context is a text by Dariusz Libionka, discussing major publications on Polish aid to Jews, including works by Tatiana Berenstein and Adam Rutkowski, Szymon Datner, Władysław Bartoszewski, Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, Stanisław Wroński and Maria Zwolakowa, Marek Arczyński, Teresa Prekerowa, Waclaw Zajaczkowski, and Jan T. Gross (Berenstein, Rutkowski, 1960, 1963; Datner, 1968, 1970; Bartoszewski, Lewinówna, 1969; Iranek-Osmecki, 1968; Wroński, Zwolakowa, 1971; Arczyński, Balcerak, 1979; Prekerowa, 1982; Zajaczkowski, Sheerin, 1988; Gross, 2000). Libionka also outlines the research and educational activities of the Main Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes

in Poland, the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy [Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację] and the Institute of National Remembrance [Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – IPN].

One of the factors that have had a significant effect on research into Jewish losses and Polish-Jewish relations during the war is the instrumental treatment of these topics under communism. For various of reasons (mostly political), most of the research done during this period focused on Polish assistance to Jews, broadly speaking, with a prominent tendency to overestimate both the number of victims and of those who received assistance (Libionka, 2008, pp. 18–25; Steinlauf, 2001, pp. 59–92; Forecki, 2010, pp. 13–105; Trojański, 2018, pp. 4–13). Information regarding the number of people murdered at KL Auschwitz, once estimated to have been as many as 4–5 million, has now been verified, with recent estimates putting the minimum figure at 1.1 million victims, including around 960,000 European Jews (Piper, 1992, pp. 60 ff.; Leociak, 2009, p. 53; Trojański, 2018, pp. 4–13). Similarly imprecise (usually exaggerated) data regarding the number of victims were once presented for the other camps, including the Aktion Reinhardt camps (Madajczyk, 1970; Arad, 1987; Kobilec, 1993; Kiełkowski, 1981; Cebulski, 2016; Leociak, 2009). Individual stories had been described as early as the 1940s and 1950s and attempts had been made to highlight the activity of organizations like the Żegota Council to Aid Jews. Popular and academic publications on similar topics intensified during the Thaw of 1956 and the anti-Semitic campaign of 1968. The “anti-Zionist” campaign of 1967–1968 led to an even deeper politicization of the discourse regarding Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War. Researchers did not enjoy full academic freedom at the time and works published in Poland during this period presented a simplified image of the Holocaust and of Polish-Jewish relations. Authors focused principally on assistance to Jews, overrepresenting its scale. This perspective was contrasted with post-war Jewish ingratitude, said to be manifest for example in the fact that survivors were failing to provide for those who had saved their lives. An offensive language was used with regard to Jews, especially in the press.

In the 1970s, scholarly attention focused largely on organized help for Jews. Voices critical of texts published in the West could be found in books published in Poland, as some foreign publications had suggested Polish complicity in crimes against Jews. Such suggestions were believed to defame or even to attack a nation considered to have been one of the greatest victims of the Second World War. The situation began to change in the late 1970s and in the 1980s. Along with political transformation came a desire to thoroughly and properly research the difficult subject of Polish-Jewish relations. However, this movement still failed to produce a comprehensive work on the subject. In the 1980s, more in-depth studies were conducted on the phenomenon of organized help, the attitude of the Polish Underground State to the plight of the Jews, or cooperation between the Polish underground and the Jewish Fighting Organization.

In public awareness, the turning point in post-war discussions on Polish-Jewish relations came with the publication of Jan Błoński's essay *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* [The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto] in "Tygodnik Powszechny" on 11 January 1987 (Błoński, 2008). The article, in which Błoński calls on Poles to assume part of the responsibility for the tragedy of their fellow Jewish citizens during the Second World War, was deemed controversial, to say the least. Its reception in Polish society also showed that coming to terms with problematic aspects of the past was something that only part of the Polish intelligentsia was willing to embrace and that society at large did not perceive as self-evident.

After 1989 and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe the history of the Jewish community in this region became one of the main areas researched by Polish scholars. The publication of Jan T. Gross's book *Sąsiedzi* (Gross, 2000)\* is generally considered a turning point in the historiography of Polish-Jewish relations during this period. Gross's description of the Jedwabne massacre sparked the most serious and profound discussion about Polish-Jewish relations since 1945 (Żbikowski, 1992; Bikont, 2004; Tryczyk, 2015). Although Gross's findings and the book itself were criticized, the debate around it gave rise to a need to confront the more problematic aspects of the past. In response to this, but also due to the need to deepen the study of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War and the immediate post-war period, the Institute of National Remembrance published its own books on the Jedwabne and Kielce pogroms as well as a range of works devoted to the Holocaust and relations between Poles and Jews (Machcewicz, Persak, 2002a, 2002b; Kamiński, Żaryn, 2006; Bukowski, Jankowski, Żaryn, 2008; Rogalewska, 2013; Grądzka-Rejak, 2016; Sitarek, 2015; Sitarek, Trębacz, Wiatr, 2012; Rączy, 2014; Żbikowski, 2006; Puławski, 2009). The Institute of National Remembrance also published the series "Kto ratuje jedno życie..." [Whosoever saves one life...] describing the broader context of providing assistance under German occupation as well as the stories of a number of rescuers (Rączy, 2008; Szpytma, Rodzińska-Chojnowska, 2009; Namysło, 2009; Rączy, Witowicz, 2011).

J. T. Gross's book also contributed to the emergence of a type of new historical school dealing with the Holocaust in Poland. Its proponents, scholars associated with the Polish Center for Holocaust Research in Warsaw, have published works focusing mainly on the final stage of the Holocaust, i.e., the period from 1942 to 1945. In April 2018, historians affiliated with the Center published *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* (Engelking, Grabowski, 2018). The two-volume work analyzes Jewish survival strategies and wartime experiences as well

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\* English edition: Gross, J. T. (2001). *Neighbors. The destruction of the Jewish community in Jedwabne, Poland*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

as Polish-Jewish relations in nine selected counties. The authors try to estimate the number of Jews living in each county in 1942, including the percentage of Jews in hiding after the liquidation of ghettos, those in hiding about whom even fragmentary information could be obtained, as well as the number of survivors and victims in each county, as far as these are possible to account for (Engelking, Grabowski, 2018, pp. 29–30). The remaining 80% of the General Government is still waiting to be investigated.

One of the subjects that scholars have not examined in much detail are the repressions that those who helped Jews were subjected to. This issue was first treated by Szymon Datner, a survivor of the Holocaust himself and a member of the Jewish Historical Institute staff. In his book *Las sprawiedliwych* [A Forest of Righteous], he listed 343 names of Poles killed for assisting Jews (Datner, 1968). Currently, the most important work on the subject is *Zbrodnie na Polakach dokonane przez hitlerowców za pomoc udzielaną Żydom* [Hitlerite Crimes against Poles for Assisting Jews] by Waclaw Bielawski, prosecutor with the Main Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes in Poland (Bielawski, 1987). In the revised edition of the book from 1987, Bielawski mentions the names of 872 murdered Poles. His findings are based on an investigation into crimes committed by Nazi officials in occupied Poland which he had been conducting since 1968.<sup>1</sup> Bielawski estimated that around 2,400 Poles had been killed for helping Jews.<sup>2</sup>

An attempt to estimate the number of victims was also made by Waclaw Zajaczkowski in the work *Martyrs of charity* (Zajaczkowski, Sheerin, 1988). This book, however, contains quite a bit of poorly documented information about victims of repressions. Qualifying these individuals as martyred helpers may therefore raise reasonable doubts. On the other hand, the 1997 English-language report *Those who helped. Polish Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (Juszkiewicz, R. et al., 1993–1997), authored by staff of the Main Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation, references the names of 704 individuals killed for assisting Jews. Publications issued in later years have put the number of murdered at over 2,000, and there are historians who believe this to be an underestimate. Research is being done on the subject at the Institute of National Remembrance within the framework of the project *Indeks Polaków zamordowanych i represjonowanych za pomoc Żydom w okresie II wojny światowej* [Index of Poles Murdered and Subjected to Repressions for Helping Jews during the Second World War]. The aim is to find information about documented cases of repressions for helping Jews and to describe the helpers'

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1 The 46 volumes of case records include 2,000 witness interview reports, correspondence, press articles and all kinds of German documents from the occupation period.  
2 Part of this material has been published with commentary by Sebastian Piątkowski (Piątkowski, 2018).

stories. The focus is not only on those killed but also on those deported to concentration camps, arrested, beaten, expropriated or subjected to other kinds of punishments.<sup>3</sup>

## Holocaust Victims and Survivors

Calculating the approximate number of Jews who survived the Holocaust in light of the sources at the disposal of historians is an extremely challenging task. The first difficulty has to do with the fact that the number of Jews living in Poland on the eve of the Second World War is known only in approximation. Certain hypotheses are usually adopted based on a slight upward trend observed in Jewish demographics in Poland between the 1921 and 1931 censuses. Albert Stankowski and Piotr Weiser have made the smallest population assumptions, calculating that around 3,370,000 Jews should have been living in Poland on the eve of the war (Stankowski, Weiser, 2012, p. 15). Michał Borwicz, on the other hand, put their number at 3,475,000 (Borwicz, 1981), while Henryk Kopeć wrote of 3,446,000 Jewish citizens of the Second Polish Republic (Stankowski, Weiser, 2012, p. 15). These numbers do not include recent converts, who nonetheless do not significantly alter the figures. However, the lack of census information from the period immediately before the outbreak of the war makes it very difficult to calculate the precise number of victims and survivors of the Holocaust.

Another obstacle has to do with the lack of accurate statistics reflecting how many Jews left for the USSR and spent the war there. Lucjan Dobroszycki estimated that this group numbered some 300,000–350,000 people, about 240,000–250,000 of whom returned to Poland after the war (Dobroszycki, 1994, p. 19; Berendt, 2009, pp. 65–67). Also unknown is the number of Polish Jews who perished in the USSR during the war as well as those imprisoned and killed in NKVD prisons in the Eastern Borderlands in the summer of 1941 (Berendt, 2009, p. 65).

In order to provide a clearer illustration of how hard it is to estimate the numbers in practice let me draw on the example of the Kraków Jewish community whose history I have been researching for several years. At the beginning of the 1930s, Jews in Kraków numbered almost 57,000. In the 1931 census (as in the one conducted ten years previously), there was a question about one's religion and a question about one's mother tongue,

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3 So far the book *Rejestr faktów represji na obywatelach polskich za pomoc ludności żydowskiej w okresie II wojny światowej* (Namysło, Berendt, 2014) has been published (in the form of an e-book). At the time of writing this text, another publication featuring part of the findings from this project is forthcoming (Namysło, Grądzka-Rejak, 2019).

but no question pertaining to nationality (Ogonowski, 2012). Studies for Kraków indicate that as many as 45,828 people declared one of the Jewish languages as their mother tongue: 23,340 people (including 11,473 men and 11,867 women) stated Yiddish, while 22,488 people (11,020 men and 11,468 women) stated Hebrew as their native language. This represents a total of around 20.95% of the overall population of Kraków (*Drugi spis powszechny ludności z dn. 9 grudnia 1931 r. Mieszkania i gospodarstwa domowe. Ludność. Stosunki zawodowe. Miasto Kraków*, 1937, pp. 13 ff.; Bieniarzówna, Małecki, 1997, p. 31; Chwalba, 2002, p. 95). Jewish refugees and migrants began to arrive in the city just before the outbreak of war. The deputy mayor of Kraków, Wincenty Bogdanowski, wrote as follows about the population of Kraków during this period:

Kraków began to fill with Jews from abroad who had come to Poland due to the persecution of Jews in Germany, which further exacerbated the attitude of the Christian population towards the Jewish population. It was calculated at the time that out of a total population of 270,000 people in Kraków, 70,000 were Jews (*Wspomnienia dra Wincentego Bogdanowskiego*, n.d., p. 55).

This would indicate that there was a steep rise in the number of Jews in the city, especially if we compare these numbers with the results of the 1931 census. On the other hand, during the initial days and weeks of the occupation the population of Kraków, including the city's Jewish population, underwent constant and dynamic fluctuations (Czocher, 2011, pp. 191 ff.). The September exodus and deportations from territories annexed to the Reich make it difficult to give a precise number of Jews who were in the city after the outbreak of war and over the course of the following months (*Sprawozdanie dotyczące liczby ludności żydowskiej*, n.d.). The registration of Jews at the behest of the occupier in the autumn of 1939 brought information diverging from the pre-war figures but quite close to Bogdanowski's assessment. The first census was completed from 8 to 24 November, and the second from 25 November to 31 December 1939 (Wroński, 1974). According to their results, there were 68,482 Jews living in Kraków and the nearby municipalities (for example Borek Fałęcki, Skawina, Prokocim; some of these were incorporated into Kraków after 28 May 1941). Almost 28% of this number, i.e., 19,732 people, were children under the age of 16 (*Sprawozdanie dot. ruchu ludności żydowskiej*, n.d., pp. 1 ff.; Chwalba, 2002, p. 95; Rączy, 2014, pp. 66–104, 71–80, 98–102).

The already mentioned internal migration and deportations from territories annexed to the Reich during the early months of the occupation coupled with the crimes committed during this period are another factor that complicates the researcher's work. It is worth providing some additional information here about Poland's defense campaign in September

1939 and the initial weeks of German occupation. The holdings of today's Branch Commissions for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation contain material from postwar investigations into the scale and number of victims of violent acts perpetrated during this period by the Wehrmacht. Many of the surviving reports and expert opinions composed on their basis contain overstated data which are hard to satisfactorily verify today. This holds true both for crimes against Poles and crimes against Jews. Scholars often cite these figures in their writings, which perpetuates their presence in academic circulation (Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni. Województwo krakowskie miejskie, 1984; Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni. Województwo lubelskie, 1985; Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni. Województwo przemyskie, 1983; Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni. Województwo radomskie, 1980; Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni. Województwo rzeszowskie, 1984; Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni. Województwo siedleckie, 1985; Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni. Województwo tarnobrzesckie, 1984; Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni. Województwo zamojskie, 1994).

Returning to the example of Kraków, which does not differ significantly from other cities in this respect, we find information in testimonies about many people, primarily men, leaving in the early days of the war. These departures could have been relatively short but sometimes it was the last time that family members who remained in the city saw their loved ones – chiefly husbands and fathers. Entire Jewish families also left town. The situation was very dynamic. Some returned after a while, others remained in the GG countryside or managed to flee to the USSR. They were replaced by new arrivals – Jews who flocked to Kraków believing that the big city would offer safety. The occupation authorities also directed groups of deportees and refugees to Kraków, for whom living quarters, work and other kinds of assistance needed to be organized. Jewish deportees mostly ended up in Kazimierz but also in apartments in other parts of the city. This caused overcrowding, reduced living comfort and deprived residents of intimacy, which inevitably led to conflicts. Lack of familiarity with the city as well as lack of human connection and deteriorating housing conditions and food supply made the newcomers more prone to diseases (cf. Stankowski, Weiser, 2012, pp. 16–17). Although traceable in the sources, e.g., memoirs, the dynamics of migration and deportation are essentially impossible to reconstruct in terms of numbers today.

It is also worth noting that the structure of the Jewish community in occupied Kraków was further altered by the fact that the Germans forcefully resettled part of the Jewish population outside the city in 1940 and 1941. Since the spring of 1940, the authorities took measures to remove Jews from the capital of the General Government. The first decree to this effect was passed on 12 April 1940 (Wroński, 1974, p. 89). Only some 10,000 Jews were allowed to remain – mostly craftspeople and representatives of professions that the Germans deemed useful to the public or the economy. According to Raul Hilberg, around 43,000 Jews were resettled



in transports, although this number seems slightly underestimated. Officially, around 11,000 Jews wound up in the Kraków ghetto at first. Therefore, assuming that there had been around 65,000 Jews in the city in 1940, we can presume that around 50,000 were taken away on transports (or left of their own accord after the announcement of the decrees) (Der Stadthauptmann der Stadt Krakau, 1939–1945a, pp. 2–202; Der Stadthauptmann der Stadt Krakau, 1939–1945b, pp. 2–200; Der Stadthauptmann der Stadt Krakau, 1939–1945c; Hilberg, 2014, p. 242). The Germans drew up transport lists and ordered Jews from Kraków to go to different towns in the Kraków, Lublin and Radom districts,<sup>4</sup> specifying the precise destinations. The organized and involuntary nature of this resettlement action, whose aim was to rid the city of Jews, meant that many of the deportees found themselves in places where they had no acquaintances, no place to live, and no livelihood. Nor were the towns to which they were sent ready to receive these exiles. Although transport lists have survived and it is theoretically known who ended up where, we do not know how many people subsequently moved or went back to Kraków. There is no doubt that such deportations impacted the population figures in different towns, consequently making it difficult to tally the number of victims and survivors. Moreover, the social structure of the Kraków Jewish community changed as a result of mass migrations which began right after the outbreak of the Second World War. There were many Jews in the city who did not live there before September 1939, but were only seeking refuge there. Meanwhile many Jews originally from Kraków left of their own accord (when the war broke out and the occupation started), heading for the Second Polish Republic's former eastern territories or other urban and provincial centers in search of safety. Hence use of the term "Kraków Jews" also makes it necessary to account for Jews who had lived in the city before the war and left it during the occupation.

Another factor involved in calculating the number of victims claimed by the Holocaust is the lack of statistical data pertaining to different phases of extermination. Obviously transport lists of deportees to extermination camps have not survived. In the case of Kraków, two deportations were organized within the framework of Aktion Reinhardt in 1942. It is estimated that at least 5,000 Jews were deported in June, and

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4 Transports were sent i.a., to Lublin, Mielec, Tarnów, Bochnia, Brzesko, Dukla, Dębica, Rzeszów, Bogumiłowice, Chełm, but also to Biała Podlaska and Międzyrzec Podlaski. The last preserved transport list dates back to 2 April 1941, when the Kraków ghetto had already been set up. In February 1941, the transit camp for those leaving Kraków was moved to Szlak Street 26. A total of 80 transports were organized. Precise data concerning the number of those deported to towns in different districts can be found at the National Archives in Kraków and the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (Der Stadthauptmann der Stadt Krakau, 1939–1945a, pp. 2–202; Der Stadthauptmann der Stadt Krakau, 1939–1945b, pp. 2–200; Der Stadthauptmann der Stadt Krakau, 1939–1945c; Hilberg, 2014, p. 242).

that over 7,000 Jews were then deported to Bełżec in October, while some 300 were killed in the ghetto at this time. We do not know how many Jews (including Kraków Jews) were sent to the German Płaszów camp on the eve of and during the liquidation of the Kraków ghetto (March 13–14, 1943) (Kotarba, 2016, p. 67; Pemper, 2006, p. 103). Historians put the number at around 10,000 (including the 8,000 taken there during the liquidation of the ghetto).

At different stages of life in the ghetto and during their stay in Płaszów Jews received help from Poles. We are not able to accurately estimate its scale and reach, yet numerous testimonies confirm that several kinds of assistance were provided (Relacja Tadeusza Moździerza, n.d.; Sprawa Władysława Budyńskiego, n.d.; Bartoszewski, Lewinówna, 2007). Based on documents available for Kraków it is difficult to estimate how many Jews chose to hide on the “Aryan” side. If we take Szymon Datner’s estimate of about 10% escaping from the ghetto (Datner, 1968) as a point of departure, they would have numbered at least 2,000. However, taking into account that Jews from other cities like Lwów or Warsaw could have been looking for shelter in Kraków too, their number could have been much higher. In light of memoirs, Jews originally from Kraków often sought refuge outside their hometown fearing recognition and exposure. Not infrequently, for various reasons, people changed hiding places and migrated between the city and the towns and villages of the nearby countryside, which further tangles the picture.

The occupiers passed various decrees regulating Jewish life. At the beginning, Jews were recognized as a distinct group with a different status than the Poles. Then they were subjected to various property regulations and stripped of numerous freedoms. Eventually, regulations instituting the death penalty for any assistance provided to Jews were added to the list. On 15 October 1941, Hans Frank signed a regulation punishing all forms of help with death (Third regulation on the restriction of residency in the General Government from 15 October 1941). These restrictions were compounded by other factors such as pre-war quarrels, fear, anti-Semitic attitudes, lack of financial resources and various limitations due to the war. Because of all these factors, many people refrained from providing help. There was also no shortage of *szmalcownicy* [blackmailers] in occupied Kraków, who were a very real threat to Jews hiding on the “Aryan” side and to the Poles sheltering them (See e.g. Relacja Maurycego Wassermana, n.d.; Relacja Anny Mekler, n.d.; Relacja Hersza Fristera, 1945; Relacja Markusa Halperna, n.d.; Relacja Władysława Miki, 1946; Relacja Bruno Peczenika, 1946; Relacja Michała Zellnera, 1947; Relacja Juliusza Selingera, 1947).

An important way of helping was to supply “Aryan” papers and – what often went hand in hand with this – to find work and lodgings for the helpees (Samsonowska, 2006; Samsonowska, 2013; Seweryn, 1967). A number of priests running parish offices prepared Catholic birth certificates for

Jewish escapees from the ghetto at risk of being arrested (Grądzka-Rejak, 2016, pp. 125–154). Those arrested and imprisoned in Kraków penitentiaries were often helped by clergy (Kuś, 1975). Sometimes several people were involved in helping a single individual.

Thanks to the documentation of Yad Vashem's Righteous Among the Nations Department we can determine the minimum number of people who helped. The Yad Vashem online database contains over 750 stories from occupied Kraków. It is not an exhaustive collection, however. There is material in the JHI archive documenting cases rejected by Yad Vashem during the procedure, for example due to formal shortcomings. This includes some 90 applications to Yad Vashem describing situations from occupied Kraków (АЖИИ, archival fonds no. 349).

Maria Hochberg-Mariańska, engaged in the activities of the Kraków Żegota, claimed that "Kraków was not as infected with the plague of denouncers and blackmailers as Warsaw" (Hochberg-Mariańska, 1988), a view that is shared by Krystyna Samsonowska (Samsonowska, 2006; Samsonowska, 2013). Similar opinions also appear in many other publications. An analysis of the memoirs of Holocaust survivors from Kraków, however, clearly shows that this was not the case. The names of the perpetrators seldom appear in these accounts. Their anonymity makes it extremely hard to identify the individuals who denounced or blackmailed Jews and to assess the scale of the phenomenon. Nor is it known whether the same denouncers are described in different accounts or if there were multiple people. This makes it very difficult to estimate the number of blackmailers and victims alike.

As with the difficulty of assessing the number of Jews in Kraków at various moments of the German occupation, it is also difficult to determine how many Jews survived the war in the city and its immediate vicinity. Nor did all of those who had hidden on the "Aryan" side initially decide to reveal their ethnic background after the war. According to the data of the Social-Political Department of the Kraków Voivodeship Office, there were 500 Jews in Kraków at the end of January 1945 (Urząd Wojewódzki w Krakowie, Wydział Społeczno-Polityczny, 1945–1950). This figure includes both those who had been hiding in the city and those who only arrived there after the end of the German occupation. By the end of February 1945 (again, according to the Voivodeship Office data), there were already as many as 1,500 Jews registered in the city (Gawron, 2005, p. 16). Julian Kwiek, citing the results of the first census conducted by the county office, reports that in April 1945 there were 6,343 Jews in Kraków out of a total of 7,570 Jews living in 17 towns across the Kraków Voivodeship (Kwiek, 1998, p. 13). These statistics were drawn up based on information available to the county heads. Kwiek also came up with a figure for the Jewish community using data from the Ministry of Public Administration. These indicate that in June 1945 there were 6,461 Jews in Kraków, 10,699 in January 1946, and as many as 21,514 in July 1946 (Kwiek, 1998, pp. 14–15).

These numbers reflect a rising trend. The reason for this rise was, i.a., the Jews' considerable mobility during the post-war period, different criteria on census forms, or the fact that Jews were more likely to gravitate towards big cities after the war (Kwiek, 2000; Cichopek, 2000; Zaremba, 2012). They felt safer in large urban centers. Finally, we must keep in mind that not all Kraków Jews liberated from camps and those who had found themselves in the GG capital temporarily returned to the city after the war. Some stayed in the West or – without coming back to Poland – emigrated to the United States, Palestine and other places. According to Julian Kwiek, the most credible data can be found in the censuses of the Voivodeship Jewish Committees – the best-informed bodies when it came to conditions among Jews on the ground (Kwiek, 1998, pp. 15–16). For Kraków, such data have only survived starting from mid-1947. There were 20,695 Jews in the city at that point. This number soon dwindled as a result of migration, and it is estimated that only 6,269 Jews remained in the city in December 1947. The data cited do not indicate what percentage of these people were Kraków Jews as opposed to those who only came to the city after the war. According to Edyta Gawron, just barely over 2,000 pre-war Kraków Jews were in the city in July 1947 (Gawron, 2012, p. 414).

There is no doubt that the great majority of the Jews who were in Kraków in September 1939 were killed. Those whom the Germans expelled from the city in 1940 and 1941 were murdered in extermination camps after the liquidation of the ghettos in towns across the Kraków, Radom and Lublin districts. Most of those who remained in Kraków were either deported to the extermination camp at Bełżec in June or October 1942 or killed in the Kraków ghetto. Similarly, many of those transferred to Płaszów were also killed. Nor was living on the “Aryan” side a guarantee of survival – survivor testimonies are replete with stories of real and potential dangers. The difficulties faced by researchers studying the demographics of Kraków's Jews during the Second World War are the same as those grappled with by historians researching how many Jews perished and how many survived the Holocaust.

Various scholars have made attempts to calculate how many Polish Jews lived through the Second World War. American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee data indicate that in May 1945 there were almost 50,000 Jews in the Polish lands (Sommer-Schneider, 2014, p. 68). Taking various factors into account, including the fact that some Jews survived in the Soviet Union, Isaiah Trunk estimated that some 369,000 Polish Jews survived the German occupation. Meanwhile, Grzegorz Berendt has pointed to 10 to 15% of Poland's pre-war Jewish population, so between 350,000 and 525,000 people (Berendt, 2009, p. 73). According to Stankowski and Weiser, no more than 425,000 survived, including Jews repatriated from the USSR (Stankowski, Weiser, 2012, p. 38). Lucjan Dobroszycki claimed that at least 275,000 registered after the war with the Central Committee of Jews in Poland [Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce – CKŻP] and were in

the country from the summer of 1944 until the spring of 1947. The figures peaked during the summer of 1946 following repatriation from the USSR. According to cautious estimates, there were about 230,000 Jews in Poland at the time. Most of the survivors were men, although more women had survived on the “Aryan” side (Dobroszycki, 1994, pp. 25–26).

It might seem that by analyzing the documentation of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (active in 1944–1950) we could arrive at a more precise number of survivors. As early as 8 August 1944, the Department of Assistance to Jews [Referat do Spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej] was established, its aim being to support arriving survivors. When investigating Jewish losses, it is important to remember that the department registered survivors and even obtained their testimonies about occupation-era crimes.<sup>5</sup> Eventually, after the end of the Second World War, CKŻP branches were established in different localities. One cannot fail to notice that the department began operating during the chaos of the initial postwar months. Problems with staffing, premises and funding were a constant bane. Working methods were only being developed, a questionnaire was put together, and agreement was reached as to what to ask survivors about. Moreover, the CKŻP’s priority was to help survivors locate family and friends and to provide them with day-to-day support, which took priority over statistical and documentary activities (Dobroszycki, 1994, pp. 41–42). The immediate postwar period was characterized by the dynamic movement of people, which also makes it difficult to assess the number of survivors. It sometimes happened that, migrating around the country, survivors registered multiple times with different branches, especially if they could thereby obtain various kinds of benefits. With this purpose in mind, they also sometimes wrote down different places and ways of survival in the questionnaires. Others yet did not register at all, fearing anti-Semitism or because they did not require assistance from the CKŻP (Dobroszycki, 1994, p. 44). Spelling mistakes were also made in names and surnames, which later could have led to the same person being entered into databases as several individuals. It was not infrequent for people to give only their first and last name, leaving other fields (which could have facilitated identification and eliminated doubles) blank. Hence these data, too, carry errors.

Over 300,000 personal forms of Polish Jews registered after the war by the Central Committee of Polish Jews have been preserved in the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute. 130,000 of these forms state where the individual in question survived the war. The vast majority (almost 95,000) survived in the USSR. Being in a camp is reported by over 14,000 people,

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5 For more on the origins, organization and activities of the CKŻP see Grabski, 2015, pp. 15 ff.; Dobroszycki, 1994, pp. 6–7.

in a ghetto – by 3,500, on the “Aryan” side – by 11,500, and in guerrilla units – 1,227 (Żbikowski, 2018). These data, however, bring us no closer to how many people survived on the “Aryan” side, since almost two thirds of those registered did not say how they survived. A detailed discussion of the statistical material gathered by the Central Committee of Polish Jews was the subject of Anna M. Rosner’s recent book *Obraz społeczności ocalałych w Centralnej Kartotece Wydziału Ewidencji i Statystyki CKŻP* [Image of the Survivor Community in the Central Card Index of the CKŻP Information and Statistical Department] (Rosner, 2018).

### Blackmailers and their Victims

Current research and historical findings do not provide an accurate and final answer to the question of how many blackmailers and denouncers were active in occupied Poland, or – to narrow it down – in the General Government. Current research on the subject focuses largely on the GG (Engelking, 2011; Engelking, 2014; Grabowski, 2004). Statistical claims in this regard have been formulated, first of all, on the basis of information provided in survivor testimonies, such as those collected in the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, the Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem, the Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance, the USHMM Archive in Washington, the Ghetto Fighters House Archive in Israel or the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education in California. These accounts have been compared with the material gathered by the Polish Underground State (today in the holdings of the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust, the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum Archives in London, and the Archive of Modern Records in Warsaw, among others), documentation drawn up during the procedure to award the title of Righteous Among the Nations, and the records of postwar trials conducted by Special Criminal Courts. These trials, commonly known as *sierpniówki* [August trials], were the result of cases brought before courts pursuant to the Polish Committee of National Liberation [Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego] Decree of 31 August 1944 on the penalties for fascist-Hitlerite criminals guilty of the murder and ill-treatment of civilians and prisoners-of-war and for traitors of the Polish Nation. Other source materials that historians have drawn on to assess the scale of blackmailing include the records of trials of German war criminals conducted in Poland and elsewhere (e.g., by the Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes in Ludwigsburg).

Literature on the subject usually puts the phenomenon of blackmailing at around 50,000–60,000 cases. In his book *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw 1940–1945*, the historian Gunnar Paulsson writes of 3,000–4,000 blackmailers active in Warsaw alone, although it is not quite clear how he arrived at this number. Warsaw was in some sense exceptional

both in terms of the number of Jews in hiding (Paulsson estimates that there were as many as 28,000 Jews on the “Aryan” side before the Warsaw Uprising) and the number of blackmailers (Paulsson, 2002). In other towns in the GG both of these phenomena occurred on a smaller scale. It is also hard to determine whether there were more blackmailers in cities or in the countryside. Since many Jews sought shelter in villages or small towns, blackmailers were also active in the country. Detailed research is currently being done on selected counties in the GG, hence perhaps in a while we shall learn more both about the phenomenon of Poles helping as well as denouncing and murdering Jews during the Second World War (Engelking, Grabowski, 2018, *Introduction*). However, one should bear in mind that many individual cases, both positive and negative, will never see the light, since they are not described in the sources and eyewitnesses have passed away. Hence we will always be talking about underestimates, that is only cases that are documented.

The fact that blackmailing was not an isolated phenomenon is demonstrated by the fact that on 18 March 1943, the Directorate of Civil Resistance [Kierownictwo Walki Cywilnej], an agenda reporting to the Polish government-in-exile, promulgated a special decree in which it warned that any attempts to exploit the tragic circumstances of the Jews (despoiling, blackmailing or denouncing) would be punished. The same day, a text entitled *Szantaże i ich zwalczanie* [Blackmailing and combating it], appeared in the “Biuletyn Informacyjny”, announcing:

There are individuals without dignity or conscience, coming from the criminal world, who have found for themselves a new source of illicit income by blackmailing Poles hiding Jews and Jews themselves. The Directorate of Civil Resistance warns that these kinds of blackmail are duly noted and shall be punished with the full force of law, already today, to the extent possible, and certainly in the future (*Szantaże i ich zwalczanie*, 1943).

The precise number of sentences carried out against blackmailers remains unknown. Historians estimate that between a couple to several dozen penalties were administered. Often the penalty was handed down for other offenses at the same time and was not limited to blackmailing Jews (Libionka, 2006, pp. 121–125; Puławski, 2009; Puławski, 2018). Information regarding hostile attitudes among Poles towards Jews in hiding also appeared in the underground press from time to time.

To date, historians have not determined the approximate number of Jews killed by Poles during the Second World War. The research of Szymon Datner, historian and Holocaust survivor, is often referenced as a basis for any estimate (Datner, 1970). Datner said in a conversation with the journalist Małgorzata Niezabitowska:

The Poles are not responsible for the crimes of the Holocaust. However, the two hundred to two hundred and fifty thousand Jews who were trying to save themselves were a real – if I may say so – problem for the Poles. [...] [This number] is not fully credible, like all other [figures] pertaining to this issue. There was no possibility of counting exactly how many Jews were trying to save themselves. It has not even been possible to determine how many were saved thanks to Poles because many of these Jews left Poland immediately after the war. There are controversies among historians as to the number of those saved. The spread is big – from fifty thousand, according to [Filip] Friedman, to one hundred and twenty thousand, according to [Józef] Kermisz from Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem. [...] My assessment, also to some extent intuitive, is about eighty to one hundred thousand saved. At any rate, those Jews, the quarter of a million or so looking for help, were a problem for the Poles. They were the ones who knocked on the windows of peasant huts or on apartment doors (Niezabitowska, Tomaszewski, 1993, pp. 148–149).

Taking these figures as a starting point, some scholars accept that around 10% of the Jewish community was on the “Aryan” side, that is some 280,000–300,000 people (Berendt, 2012). Shmuel Krakowski estimates that around 300,000 Jews escaped from the ghettos and camps (Krakowski, 2002, p. 100; cited after: Engelking, Grabowski, 2018, p. 28). Meanwhile, the number of Polish Jews saved is usually estimated at around 50,000–80,000 (including at least around 30,000 on the “Aryan” side). Krakowski believes that some 30,000 survived on the “Aryan” side (Engelking, Grabowski, 2018, p. 29). According to Teresa Prekerowa, 60,000–115,000 people could have survived the occupation, including 30,000–60,000 on the “Aryan” side, 20,000–40,000 in the camps, and 10,000–15,000 in the forest or in guerrilla units (Prekerowa, 1993, p. 384). Michał Borwicz on the other hand claims that between 40,000 and 50,000 Jews survived in the Polish lands (Borwicz, 1981, p. 123).

Subtracting the number of people who ultimately survived from the number of those who escaped and took chances on the “Aryan” side, we see that around 200,000 of the escapees are “missing” or unaccounted for. These people are sometimes said to be victims of their Polish neighbors. However, such a claim cannot be proven on the basis of the above-mentioned figures alone. The “missing” 200,000 surely include those who due to various factors eventually abandoned hiding on the “Aryan” side and returned to the ghetto; others could have died of natural causes or diseases or committed suicide; some could have escaped across the green border into Slovakia, Hungary or the USSR; there were also those who had false documents with a Polish last name and continued to use them after the



war, never revealing their Jewish origins (which seems understandable given that anti-Semitism was still strong in Poland immediately after the war). All of these variables as well as other circumstances that we are not aware of should be factored in when trying to count how many murders Polish neighbors might have committed. Cautious estimates indicate that Poles are responsible for the death of at least several tens of thousands of Jews. At the same time we need to be aware that we will never find out about some cases since no documents or witnesses survive.

Some Poles responsible for crimes against Jews during the Second World War were tried after the German occupation. The trials were conducted pursuant to the Decree of 31 August 1944 on the penalties for fascist-Hitlerite criminals guilty of the murder and ill-treatment of civilians and prisoners-of-war and for traitors of the Polish Nation. Under this law, blackmailing was punishable by death, while extorting money from those in hiding (art. 2) was subject to a penalty of up to 15 years' imprisonment or life imprisonment. The blackmailers whose victims survived benefited from an amnesty in 1956. A total of 17,845 people were sentenced under the August Decree in 1946–1969 (Rzepliński, 2002; Kubicki, 1963; Jasiński, 2015). Research on Polish participation in murdering Jews during the Second World War is still ongoing.

## Conclusions

It is not fully possible to estimate the number of those who survived and perished in the Holocaust in light of currently available research findings. Above all, historians do not have access to full statistical data on the number of Jews living in the Second Polish Republic on the eve of the Second World War. The basis for any estimate therefore comes from the 1931 general census or from the censuses ordered by the Germans during the occupation. The latter have not survived for all towns and cities. Nor do we have full data regarding the number of Jews who spent the war and occupation in the Soviet Union (Stankowski, Weiser, 2012, p. 38). The information regarding the number of Jews killed by Einsatzgruppen in the East is not available in full either.

Similarly for those who survived the Holocaust. A certain unspecified group of survivors never returned to Poland or never registered anywhere after the war and therefore remained off the radar. Others registered several times with different branches of the CKŻP, sometimes stating different ways and strategies of survival (also depending on what kind of benefits they could obtain by doing so). Some of the Jews in Poland also fled to Western Europe via Romania or Hungary and were not registered. Some of those who had hidden on the “Aryan” side or used “Aryan” papers continued to use their false identity after the war. They are also unaccounted for in the statistics. Pre-war and occupation-era converts are

another such group. Moreover, it is important for what territories scholars make the calculation. If for the area of the pre-war Second Polish Republic, are they also factoring in the Jews who remained in the new republics set up by the USSR? The issue of Polish-Jewish relations continues to be of relevance to these considerations, including the question of how many Jews were saved thanks to Polish assistance and how many were killed or denounced by Poles (sometimes along with those sheltering them). Nevertheless, studies into Holocaust-related issues are being continued, often with a regional focus, helping to verify previous findings and to refine the numerical estimates of interest to scholars.

(transl. by Dominika Gajewska)

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