

**HOLOCAUST HISTORY BETWEEN LIBERATION AND SOVIETIZATION:
THE PUBLICATIONS OF THE CENTRAL JEWISH HISTORICAL
COMMISSION IN POLAND 1945-1947**

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the Central Jewish Historical Commission (Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna, CZKH) in Poland (1944-1947) – one of the first centers of the collection and publication of testimonies in postwar Eastern Europe. The achievement of the “survived historians” was underestimated for many years. I elaborate on the main features of their approach to Holocaust writing arguing on the originality and timeliness of their work in contemporary Holocaust historiography, as well as the important role they played in the establishment of the Holocaust scholarship. A specific place among other Historical Commissions in postwar Europe was occupied by the Commission due to their non-precedent activeness and interdisciplinary research in the circumstances of the transition from Nazi occupation towards the Soviet political domination in Poland. I demonstrate the ideological and political background by drawing institutional connections and network ties to the institutions, schools, and political movements, which had an impact on the Commission’s work, which resulted in the series of publications. I analyze the selected examples from the Commission’s publications and methodological statements, using Polish-language published sources and archival material. In these materials I trace the preserved dilemmas and issues characterizing early postwar Jewish Holocaust documentation and memory creation and provide a detailed insight on how they were realized in the actual publications. As a result, I contribute to the field with an overview of how Jews in Poland pioneered historical writing about the Holocaust. In addition, the analysis of the ideological context of how Holocaust memory was created in Poland during its transition into Soviet satellite will show tendencies which left their mark on the Holocaust historiography globally.

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Introduction

The unprecedented nature of the Holocaust resulted in an urgent need for testimony. New forms of documentation and memorialization had to be invented according to the uniqueness of the catastrophe and its consequences. One of the first centers for the collection and publication of Holocaust testimonies organized by survivors was the Central Jewish Historical Commission (CŻKH), active in Poland between 1944 and 1947. The CŻKH was a semi-professional historical institution destined to collect interviews and testimonies of Jews who survived the Holocaust and non-Jewish witnesses. The CŻKH began publishing its findings in various genres including memoir, historical research and literature. The raw testimonies on the most recent tragedy were edited and destined to fulfil various purposes at a time: historiography, commemoration, legal prosecution, and ideology.

The postwar period in Europe and particularly in Poland became a popular subject of research in the last fifteen years. The post-Holocaust developments attracted scholarship from the perspective of political, social history, and memory studies. Significant works that deal with the issue of Holocaust memory in Poland concentrate on the post-trauma society and the problematic nature of contested victimhood between Poles and Polish Jews.¹ The political situation in Poland in the context of the Jewish experience attracted scholars to revise the deeply rooted stereotypes

¹ Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska et al., *Jewish presence in absence: the aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland, 1944-2010*. (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 2014). Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Alexander M. Martin, Eds. *The Holocaust in the East: Local Perpetrators and Soviet Responses* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014). Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the politics of commemoration, 1945–1979* (Ohio University Press, 2003). Joanna Michlic, *Jewish children in Nazi-occupied Poland: survival and Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust as reflected in early postwar recollections* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2008). Michael Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse University Press, 1997). Feliks Tych, “A Witness and His Path to Research”, in: Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, *The Holocaust: voices of scholars* (Cracow: Austeria Publishing House, 2009). Feliks Tych and Barbara Engelking, *Memory: the history of Polish Jews before, during and after the Holocaust* (Warsaw: G. Tencer. 2008). Joshua Zimmerman, *Contested memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its aftermath* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 2003).

on Polish antisemitism and Judeo-communism and concentrate on the micro-level of everyday life and previously marginalized political aspirations.² However, the studies on political history do not usually deal with the historiography of the Holocaust, and the memory studies operate well-established narratives in attempt to detect major conflicts. In my opinion this leads to the simplification of the postwar reality, in which the history of the Holocaust developed.

The leading authors on the Jewish historical commissions in Europe, including Polish, are Laura Jockusch and the Israeli scholar, Roni Stauber.³ The Central Jewish Historical Commission also present in the research of Natalia Aleksium, who places it in the international Holocaust research networks and elaborates on its historiographical role and position.⁴ The history of the CŻKH and its successor the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH) is reflected in the works published by the

² Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland: a portrait based on Jewish community records, 1944-194*. (Armonk, New York, 1994). Natalia Aleksium, *Dokąd dalej?: ruch syjonistyczny w Polsce (1944-1950)* (Warszawa, 2002). Anna Cichopek, *Beyond Violence: Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia, 1944-48* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). David Engel, "The Reconstruction of Jewish Communal Institutions in Postwar Poland: The Origins of the Central Committee of Polish Jews, 1944-1945." *East European Politics and Societies* 10, no. 1 (1995): 85-107. August Grabski, *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce (1944-1950): historia polityczna* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2015). Stefan Grajek, *Po wojnie i co dalej: żydzi w Polsce, w latach 1945-1949* (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2003). Shimon Redlich, *Life in Transit: Jews in Postwar Łódź, 1945-1950* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011).

³ Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012). Laura Jockusch, "Historiography in Transit: Survivor Historians and the Writing of Holocaust History in the late 1940s." *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 58, no. 1 (January 2013): 75. Laura Jockusch, "'Khurbn Forshung': Jewish historical commissions in Europe, 1943-1949." *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* (2007): 441. Laura Jockusch, *Collect and record! : Jewish holocaust documentation in early postwar Europe*. (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2012). Laura Jockusch, *Early Chroniclers of the Holocaust: Jewish Historical Commissions and Documentation Centers in the Aftermath of the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 2012). Laura Jockusch, *Joining Forces to Comprehend the Jewish Catastrophe: The Attempt to Establish a European Community of Holocaust Researchers* (Oxford University Press, 2012). Roni Stauber, "Philip Friedman and the Beginning of Holocaust Studies." In: David Bankier and Dan Mikhman eds., *Holocaust Historiography in Context* (2008): 83-102. Roni Stauber, *Laying the foundations for Holocaust research: the impact of the historian Philip Friedman* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009).

⁴ Natalia Aleksium, „An invisible web: Philip Friedman and the network of Holocaust research.“ In: Regina Fritz, Éva Kovács and Béla Rásky eds., *Before the Holocaust had its name: Early confrontations of the Nazi mass murder of the Jews*. (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2016) 149-165. Natalia Aleksium, „Philip Friedman and the emergence of Holocaust scholarship: a reappraisal“, *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*. 11 (2012) 333-346. Natalia Aleksium, „The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland 1944-1947“, *Polin*. 20 (2008) 74-97. Natalia Aleksium, "STUDIA. Historiografia na temat Zagłady i stosunków polsko-Żydowskich w okresie drugiej wojny światowej." *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały* 1 (2005): 32-51. Edyta Gawron, "Jewish Studies in Postwar Poland." *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia* 11 (2013).

Institute itself, mostly during the Socialist era.⁵ Very few works deal primarily with the Commission's publications, and all of them are limited by a particular issue, not giving an overview of the centralized effort and results of this special institution.⁶ For instance, Tokarska-Bakir performs a close reading of the book *Innocent Words* by Blumental placing it in a context of comparable texts and narratives, however she does not see this publication as part of a series, interconnected and created by the CŻKH's team.

Evidence of Nazi crimes against Jews was collected by personal and group initiatives already during the war.⁷ However, a large scale open work could begin only after liberation. The CŻKH was established in Lublin in December 1944 even before Warsaw was liberated. During the transitional period in Poland, when the new government had to be elected and the country underwent gradual Sovietization, Jewish organizations had certain extent of freedom and their work was most productive. After 1947, the political situation in Poland changed towards authoritarian government and the initial collective of the CŻKH was destroyed by political pressure following emigrations. It was transformed into the Jewish Historical Institute, which also published and researched during the Socialist era in Poland, but the ideological direction of these works was much more radical and dictated by the communist standards. Therefore, I

⁵ Zygmunt Hoffman, „Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce”, in: *35 lat działalności Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce Ludowej* (Warszawa 1980). Maurycy Horn, „Żydowski Instytut historyczny w latach 1944-1949”, in: *BŻIH*, 1979. Maurycy Horn, „Działalność naukowa i wydawnicza Centralnej Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej przy CKŻWP i Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce w latach 1945-1950 (w czterdziestolecie powstania ŻIH)”, in: *BŻIH*, 1985, nr 133-134. Eleonora Bergman, ed. “Jewish Historical Institute, the first fifty years”, 1947-1997: *conference papers. History of Jewish People*, 1996. Maurycy Horn, „Działalność Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce w latach 1944-1979”, in: *35 lat działalności Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce Ludowej* (Warszawa, 1980), 5-46. Maurycy Horn, „Żydowski Instytut Historyczny w Polsce w latach 1944-1949”, in: *BŻIH*, 1979 (109), 3-15.

⁶ Beate Müller, "Trauma, Historiography and Polyphony: Adult Voices in the CJHC's Early Postwar Child Holocaust Testimonies." *History and Memory* 24, no. 2 (2012): 157-95. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, "„Słowa Niewinne”. Czytając Nachmana Blumentala.," *Teksty Drugie*, 2005.

⁷ Jewish Antifascist committee in Moscow began work in 1942, Ringelblum underground archive in Warsaw ghetto functioned already from the beginning of occupation in 1939, Matatias Cart undertook the dangerous role of underground archivist in 1940. There are also some testimonies that people in some camps and ghettos collected material, although it was not done on a large scale or these materials were not preserved.

concentrate on the early postwar years from 1944 till 1947, which were also the formative years of Holocaust writing. The case study is based on a sample of twelve out of forty titles dealing with Nazi concentration, extermination and labour camps. This choice is motivated by the iconic place of camps in the Holocaust historiography.⁸ The proposed material using multiple genres gives a diverse picture of the pre-creation of camps as memory icons way before the “memory boom” dated in the late 1970s. My analysis touches also upon the historical background of the period, concentrating on the institutional history of the CŻKH and the context of the Soviet influences in Eastern Europe.

Current growing interest in the Holocaust aftermath has resulted in a wide range of publications that deal in one way or another with particular aspects of the Commission’s work or certain publications. However, there is a lack of general overview that would go beyond the cited commonly self-reflected works from the period after the 1947 publications by the Jewish Historical Institute, the successor of the Commission. Critical analysis of their methodology in previous years was limited mostly to the leading figure of the director Philip Friedman, and the matter of imperfection of the survivor in the role of historian.⁹ The contemporary state of historical research accepts the victim’s perspective in the form of testimony or personalized narrative as a legitimate historical document with a potentially high research value. I approach these writings from the perspective of documents of époque. I demonstrate what survivors who became the first Holocaust historians aimed to create, how they did it and why.

The matter of Holocaust memory in Poland and the USSR has been constantly separated. Having in mind significant differences in the policies and situation of Jews in the postwar USSR and

⁸ Dan Stone, Ed. *The historiography of the Holocaust* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁹ See: Natalia Aleksion, “Philip Friedman and the Emergence of Holocaust Scholarship: A Reappraisal”, *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook 11* (2002), 333-346. Natalia Aleksion, "Survivor Testimonies and Historical Objectivity: Polish Historiography since Neighbors." *Holocaust Studies* 20, no. 1-2 (2014): 157-178.

Poland, I nevertheless argue that together with the exchange of displaced persons and control over political life, an exchange of ideological signs concerning important political issues such as the Holocaust emerged between the two countries. To be sure, my research reveals that Soviet influence was not the only one: nationalistic (Zionist) movements were particularly strong at that time, together with an emotional position of the survivor/historian. These diverse influences created a unique amalgam, a part of which I will present here.

I use a wide range of primary sources. First of all, the collection of publications itself. Some of these publications were republished or reprinted recently with added comments, biographical data and historical background.¹⁰ I use relevant literature about the authors of the publications. Some of them became famous later because of their other activities like Jozef Kermisz, a director of Yad Vashem archives, but some of them never appeared again in public nor published anything else like Róża Bauminger or Betti Ajzensztajn. The main primary archival source is the collection 303/XX Central Jewish Historical Commission from Jewish Historical Institute archives.

An extremely valuable source to understand the political views of the Jews in Poland after the war is the weekly Bulletin of the Jewish Press Agency (BŻAP) from the years 1944-1949. On its pages, it is very clear how postwar Jewish society in Poland perceived the change of power and the issue of Holocaust memory preservation. For the deeper analysis of the methodological approach, I have traced Natalia Aleksion¹¹ for material in the Philip Friedman's collection in

¹⁰ The publication series „Wydanie krytyczne prac Centralnej Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej” [Critical edition of the Central Jewish Historical Commission's works] initiated by ŻIH; so far have been published: Szymon Datner, *Walka i Zagłada Białostockiego Ghetta*, ŻIH, 2014; Janina Herscheles, *Oczyma dwunastoletniej dziewczyny*, ŻIH, 2015; Natan Eliaz Szternfinkiel, *Zagłada Żydów Sosnowca*, ŻIH, 2017; Austeria publishing house: *W trzecią rocznicę zagłady getta w Krakowie*, Austeria, 2013. ŻIH plans to publish three more editions in 2017: „Likwidacja getta wileńskiego” by Mendl Balberyszski „Zagłada Żydów żółkiewskich” by Gerszon Taffet, and „Wielkanoc” by Stefan Otwinowski. Ewa Koźmińska-Frejłak „Chcemy pokazać <http://www.jhi.pl/blog/2017-03-01-chcemy-pokazac-ze-prowadzone-po-wojnie-przez-CZKH-badania-nad-zaglada-byly-bardzo-nowatorskie-ewa-kozminska-frejlak-opowiada-o-serii-wydawniczej-ŻIH>, last accessed 06.05.2017.

¹¹ Natalia Aleksion, „An invisible web: Philip Friedman and the network of Holocaust research.” In: Regina Fritz, Éva Kovács and Béla Rásky eds., *Before the Holocaust had its name: Early confrontations of the Nazi mass murder of the Jews*. (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2016) 149-165.

YIVO archive. The ideological basis for the research was on a large scale produced by the Central Committee of Polish Jews, whose Presidium and Culture and Propaganda office left a significant amount of documents and minutes from the meetings. This collection was accessed in ŻIH in Warsaw. The significant issue is the lack of fully available biographical information about many important authors and activists. This has to be compiled from a number of various sources, including Laura Jockusch's book or the unpublished work of other researchers.¹²

I hope that the outcome of my research will contribute to overcoming the myth of the postwar silence about the Holocaust. In order to evaluate the later activities and publications emerging from the 1960s onward, the early attempts to preserve memory should be studied. The immediate postwar period was particularly rich in fresh emotions and yet unhealed wounds. The evaluation of the works created back then is a key to understanding of how Holocaust aftermath looked like for those who wanted also others to remember.

In the first chapter I provide an overview of the situation of the Jews in Poland after the war. Especially, I concentrate on the progress of Sovietization that is gradually achieved by Soviet and Polish Soviet-inspired political rule. Particularly, I am interested in the place of Jews in this process. The main part of this chapter is devoted to the institutional and ideological structures of the Jewish postwar political and social organizations and the place of the Historical Commission in them. The second chapter places the work of the Commission in the contexts of Holocaust scholarship, its prewar roots, postwar developments, and other similar initiatives in Europe in the early postwar years. I trace the personal biographies of the Commission's employees and their methodology used for the collection, edition and potential use of the testimonies.

¹² Stephan Stach, "Das Jüdische Historische Institut in Warschau, 1947–1968." MA thesis, University of Leipzig, 2008.

In the third chapter my aim is to display the extensive outcome of the research of primary sources that is the Commission's publications from 1945-1947. Selected examples support the general overview of the most significant features. I elaborate on form, style, used sources, chosen topics and their interpretation, originality, and limitations of the books. I end the chapter with preliminary evaluation of how the Commission's publications functioned in later years and their role in the Holocaust scholarship.

Notes

All translations from Polish are mine if not stated otherwise.

The name of the city of Lwów/Lviv/Lvov will be given in the form that was used in the publications – Polish “Lwów”.

List of Abbreviations

AK - Polish Home Army (Armia Krajowa)
BŻAP - Bulletin of the Jewish Press Agency (Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej)
BŻIH – Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.
CKŻP - Central Committee of Polish Jews (Centralny Komitet Żydów Polskich)
CŻKH - Central Jewish Historical Commission (Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna)
DEGOB - Hungarian National Relief Committee for Deportees (Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság)
GKBZN - Main Commission for Investigation of German Crimes in Poland (Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce)
JAFC - Jewish Antifascist Committee (Yevreyskiy Antifashistskiy Komitet)
KOŻP - Organizing Committee of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (Komitet Organizacyjny Żydów Polskich w Związku Radzieckim)
NTN - Supreme National Tribunal (Najwyższy Trybunał Narodowy)
PKWN - Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego)
PPR - Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza)
PPS - Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna)
TRJN - Polish Provisional Government of National Unity (Polski Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narodowej)
TSKŻ - Socio-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce)
USHMM - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
YIVO - Institute for Jewish Research (Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut)
ŻIH - Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny)
ZPP - Polish Patriot's Union in Moscow (Związek Patriotów Polskich)

Chapter 1. Jews under the Transition in Poland, 1944-1947

In this chapter I start with a description of the postwar reality of the Jewish survivors, and the political and ideological background. In the first part, I pay special attention to the gradual Sovietization of Poland under Stalinist influence and, above all, to the role and place of Jews in this process. In the second part I explain the institutional structure of the postwar Jewish community. This allows me to place the Historical Commission in its context and understand its motivations and aims, as well as how the situation affected the researched publications. In the third subchapter I provide a short overview of the establishment and institutional structure of the Commission. The fourth part deals with their cooperation with Polish investigating and prosecuting authorities on the Nazi crimes and the complicated relationship of these authorities with the Commission. In the last part I will show how the period under research concludes with the institutional reorganization and significant changes in the personal and ideological composition of the Commission.

1.1 Repatriation, Sovietization, Emigration

1.1.1 Life after Death?

In common opinion, the Holocaust was the end of the Jewish civilization in Poland. However, recent years have brought more research about the experience and the significance of the postwar Jewish community. The Catastrophe indeed decimated the Jewish population in Poland, which numbered over three million people before 1939, however, 240,000 Jewish survivors remained in Poland in 1946, and this was still one of the biggest populations then living in Europe. In the

years before the rapid Stalinization and establishment of Communist rule in the country limited political and social freedom (a situation that should last from 1948 until 1989), Jewish institutions and even political parties could exist and express national, cultural and political aspirations. Especially liberal on the part of the communists was the attitude towards Jewish self-organization in the immediate aftermath of the war.

Soon after the liberation of Eastern Poland in 1944, many Jewish parties and groups were reestablished. This was the time of constant movement: some Jews were coming out of the camps, others from hiding places and forests; one was coming back from Moscow, one attempted to gain Polish citizenship again while spending the wartime in the Soviet provinces in Asia. Some stopped on the ruins of the Polish state for a while, then traveled further to the West or to Palestine/State of Israel to build a new future. Many were scared to stay in the country because of the anti-Semitic aggression on the part of the ethnic Polish population. Some Jews used the opportunity to shed their Jewish identity, become Poles, and make a career in the state administration and security services.

1.1.2 Poland between the War and Sovietization

In 1944, control over the Polish territories passed to the Red Army and from the Red Army to the Polish Communists. From July 1944 the populist program of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego, PKWN) was promoted among the population to gain support for the Communists. The Polish Provisional Government of National Unity (Polski Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narodowej, TRJN) was called in June 1945 to rule until the elections for the new government. The Provisional Government as a puppet Soviet

government that took over power in Poland before the London-based Polish government in exile could do so. The Communists were trying to convince the population to vote for them first in the People's Referendum of June 1946 and later in the elections of January 1947, while half a million Soviet troops were still stationed in Poland and together with the newly established secret police were organizing regular operations against the anti-communist Polish resistance. Various partisan resistant groups were still active in Polish forests and countryside including so-called "cursed soldiers" [Polish: *Żołnierze wyklęci*].¹³ Their activity resulted in casualties among Jews and communists assassinated by these groups and mass violence of NKVD and newly established Polish militia towards local population and partisans. The population suffered from shortages, and the infrastructure was destroyed including in the completely ruined capital, Warsaw.¹⁴

On 30 June 1946, the communist coalition within the Provision Government organized the „People's Referendum”, asking three questions that had to help evaluate the actual attitude of the population and prepare the country to future elections.¹⁵ The mostly falsified results matched the need of the power-seekers, not the real state of affairs.¹⁶ Under similar conditions, the elections of 19 January 1947 were won by the Democratic Bloc (Blok Demokratyczny), which included PPR, PPS, SL and SD, with a result of 80.1% while contemporary estimations allowed to give a

¹³ *Żołnierze wyklęci* were called „cursed soldiers“, they were guerilla warfare fighting against the Red Army and communist partisans, after the war they continued to resist the Soviet powers in Poland. Interestingly, the last known “cursed soldier” Józef Franczak was killed as late as 1963. In contemporary Poland the cult of cursed soldiers has been built by the governmental politicized memory as a strong example of Polish nationalist fight for freedom. See: Jerzy Ślaski, *Żołnierze wyklęci*, (Warszawa, Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 1996).

¹⁴ Krystyna Kersten, *The establishment of Communist rule in Poland, 1943-1948*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). 163-167.

¹⁵ After the publication of the referendum law and the content of the questions, which contain no truly controversial elements for the ruling parties (1. Are you abstaining from the Senate ?, 2. Do you want to consolidate the economic system introduced by the agricultural reform and nationalization of the basic branches of the national economy? 3. Do you want to consolidate the western borders of the Polish state in the Baltic, Oder and Lusatian Neisse?), A period of increased propaganda began. See: Referendum ludowe, WIEM Encyklopedia, http://portalwiedzy.onet.pl/15919,,,referendum_ludowe,haslo.html, accessed 07.05.2017.

¹⁶ Also known as the Three Times Yes referendum (Trzy razy tak, 3×TAK).

real number of around 30%. However, the whole process was so strongly falsified that the real result could not even be guessed.¹⁷

Polish antisemitism, strengthened by years of Nazi propaganda and public opposition to the full emancipation of the minorities from the interwar period, made the situation for the Jews very difficult. The prewar myth of "Judeo-communism" was now applied to the conditions of postwar redistribution of power to communists, some of whom were indeed of Jewish origins, and created a popular hatred among the Poles.

1.1.2 Repatriation, Emigration, and the Attempt to Restore the Community

There are two major categories of survivors: those who spent the war under the occupation and those who escaped to the USSR. The first group is divided into three – survivors on the "Aryan side" or in hiding, those who joined partisan groups, and survivors from concentration and extermination camps.¹⁸

The vast majority of Jewish survivors from Poland had found exile in the USSR during the war. Jewish communists had disproportionately more chances to be rescued and moved to the Soviet Union from the advance of the Nazis. During the war there were around 200,000 Jews or about 50-60 percent of refugees from Poland registered throughout the Soviet Union.¹⁹ In 1944, the ZPP established in Moscow the Organizing Committee of Polish Jews (Komitet Organizacyjny Żydów Polskich, KOŻP). The KOŻP was responsible for Jewish affairs, mainly for the

¹⁷ Krystyna Kersten, "Narodziny systemu władzy." *Zeszyty Historyczne (Paryż)* 77 (1986), 315–316.

¹⁸ Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland*, 4.

¹⁹ Grzegorz Berendt, "A New Life: Jewish Institutions and Organizations in Poland from 1944 to 1950" in: *Jewish Presence in Absence: The Aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland, 1944–2010* by Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 2014, 221-222. Estimation is given according to Hornowa, Elżbieta. *Powrót Żydów polskich z ZSRR oraz działalność opiekuńcza Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce*. Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1985, 109-112.

repatriation of Polish Jews.²⁰ Along with a fear of unorganized repatriation they had to deal with the consequences of the USSR Decree from 29.11.1939, according to which “all citizens of Western Ukrainian SSR and Belorussian SSR, who were present on that territories on 1-2 November 1939, were granted on the basis of the law “On Soviet citizenship” from 19.09.1939, the citizenship of the Soviet Union.”²¹ In addition, the refugees were in urgent need of social and medical care, food, clothes and orphanages. With the approval of Soviet authorities and financial support from the Jews of the Western world, the KOŻP fulfilled all these functions. The Repatriation Agreement was signed by the Provisional Government in Poland and the USSR on June 6, 1945. As a result, around 170,000 people came back to Poland in 1946. The process was ongoing for a few years, until the Soviet Union dissolved KOŻP and stopped the repatriation in 1949.²² Polish Jews who survived in the USSR underwent a high degree of Sovietization already during the wartime.

The process of repatriation from the Soviet Union took place in two major waves: from the former Polish territories (Western Belarus, Ukraine, and Southern Lithuania) Jews came back together with the Red Army approaching Poland in 1944-45. The second, much larger group was repatriated after the Polish-Soviet agreement of 6 June 1945, according to which those Poles (whether Jewish or not) who could prove their citizenship before 1939 had the right to return to Poland.²³ The main organizers and negotiators of the repatriation were the Polish Patriot’s Union

²⁰ Grzegorz Berendt, “A New Life: Jewish Institutions and Organizations in Poland from 1944 to 1950” in: *Jewish Presence in Absence: The Aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland, 1944–2010* by Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska. (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 2014), 219-220.

²¹ Krystyna Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm: anatomia półprawd, 1939-68*. Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992, 43-44. From 1941 Soviet policy went even further, giving Soviet passports to all ex-Polish citizens who were not of the Polish nationality, that is minorities, and first of all the Polish Jews. In an absurd way, often inspectors decided on who belongs to the Polish nation not on the basis of self-identification, but on how a name sounded. This matter created a huge problem to Jews who wanted to return from the USSR to Poland after 1944.

²² Grzegorz Berendt, “A New Life”, 222.

²³ Natalia Aleksiuń, *Dokąd dalej?: ruch syjonistyczny w Polsce (1944-1950)* (Warszawa, 2002), 61-65.

in Moscow (Związek Patriotów Polskich, ZPP), the institution of Polish and Polish-Jewish Communists, who were relatively trusted by Stalin's circles.²⁴

The PKWN manifesto of 1944 declared the civil rights and democratic freedom for the whole Polish population. For the Jews it promised the "restoration of [Jewish] communal life as well as equal rights, both de jure and de facto."²⁵ Despite the destruction of the Jewish prewar community in Poland and the small Jewish population present, the intensity and diversity of the political and social life in the first post war years was very impressive.

It is impossible to estimate the exact number of Jews living in Poland after the war. As a result of constant migration inside and outside the country and organizational chaos, which allowed some people to register more than once, the numbers are approximate. According to Dobroszycki, the totals rose from around 42,500 in May 1945, to 106,000 in January 1946, and reached 240,000 at the time of Kielce pogrom in July 1946. Mass emigration resulted in a dramatic decline in numbers to 89,000 in 1947.²⁶

The atmosphere of danger in Poland after the war was widespread. Jews were afraid to go back to their towns, as often their property including houses and apartments was already overtaken by Polish neighbors, who did not want to give it back easily. Despite the presence of the Red Army, banditry and violence continued for a long time. Various anti-Jewish, anti-communist groups were still active, including members of the Polish Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK). The cases of beating, plunder and murder of Jews were quickly known, creating panic and stimulating the

²⁴ Interestingly, the ideological division into Zionists on the one hand and Communists plus Bund on the other hand existed already in this small group in the Organizational Committee of Polish Jews (Komitet Organizacyjny Żydów Polskich, KOŻP), and became a matter of never ending discussions among them during the existence of the ZPP as well as after their return to Poland. Aleksion, 2002, 50.

²⁵ Norman Davies, and Antony Polonsky, eds. *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939-46*. (Springer, 1991), 223.

²⁶ Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland: a portrait based on Jewish community records, 1944-1947*. (Armonk, New York, 1994), 10.

plans to leave the country among the fresh returnees. A critical point was reached with the Kielce Pogrom on July 4, 1946. Thirty-six Jews were killed by the local population after a Polish boy was announced missing and the rumors blamed Jews, recalling the ages-long “blood libel” accusation. The local witnesses, police and military were passive and did not prevent the tragedy from happening. This was not the only, but one of the largest pogroms in postwar Poland, and created a panic among the Jews.²⁷ The experience of massive antisemitism in Poland after 1945 made the USSR appear as a protector against this renewed threat.

Other factors that influenced the emergence of the “emigration panic” were the psychological trauma after the loss of family and home in the horrors of the Holocaust; a very strong Zionist propaganda, which inspired many to move to Palestine to build a new future there, and finally, the fear of the soon-to-come Communist power in Poland and its effects on the free economy, particularly threatening for Jewish entrepreneurs and artisans who had been wealthy before the war.²⁸

1.2 *The Central Committee of Polish Jews*

The Central Committee of Polish Jews (Centralny Komitet Żydów Polskich, CKŻP) created in Lublin in November 1944, was the first self-organized Jewish institution in the postwar period, responding to the immediate need to feed, settle and help all those Jews who survived but did not have any place to go to or any authority to rely on. Many of the branches that merged into this umbrella organization, had initially been just private local initiatives. Jewish groups formed

²⁷ Bożena Szaynok, “The role of antisemitism in postwar Polish-Jewish relations.” In: Robert Blobaum ed., *Antisemitism and its opponents in modern Poland* (Cornell University Press, 2005), 272-275.

²⁸ August Grabski, and Grzegorz Berendt. *Między emigracją a trwaniem: syjoniści i komuniści Żydówscy w Polsce po Holocauście*. (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2003), 53.

almost exclusively in towns and cities; almost none of the Jews decided to go back to villages and shtetls, because of the complete destruction of their properties and the fear of the aggressive attitude of their former neighbors.

From the very beginning, the CKŻP presented itself as the primary and sole institution representing the Jewish community to the Polish government. The formal position of the CKŻP and its weight in the Jewish community was strong and indicated a significant level of independence. In a way it realized for the first time in history the idea of centralized cultural autonomy of the Jews. However, the real political weight of this institution was far from giving it true autonomy, since it was always connected to the quickly changing Polish situation, especially its gradual Sovietization.

1.2.1 Ideology and Political Composition

Urgently created to assist Jewish survivors, the CKŻP soon became the most important political organization for Jews, controlling all spheres of life.²⁹ In the years of transition (1944-1947), before the total victory of the communist regime in Poland, the conflict of interests among different political groups inside of the CKŻP was a regular issue. In 1945, the CKŻP was reorganized, moved to Warsaw and filled with members of the main Jewish political groups. Among the parties represented, there were the Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR), the Bund, Poaley Zion right, Poaley Zion left, Ichud, He-Chaluc, Ha-Shomer Ha-Tzair and

²⁹ Aleksium, 2002. 52.

other smaller groups.³⁰ The PPR had the biggest group in the Presidium, comprising six chairs; Ichud and Bund had four each; other parties were represented with smaller numbers.³¹

Despite the formal pluralism of political representation in the CKŻP, the PPR successfully guided most of the Committees' policies. The only exception was the question of migration to Palestine, lobbied by the Zionists.³² According to David Engel, the CKŻP could represent a medieval rather than a modern model of cooperation between internal Jewish organizational structures and external state authorities. The postwar period in his analysis was characterized by a high level of internal Jewish autonomy, while the Polish government had little interest in interfering.³³ However, one should keep in mind the fact that the CKŻP emerged and operated as part of a postwar political structure, which was fully approved by the Polish authorities and their Eastern supervisors. The only way for the CKŻP to obtain this level of autonomy was to ensure a close and harmonious cooperation with State and Party, and so they did. Nevertheless, this opportunism was not exclusively pragmatic – the pro-communist position of the people who were members of

³⁰ *Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR* was a communist party in Poland from 1942 to 1948, founded as a reconstitution of the Communist Party of Poland, and merged with the Polish Socialist Party in 1948 to form the Polish United Workers' Party. *The General Jewish Labour Bund in Poland* was a Jewish socialist party in Poland which promoted the political, cultural and social autonomy of Jewish workers, sought to combat antisemitism and was generally opposed to Zionism. The Bund was dissolved, along with all other non-communist parties, in 1948. *Poaley Syjon* (also spelled *Poale Zion*) was a movement of Marxist–Zionist Jewish workers founded in 1905. It split into Left and Right factions in 1919-1920, after the Second International. The right wing was less Marxist and more nationalist, strongly affiliated itself with the Second International, and was committed to the world Zionist Organization. The left wing faction did not consider the Second International radical enough. It opposed the decision to rejoin the (World) Zionist Organization, and supported the Bolshevik revolution. Their attempts were unsuccessful, as the Soviets were suspicious of Zionism nationalism. *Ichud* (Hebrew: Unity), a joint cooperation of all the Zionist factions, was more a Zionist movement than a political party. It was abolished in February 1950. *He-Chaluc* (Hebrew: the Pioneer) was a Zionist movement promoting Jewish settlement in Erec Israel (the Land of Israel). The pioneer movement was reconstituted in Poland after 1944, albeit only for a brief period of time. *Ha-Szomer ha-Cair* (Hebrew: The Young Guard) was a radical, avant-garde pioneering movement of Zionist youth established in Galicia after 1914. Mordechai Anielewicz, a prominent activist, became the leader of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. After 1944, the members of the organization participated in the preparations for the aliyah – both the legal and illegal ones. Tomaszewski J., Żbikowski A., Żydzi w Polsce. Dzieje i kultura. Leksykon, Warszawa 2001.

³¹ Aleksion, 2002, 53, and Tomaszewski J., Żbikowski A., 2001.

³² August Grabski, *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce (1944-1950): historia polityczna* (Warszawa, Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2015), 11.

³³ David Engel, "The Reconstruction of Jewish Communal Institutions in Postwar Poland: The Origins of the Central Committee of Polish Jews, 1944-1945." *East European Politics and Societies* 10, no. 1 (1995): 85-107. 86-7, 105-107.

the Jewish fraction in PPR and at the same time leaders of the CKŻP was widely supported by the majority of the Jewish population. The reasons should be found in the specificity of the situation of survivors in the postwar years and their desire to have a safe and prosperous future of the Jewish community, which at that time only the communists could promise.

1.2.2 Structure and Aims

Under the joint name of the Central Committee of Polish Jews a number of regional branches were established throughout the country. There were around two hundred local Committees supervised from Warsaw by mid-1946.³⁴ It was mostly financed by the American Joint Distribution Committee. The managing council included representatives of all legal at that time political Jewish Parties with prevalence of Jewish communists from PPR. The Committee organized and controlled such spheres as education, medicine, social help, and religion.

The early statement on the basic aims and tasks of the CKŻP was published in November 1944 in the first Bulletin of the Jewish Press Agency (Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej, BŻAP).

As a result of internal discussions, the Central Committee decided to base its activity of the following principles:

1. The ruthless fight against fascism in all its forms, overt or disguised, as an enemy of all mankind, Poland and the barbaric perpetrator of the biggest tragedy in the history of humanity, which met the Jewry in Europe, and Polish Jewry in particular.
2. The full participation of Jews in the active struggle for the complete expulsion of Germans from Poland and the creation of an independent, free and truly democratic Poland.
3. "Productivization"³⁵ of the remaining Jews, their active participation in the economic reconstruction of their country and the development of its productive forces, on the basis of the legal and practical equality.

³⁴ Grzegorz Berendt, "A New Life", 226.

³⁵ The term "productivization" was originally introduced by the Haskalah movement, members of which believed that breaking the traditional way of life and engaging in the agriculture and industrial production, Jews could better assimilate to the gentile society. This concept was inherited by the USSR authorities, which promoted productivisation as a way to fight bourgeoisie, private commerce and petty artisans, and to build socialism. Michael

4. Reconstruction of national cultural life, education, cultural institutions, and Jewish art in all forms.
5. Reconstruction of Jewish communities (*gmina*) as centers of cultural, social and religious Jewish life.
6. A special concern about Jewish children, as the most precious treasure and the future of the nation.
7. The organization and management of community services for the Jewish population and maintenance of the contact with Jewish organizations abroad.
8. Collection and publication abroad materials pertaining to torture and murder of Polish Jews and Jews of other countries.
9. The collection and publication of materials pertaining to the armed resistance of the Jews and their participation in the struggle against the occupier.
10. Recording of the overall harm that the Jewish community, Jewish art and culture, and Jewish social organizations suffered during the war.
11. Awarding to the Jewish population the legal aid at the restitution of property looted by the occupant.
12. Maintaining contact with the Organizing Committee of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union at the Union of Polish Patriots.³⁶

Three key elements prevailed from the beginning in the CKŻP's activity: first the support of the major communist aspirations – anti-fascist fight, “democratization”, meaning Sovietization of Poland, “productivization” of the Jewish masses, and close cooperation with Soviet Jewish institutions under the Stalinist control; second the supervision and care over the Jewish population on the political, social, cultural and economic level; and finally, the third task of writing the history of the Nazi crimes against the Jews and making them public.³⁷ The Central Jewish Historical Commission was a special department destined to undertake this crucial task.

L Miller, and Scott Ury, eds. *Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and the Jews of East Central Europe* (Routledge, 2016), 162.

³⁶ BŻAP, 13.11.1944

³⁷ To fulfill the mentioned tasks the following departments of the CKŻP were organized by 1946: a Secretariat, and separate Departments for Repatriation, Legal Issues, Social Welfare, Technology and Building, Emigration, Registration and Statistics, “Productivization”, Child Care, Youth, Culture and Propaganda, Education, Human Resources, Finances. The matter of religious life was not a subject of the CKŻP's responsibility, this function would have been in conflict with its leftist anti-religious ideology. Temporarily, Jewish religious associations were allowed to exist, from the 1946 under the name of Jewish Religious Congregations under Dawid Kahane's leadership. August Grabski, *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce (1944-1950): historia polityczna*. (Warszawa, Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2015), 21-23.

Four separate points out of twelve (points 8 to 11) in the statement of the most important Jewish organization responsible for almost every sphere of life were devoted to the documentation and publication of the Holocaust. Already on this level the matters of Jewish resistance and suffering were separated. The issue of Jewish passivity occupied significant place in disputes inside and outside the country. The special attention paid to emphasize that Jews resisted actively and contributed to the fight with occupiers was also a sign of the strong Zionist influences within the Committee and the Historical Commission. The last two points represent a sensitive topic in the postwar reality when claims to property taken by Germans or looted by local Polish population could be deadly dangerous. In these circumstances proper legal procedures had to be organized, and this could not be done without evidence collected by the Jewish Historical Commission. This, apart from participation in the war crimes investigations and trials, was another level of activity, and the reason for the Commission's central position in the Jewish community. Particularly, the Western Jews and non-Jewish governments and organizations had to be well-informed about the horrors that happened to Jews in Poland during the occupation. The aim was to gain the approval of Allies to the communist politics seen in contrast with fascist crimes and to attract financial and diplomatic support from the West.

The characteristic duality of Soviet policies towards the Holocaust in the early postwar years resulted simultaneously in glorification of the Jewish fighters and a silence about the exclusiveness of Jewish suffering during the War. The policy of depicting Nazi crimes against non-Soviet Jews was different. After 1943, when Germany disclosed the Katyń affair, Soviet media were speculating on Jewish victims in Poland in order to gain credibility in the eyes of the Allies. Another wave of media attention on the death camps in Poland lasted from 1944 way into

the postwar period.³⁸ In order to discriminate against the Polish government-in-exile as anti-Semitic and enable the establishment of the Soviet rule in Poland, Soviet propaganda continued to support the publicizing of Jewish martyrdom until 1947. This could be one of the reasons why the CŻKH was allowed to exist and work on the Holocaust in an atmosphere of relative freedom.

1.3 The short history of the Central Jewish Historical Commission

In August 1944, the group of Jewish survivors led by Marek Bitter established a provisional Historical Commission in just-liberated Lublin. This initiative suffered from a lack of funding and staff. Therefore, the provisional Central Jewish Committee decided to take over and create a Central Jewish Historical Commission as a branch of the Committee with a centralized budget and country-wide network. In December 1944, the founding meeting proclaimed the historian Philip Friedman as its director and accepted for membership other survivors including Josef Kermisz, Mejelech Bakalczuk, Noe Gruss, and Abba Kovner.³⁹ Several members of the CŻKH were professional historians. Philip Friedman, the director of the Commission, and Józef Kermisz, the head of the CŻKH's archive, were the most trained and competent members. The rest contained people of various professional experience.

In March 1945, when most of the Polish territory was liberated, the Commission moved to Łódź, as Warsaw at that time was in ruins. From a small office that consisted of only two employees, the CŻKH grew to around thirty people in the main office, one hundred all together, if one includes the branches.⁴⁰ Regional branches were established in many Polish cities. The regional

³⁸ Karel C. Berkhoff, "Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population": the Holocaust in the Soviet Media, 1941-45." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10.1 (2009): 61-105, 114.

³⁹ In the following months Michal Borwicz, Joseph Wulf, Ada Eber, Nella Rost, Nachman Blumental, Rachel Auerbach, Isaia Trunk and Artur Eisenbach also joined. Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*, 91.

⁴⁰ Nachman Blumental ed., *Instrukcje dla zbierania materiałów etnograficznych w okresie okupacji niemieckiej*

commissions in Kraków, Katowice, Wrocław, Warsaw, and Białystok were the most active.⁴¹ In order to systematize the efforts of all the branches, the CŻKH employed several instructors, who traveled from one center to another, teaching new members on methodology. Sometimes, leaders of the branches were invited to the Central office. But the main source for enabling easy and quick work with testimonies were the published instructions. For each field, historical, ethnographic, children experience, and medical examination, were developed separate questionnaires. The guidelines for non-professional *zamlers* (collectors) contained examples of questions on personal data and various aspects of experiences of survivors during the occupation. The main archive of the Commission was established in Łódź under the supervision of Józef Kermisz, a talented historian, who left the country to become one of the creators of the world-famous Yad Vashem institute. He was the director of the Yad Vashem archives for many years. However, in 1945, everything that could be gathered was gathered in this pretty eclectic Łódź archive. Most importantly, thousands of written testimonies (1,300 in 1945, 4,300 in 1949) became the center of the collection. The archive contained also documents of German and Jewish organizations and institutions, private correspondence, diaries, personal documents, prewar documentation and artifacts, including books, poetry, religious items, photos, paintings, and sculpture. If something was in private hands or was available in other collections, photocopies or written copies were made. In 1946, the sensational discovery of the hidden Ringelblum Archive in the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto gave the archive a unique dimension.⁴²

In 1947, the CŻKH was transformed into the Jewish Historical Institute and moved permanently to Warsaw. By this date, the Commission had published thirty-eight books and brochures.⁴³ With

(Łódź: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna w Polsce., 1945), 4.

⁴¹ Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*, 89-91.

⁴² Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*, 100-102. For details see in this thesis: 2.1.7 Ringelblum archive

⁴³ Maurycy Horm, *Żydowski Instytut historyczny w latach 1944-1949*; BŻIH, 1979, 3-17.

growing tensions, as Poland was gradually Stalinized, the ideological expectations of the Party grew as well and as a result the Central Committee of Polish Jews started a policy of transforming the research institution into a tool of propaganda. Philip Friedman decided to emigrate and left his position and the country in July 1946. He was replaced with Nachman Blumental, with Józef Kermisz as general secretary in 1947.⁴⁴ They had both spent the war in the USSR and seemed more reliable in the eyes of the communist Jewish leadership, dominated by the powerful party member Szymon Zachariasz. However this state of affairs did not last. In 1949, they were both replaced by the trusted party member Bernard Mark, had been active in the Stalinist circles within the Polish Patriot's Union in Moscow during the war.⁴⁵ Under his leadership the Jewish Historical Institute published highly politicized works that were full of neat communist slogans. As the Central Committee of Polish Jews was dissolved and TSKŻ was established, the Institute remained an independent research institution with its own building and finances dependent totally on the ruling regime.

1.3 The role of the CŻKH in the investigation of Nazi crimes

The cooperation with other institutions investigating Nazi crimes and contributing to the prosecution of war criminals was an important part of the Central Jewish Historical Commission's work. The CŻKH provided materials and information to the Main Commission for Investigation of German Crimes (Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce, GKBZN), the Supreme National Tribunal (Najwyższy Trybunał Narodowy, NTN), the Polish prosecutor's Office and courts, and it also worked with the Institute for National Remembrance.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*, 117.

⁴⁵ Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*, 118.

⁴⁶ The Main Commission for Investigation of German Crimes emerged in November 1945 by decree of the Presidium of National Council. Its main task was to collect documentation to enable the condemnation of offenders for crimes

It participated in the preparations for the Nuremberg Tribunal, for instance by drawing up the memorandum titled “The annihilation of Polish Jews under the German occupation in 1939-1945” for the Polish delegation to Nuremberg. When General Telford Taylor, the Chief Counsel Prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trials, came to Poland and asked representatives of the government about the data on the Jews, who suffered and died because of forced labor, the government passed the request to the GKBZN, and they in turn asked the CŻKH for help.⁴⁷ In 1945, the CŻKH has provided a significant amount of documents to the GKBZN. Philip Friedman, the director of CŻKH, was appointed to the Editorial Committee of the Bulletin of the GKBZN – the periodical platform for publishing findings, which was in high demand in Poland and abroad.⁴⁸

The case of Amon Leopold Goeth was Poland's first trial in which the defendant was accused of direct participation in the crime of genocide.⁴⁹ The CŻKH cooperated with the Kraków Regional GKBZN in the preparation for the trial. One of the two expert witnesses was Michał Borwicz, the director of the CŻKH's Kraków branch. He described the general policy and system of extermination of Jews in Poland. His participation was an important element for the prosecution to show how significant for trial was the evidence about the crimes specifically on Jews.⁵⁰

committed during the years of World War II. It was proclaimed to be an overriding authority on all other institutions in Poland that conducted similar research, and they all are obliged to cooperate. The GKBZN was aimed to commit to publication and promotion of all findings widely for the Polish audience as well as transfer the results of investigations to relevant institutions abroad. Accumulated in 1945-1946 by the committee, the documentation passed mainly to the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. In 1949, the GKBZN transformed into the Main Commission for the Investigation of Hitlerite Crimes in Poland with limited legal capabilities. See Przemysław Lewandowski, "Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu w Polsce (1945–1999)" [The Chief Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation (1945–1999)], *Piotrkowskie Zeszyty Historyczne* 16 (2015): 150-154. The Supreme National Tribunal (Najwyższy Trybunał Narodowy, NTN) was a war crime tribunal active in Poland from 1946 to 1948. The tribunal presided over seven high-profile cases (of 49 individual total). *United Nations War Crimes Commission, Law reports of trials of war criminals*: United Nations War Crimes Commission, Wm. S. Hein Publishing, 1997, p.18.

⁴⁷ RG - 15.182M, Letter from 12.03.1947, folder 122.

⁴⁸ Lewandowski, "Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu w Polsce (1945–1999).", 154.

⁴⁹ It was formulated in Polish as *ludobójstwo*, which means “genocide”. It was probably the first in the world case when this crime was included in the indictment. The inventor of the term was a lawyer Raphael Lemkin.

⁵⁰ Michael J. Bazyler, and Frank M. Tuerkheimer, *Forgotten Trials of the Holocaust* (NYU Press, 2015), 121.

Moreover, all the percipient witnesses testifying against Goeth were Jews. This was “a real trial of the Holocaust.”⁵¹ This process, according to the editor of the report, had illustrated “the martyrdom of six million Jews murdered by the Germans.”⁵² Judge Dr. Kosiński accused Nazi leaders of the elaboration of Nazi ideology, and “the creation of executive bodies of scrupulous and inhumane realization of the plans to exterminate first Jews and then Slavs.” He claimed that “the vast majority of the German people [...] approved of the acts of crime [...] and benefited from the criminal looting”. He highlighted that apart from the facts of Goeth’s crimes, which were widely known during the occupation, the indictment is based exclusively on hard evidence collected by the GKBZN and the CŻKH.⁵³ The field investigations in the death camps, among others in Chełmno, was another joint initiative of the two institutions.⁵⁴

The CŻKH’s members drafted a resolution about the necessity to create a full list of all “Hitlerite criminals”. They were aware of the fact that many suspects were kept in American and English controlled territories or even were free, and that the Polish government could not demand their extradition because of the lack of evidence. Therefore, due to its international character, the network of Jewish Commissions was to lead these efforts. All Jewish organizations and every

⁵¹ Michael J. Bazylar, *Forgotten Trials of the Holocaust*, 119.

⁵² Nachman Blumenthal, and Stanisław Kosiński, eds. *Proces ludobójcy Amona Leopolda Goetha przed Najwyższym Trybunałem Narodowym. [The process of genocidal murderer Amon Leopold Goeth at the Supreme National Tribunal]* (Warszawa; Łódź; Kraków: CŻKH, 1947). 514 pages of the book are based entirely on the transcript from the process. Judge dr. Stanisław Kosiński prepared the edition of the stenography for the book. His work on the book was assisted by two out of three main procurators of the Supreme National Tribunal in Poland: Tadeusz Cyprian and Mieczysław Siewierski.

⁵³ Nachman Blumenthal, *Proces ludobójcy Amona Leopolda Goetha*, 7-8.

⁵⁴ The Chełmno field investigation took place on May 28 1945, just after the liberation. Five out of the fourteen people present were CŻKH’s members. From CŻKH were present: Dr. Filip Friedman, Mgr. N. Blumental, Kpt. Dr. Józef Kermisz, Jakub Waldman, and CŻKH’s photographer N. Zonabend. Other participants were Polish writer Zofia Nałkowska, prosecutors and investigators, and representatives of the press. The report on this field trip was written by CŻKH’s members stated that Chełmno was the earliest death camp in Poland, and it was created as a planned site for mass killing. Numerous physical evidence had to be immediately secured and important witnesses from this area were to be interviewed as soon as possible. Due to the information that not only Polish citizens were killed in Chełmno and in a view of large amount of evidence to process, they suggested that International Red Cross and representatives of the foreign press took part in the investigations. RG - 15.182M, Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna przy Centralnym Komitecie Żydów w Polsce, Sygn. 303/XX, 1944 - 1947. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. Folder 33.

single individual would had to participate and cooperate with the local and central authorities of Poland.⁵⁵ This full registry of all Nazi criminals was meant to become a meaningful answer to the “Anglo-Saxon defenders of ‘oppressed Germans’”.⁵⁶ The alphabetical list of war criminals was created by the Historical Commission in Kraków.⁵⁷ However, it is hard to conclude whether the resolution was successful. From the one side, thanks to CŻKH’s engagement, many offenders were caught and punished, however, the utopian plans for a nationwide network of cooperation had never become a reality.⁵⁸

Problems in cooperation between the two institutions were connected to the pressure from the GKBZN to supply more material, almost every correspondence contains formula-reminder that the GKBZN is appointed as the main institution by the decree and every other institution has to cooperate. The GKBZN highlights that the cooperation is in everyone’s interest, meaning that it will allow the prosecution of more war criminals.⁵⁹ The lack of understanding for the specificity of the catastrophe among investigators is one of the most striking observations. The result were unrealistic demands made to the CŻKH. An example is the request of 5.12.1945 to give the exact number of Jews transported to each of the death camps from particular ghettos, and even to give the exact number of Jews exterminated in Poland (!). Sometimes, these requests were even more absurd. Halina Werenko, investigating judge from Warsaw, asked the Commission to send copies

⁵⁵ Political organizations of every kind, also cultural, youth, sport etc.

⁵⁶ RG - 15.182M, Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna przy Centralnym Komitecie Żydów w Polsce, Sygn. 303/XX, 1944 - 1947. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. Folder 40.

⁵⁷ RG - 15.182M. Folder 40.

⁵⁸ In my opinion there were several reasons: lack of self-organization within the Polish Jewish community, which was busy with the struggle for survival in a harsh postwar conditions or preparations for uncoming emigration; Polish government overtook the responsibility but did not act with emotional motivations typical for Jewish investigators; Allies’ politics of forgetting and forgiving were another obstacle on the way of justice. Also, the presented categories of potential criminals were intuitive rather than based on law regulations. The highly problematic issue of who is responsible and who should be put on trial – organizers or perpetrators, will become a never-ending discussion for many years. However, for Jewish historians in Poland, the answer was obvious – everyone.

⁵⁹ These services were not always free of charge, there were many bills issued, for example one for the report sent to Nuremberg was issued for 25 000 zloty.

of all materials related to the extermination of Jews in 1939-45 including political documentation of the Third Reich, Hitler's speeches, threats to the Jewish nation, and all German and local authorities' directives.⁶⁰

The CŻKH had also to create a good impression of Polish government abroad by the very fact of the close cooperation and the inclusion of crimes against the Jews into the agenda on crimes against the Polish nation. Additionally, the GKBZN used the materials for exhibitions and publications abroad.⁶¹ The Commission was a significant source of evidence for many processes including Nuremberg. The process of the nationalization of martyrdom by the Polish national authorities and the marginalization of Jewish victimhood can be clearly seen already in these early postwar years.

1.4 The Conclusion of Jewish Institutional Life in Poland

After the elections for the new Polish government in January 1947, the Democratic Block led by the Polish communists gained the majority of seats in the Parliament and the era of communism in Poland officially began. As the Polish communists needed to demonstrate their reliability in submitting the satellite state according to USSR leadership, they started to widely copy Soviet practices and ideological statements. In this atmosphere, Zionist or religious Jewish parties could not exist on the Polish political map. Moreover, the political plurality of the first postwar years began to cease and a semi-autonomous Jewish Committee could not remain as an alternative to centralized power.

⁶⁰ Letter from 26.04.1946.

⁶¹ For instance request from 16.01.1946 to send few characteristic testimonies from Treblinka for the exhibition in Switzerland.

In the bulletin of the Jewish Press Agency, it can be clearly seen how carefully Jews kept track of the news on the situation in Palestine and the changes of the Kremlin position and policy toward it.⁶² After the turn in the USSR against Israel, Zionism and nationalism of any sort, played the initial role in the liquidation of Jewish cultural-national autonomy. Another popular topic of the news was the Soviet experiment with Jewish territorial autonomy in Birobidzhan.⁶³ Surprisingly, the failed project of Stalin's nationality policy, which did not enjoy popularity in the USSR, was a big inspiration for those who argued for the future of the Jewish people in Poland and Palestine.

The rapid change in Stalin's policy towards the Jews in the USSR and its satellites began with the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. From September 1948, Jewish political and cultural institutions were closed all around the country. All their assets were nationalized. Within a few years, the developed health, business, cultural, and religious independent structures including the CKŻP were liquidated.

The only Jewish organization permitted to function in the new socialist Poland was the Socio-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce, TSKŻ) founded in 1950. The TSKŻ did not hold any political functions. It was aimed to represent literature, language, and arts and became for the remaining Polish Jews the main and only source of national identity. However, many voices in communist Poland presented those Jews who stayed in the country after 1948 as dedicated Communists and they managed to survive in the

⁶² Bulletin of the Jewish Press Agency (BŻAP) 1944-1949.

⁶³ In 1934 the Soviet government established the Jewish Autonomous Region in a sparsely populated area some five thousand miles east of Moscow. Located along the Sino-Soviet border, the Jewish Autonomous Region, popularly known as Birobidzhan, was designated as the national homeland of Soviet Jewry. The creation of Birobidzhan was part of the Kremlin's effort to establish an enclave where secular Jewish culture rooted in the Yiddish language and socialist beliefs could serve as an alternative to Palestine and resolve a variety of perceived problems besetting Soviet Jews. Birobidzhan still exists today, but despite its continued official status Jews represent only a small minority of the inhabitants of the region. Robert Weinberg, *Stalin's forgotten Zion: Birobidzhan and the making of a Soviet Jewish homeland: an illustrated history, 1928-1996* (University of California Press, 1998).

dangerous Stalinist times only because they rejected former plans about a national autonomy in Poland. Some voices even blamed the remaining Jews for overtaking of power in the country by so-called “Żydokomuna” (Judeo-communism).

Most Jews in Poland had a great diversity of plans and theories about how to live after the deadly war. The years between 1944 and 1950 were probably the years of the greatest freedom of Jews in Poland, difficult, but full of hope, and the years of notable pluralism and possibilities. The hopes to reestablish the community in its prewar shape failed. Since the State of Israel was established, the attention of Jews was mostly devoted to its great achievements and struggle. The epic history of Bund was close to its end, the disappointment of Communists in the long cooperation and cohabitation both in the USSR and in Poland would not let this party exist. Jewish Communists were busy with the task of creating a “delightful future for the Polish Peoples’ Republic.” In the atmosphere of postwar non-willingness of being called „Jude“, many of them greeted the changes and switched their identity from national to purely ideological. Politically, as I have shown, the failure was determined by the creation of the state of Israel and the resonance it created. However, one should not forget the psychological reasons: for most Jews it was not possible to go back and restart life in Poland. Many of them left immediately after they saw the scale of destruction, they chose to never go again to the place of the Catastrophe. The ups and downs of the postwar attempts to restore the Jewish community in Poland showed that life could not continue beyond death.

Chapter 2. The Central Jewish Historical Commission – Provenance, People, Legacy.

2.1 The place of the Commission in Holocaust historiography and methodology

The debate on how to place the Central Jewish Historical Commission in historiography did not occur until the recent time. The basic reason was the lack of interest to the early postwar Holocaust documentation efforts. The achievement of the “surviving historians” was underestimated for many years. The dominant opinion in academia was that these attempts were not very valuable, the postwar years were the period of “silence” about the Catastrophe, and that the beginning of the Holocaust historiography should be dated from the 1960s. With the growing interest in the late 1940s among historians in the last years appeared the question of the origins of the early Holocaust historiography. Was it a faithful successor of the Jewish history school of the interwar period? Or did the deep trauma of the war experience push historians to develop a completely new methodology, which they had to establish from scratch?

I will demonstrate in this chapter the prewar roots of the CŽKH and jointly trace the postwar developments, which could indicate the innovatory approach. I will come to the conclusion that the Commission, while using the established traditions in Jewish history writing, introduced some new features, which would become a part of the later methodology of writing about Shoah.

2.1.1 The myth of silence

For many years, not only the CŽKH’s impact was ignored by the historians. The myth of the postwar silence resulted in the common opinion that the first significant wave of Holocaust research emerged in the 1960s after the Eichmann trial. In recent years, the early postwar

Holocaust studies were rehabilitated, which allowed such historians as Hasia R. Diner, David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist to claim that the Holocaust historiography started on serious scale already in the late 1940s.⁶⁴

2.1.2 “Judeo-centric” approach

Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg, the author of the three-volume, 1,273-page magnum opus, *The Destruction of the European Jews* received his PhD from Columbia University.⁶⁵ During his studies he was connected to the prominent historian Salo Baron and his former student, Philip Friedman.⁶⁶ Friedman participated in Hilberg’s doctoral defense at Columbia in 1955. Despite the professional connection and the awareness of Friedman’s activities in Poland, Hilberg did not pay any attention to Friedman’s work published before his emigration.⁶⁷ Hilberg was accused by Israeli historians from a Zionist perspective that he used exclusively German sources, ignored the Jewish perspective and refused to demonstrate the Jewish resistance.⁶⁸ Hilberg, in fact, did use Jewish sources, but he argued that from the point of view of a social-scientific reconstruction of

⁶⁴ David Cesarani, “Challenging the ‘Myth of Silence’: Postwar Responses to the Destruction of European Jewry.” *After the Holocaust: Challenging the myth of silence* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 15-38.

⁶⁵ Raul Hilberg (1926-2007) was an American historian and the earliest acknowledged authority on Holocaust studies. He was born in Vienna, left Austria in 30s. Despite arousing sharp criticism, his contribution to portraying the Nazi killing machine makes him one of the founders of contemporary Holocaust studies. See on him "A Remembrance of Raul Hilberg" by Michael Berenbaum. Accessed from <http://amgathering.org/2007/08/2609/a-remembrance-of-raul-hilberg-by-michael-berenbaum/> 01.01.2017. The dissertation was first published in 1961: Hilberg, Raul. *The destruction of the European Jews*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985.

⁶⁶ Salo Wittmayer Baron (1895-1989) was a prominent Jewish historian. He was a professor in Vienna University and he left Europe in 20s to become a professor at Columbia University. According to Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Baron "was undoubtedly the greatest Jewish historian of the 20th century. Michael Stanislawski, *Salo Wittmayer Baron. Demystifying Jewish History* (2005). Accessed from <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/alumni/Magazine/Winter2005/llbaron.html> 01.01.2017.)

⁶⁷ In his autobiographical book *Politics of Memory*, Hilberg described Friedman as someone who is “interested in the Jewish scene in Poland [...] [who] hoped to write a book about ghettos. [...] Who lived in the Jewish world [...]” Aleksiu, Natalia. „An Invisible Web. Philip Friedman and the Network of Holocaust Research“, 2016: 149.

⁶⁸ David Engel, *Historians of the Jews and the Holocaust* (Stanford University Press, 2010) 135, 138.

the destruction process, they seemed less relevant to him, thus he concentrated on a perpetrators and their crimes. According to Laura Jockusch, the unique dimension of the CŽKH work lays in their pioneering approach to use both victim and perpetrator sources, at the same time concentrating on the Jewish experience.⁶⁹ As Friedman wrote:

What we need is a history of the Jewish people during the period of Nazi rule, in which the central role is to be played by the Jewish people, not only as the victim of a tragedy, but also as the bearer of a communal existence with all the manifold and numerous aspects involved. In short: Our approach must be “Judeo-centric” as opposed to “Nazi-centric”, which it has been so far.⁷⁰

Friedman realized this approach already throughout its activity as director of the Commission, which thereby preceded the victim-oriented approach in genocide-writing by several decades.

2.1.3 Social history and Opposition to lachrymosity

Friedman held a doctorate from the University of Vienna, he had also studied at the Jewish Teachers College under Salo W. Baron's supervision. Before the war, he taught on the social, economic and political history of Polish Jews in the nineteenth century at Warsaw University.⁷¹ He advocated principles of social history and tended to separate emotions from historical research. As a survivor, whose family perished in the Holocaust, Friedman never spoke about his personal trauma. Neither did he wish his experience to influence his methodological standards. However, the objectivity of the "survivor historians" was a constant matter of discussions within the Commission:

The task of a historian – a Jew – regarding the recent past is particularly difficult. Writing history requires the guidance of reason and not that of emotions, which creates numerous problems. In writing the history of the six years of German occupation, one cannot merely

⁶⁹ Jockusch, Laura. “Historiography in Transit“, 76.

⁷⁰ Philip Friedman, „Problems of Research on the European Jewish Catastrophe“, *Yad Vashem Studies*,3 (1959): 33.

⁷¹ Jockusch, Laura. “Historiography in Transit“, 78.

be a scholar having purely scholarly goals in mind, because a large role is played by factors of an emotional nature, such as personal experiences and personal loss.⁷²

This insistence on objective account resembles Salo Baron's opposition to lachrymosity in Jewish history, mainly identified with Heinrich Graetz, and Friedman inherited this critical position.⁷³

Salo Baron opposed the lachrymose conception of Jewish history stating that "Suffering is part of the destiny [of the Jews], but so is repeated joy as well as ultimate redemption."⁷⁴

Nevertheless, in the circumstances of the post-trauma research it was an impossible task to reject lachrymosity, as writing the history of extermination was for many an act of mourning. The

CŻKH's member Noe Grüss admitted:

We are not 'objective' and cold scientists. We approach the material of our work not like a professor approaches a body in a morgue. Our historical material are the dead bodies of our children and parents, the bodies of our dishonored wives and sisters, the memories of the partisans and ghetto fighters, the courageous hearts and burning love for [our] people and the disdain for our tormentors.⁷⁵

Therefore, the matter of survivors' objectivity occupied crucial place in the debates on the value of the early postwar research.

2.1.4 The East European Models of Jewish Historiography

Already before the war Friedman represented the East European school of Jewish historiography, founded by Simon Dubnow. According to it, the Jewish history was researched as a national history, in terms of historical consciousness and continuing existence despite crises and

⁷² AŻIH CKZP KH, folder 29, 4, Philip Friedman, *Der tsushtand un di oyfgabe fun undzer historiografye in itstikn moment* [The State and Task of Our Historiography in the Present Moment], September 19, 1945. Cited from: Laura Jockusch, "Khurbn Forshung—Jewish Historical Commissions in Europe, 1943–1949." *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook 6* (2007): 441-473.

⁷³ Engel, David. *Holocaust and the Historians*: 57-58.

⁷⁴ Eisenberg, Ronald L. *Essential Figures in Jewish Scholarship*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2014, 216.

⁷⁵ AŻIH, CKZP, KH, folder 7, 41, Noe Grüss, undated speech on the activities of the commission (Yiddish). Cited from: Laura Jockusch, "'Khurbn Forshung', 460.

persecution through the centuries. This conception also tended not to place the subjects of religion and tradition into the center of Jewish experience. Dubnow highlighted the role of ordinary members of the Jewish community in the research and the reception of historical scholarship.⁷⁶ The egalitarian character of the research was likewise demonstrated in the resolution of the CŻKH (undated, most probably not later than end of 1945). According to the draft resolution, all Jewish organizations (political of every kind, cultural, youth, sport etc.) and every single individual have to participate in collecting evidence of Nazi war crimes.⁷⁷

2.1.5 The Jewish history school of Warsaw

Dr. Józef Kermisz, Isaiah Trunk, and Artur Eisenbach studied history at Warsaw University. They represented the Polish – Jewish history school, developed in the interwar period under scholars such as Meir Bałaban, Mojzesz Schorr and Ignacy Schiper. The two approaches, which influenced the CŻKH were the “local approach” in history, promoted by Meir Bałaban, and the synthetic method focused on economic and social life of the community, advocated by Ignacy Schiper.⁷⁸ This method consisted in the combination of the analysis of what would later be called micro history with the macro context of ongoing processes.⁷⁹ It became an integral part not only of Friedman’s research, but also of later Holocaust scholarship.

⁷⁶ In his essay “Let us Search and Research”, cited from: Laura Jockusch, “Historiography in Transit“, 83.

⁷⁷ RG - 15.182M, Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna przy Centralnym Komitecie Żydów w Polsce, Sygn. 303/XX, 1944 - 1947. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. Folder 40.

⁷⁸ Roni Stauber, *Laying the foundations for Holocaust research: the impact of the historian Philip Friedman* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), 5.

⁷⁹ Roni Stauber, "Philip Friedman and the Beginning of Holocaust Studies." Bankier and Michman eds., *Holocaust Historiography in Context* (2008): 83-102.

2.1.6 YIVO

The activity of YIVO during the interwar period in gathering the testimonies of the contemporary Jewish generation and collecting interviews definitely influenced the invention of the CŻKH's questionnaires.⁸⁰ In its study of the past and present of the Jewish society, culture and economy, YIVO used the methodology of social sciences – interviews, questionnaires, and autobiographies. A similar network of the non-professional collectors for the field research was used by YIVO as later by CŻKH.⁸¹ The prewar collaboration of Friedman, Trunk, Kermisz, and Eisenbach with YIVO and the reactivation of this work after the war when YIVO moved to New York is another factor depicting the connection of the two institutions.⁸² Additionally, there was an influence of the Young Historians Circle of Emanuel Ringelblum and Raphael Mahler at Warsaw University.⁸³ They were associated with the historical section of YIVO and already during the 1920s proposed the creation of the Historical Commission for Poland. One of its projects was the collection of record books from Polish Jewish communities (*pinkeysim*). In a way, the CŻKH could be a direct successor of their initiative and to some extent it was despite the unprecedented character of the turn of Jewish historiography after the Catastrophe.

⁸⁰ Natalia Aleksion, „An Invisible Web”, 2016: 163. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research was founded in 1925 in Vilna, Poland. It became a major center for the research of Yiddish language, and history and culture of the Eastern European Jewry. Two features make it a unique for its time: the interest in all aspects of Jewish life – language, history, religion, folklore etc.; and the engagement of common members of the community as correspondents in collection of data and interviews. Source: Cecile Esther Kuznitz, *YIVO*, an article from the YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/YIVO> accessed 5.05.2017

⁸¹ Jockusch, Laura. “Historiography in Transit”, 83.

⁸² Jockusch, Laura. “Historiography in Transit”, 84.

⁸³ Jockusch, Laura. “Historiography in Transit”, 83.

2.1.7 Ringelblum archive

Emanuel Ringelblum's compilation of the archive *Oyneg Shabes* (Sabbath Joy) in the Warsaw ghetto is the unique example of a systematic effort to write history of the Holocaust from the inside perspective already during the war.⁸⁴ Between 1942 and 1943, three parts of the archive containing a rich collection of the documentation about the ghetto reality (newspapers, letters, diaries, photographs, reports etc.) were hidden in three spots in and near the ghetto. Discovered in September 1946 and December 1950, two parts of this archive are considered among the most important sources about the Warsaw ghetto. The third part was never discovered.⁸⁵ The survivors from the underground Ringelblum archive, Warsaw University-trained lawyer Hersz Wasser and journalist Rachel Auerbach both cooperated closely with the CŻKH.⁸⁶

2.1.8 Khurbn-forshung

The collection of historical material as a kind of Jewish response to violence was not practiced for the first time during the World War II. The “destruction research” (Yiddish: *Khurbn-forshung*)⁸⁷, using the perspective of the victim, original witness accounts and autobiographical material, was present already after the early twentieth century pogroms. To mention only a few

⁸⁴ Emanuel Ringelblum (1900-1944) was a pre-war Jewish historian connected to YIVO, who during his stay in the Warsaw ghetto organized an unprecedented secret archive. He did not survive, but his work survived and became not only the most important part of the CŻKH's archive, but also a fundamental source for the Holocaust research globally.

⁸⁵ The Ringelblum archive is kept in the Jewish Historical Institute, a book series with detailed inventory of the collection (34 volumes) was published by Jewish Historical Institute between 1997 and 2015.

⁸⁶ Jockusch, Laura. “Historiography in Transit”, 79.

⁸⁷ Jockusch, Laura. "'Khurbn Forshung', 441.

examples, Chaim Nachman Bialik collected testimony on the 1903 Kishinev pogrom, S. Ansky documented how massacres after the First World War affected the Pale of Settlement, and Elias Tcherikover in Berlin gathered evidence of pogroms in Ukraine during the Civil War⁸⁸ These efforts were usually the acts of Jewish self-defense, since publicizing the violence would attract support, and ensure justice and compensations. According to Dubnow, the task to write the history of anti-Jewish violence is not only of a political importance, but it is also a strong national-building element.⁸⁹

I discussed the matters of the CŽKH's methodology and its provenance. The predecessors of the Commission were among others the early chronicles of pogroms, Simon Dubnow, Salo Baron, the YIVO Institute, and Emmanuel Ringelblum. The methodological legacy of the prewar Jewish historiography most importantly consisted of an egalitarian yet professional approach excluding emotions and using a synthesis of micro- and macro-history. The Eastern European tendency of writing the Jewish history from the national perspective resulted in the similar direction within the emerging Holocaust historiography.

The recent developments in historical approaches moved the perspective of microhistory and research on everyday life forward. Therefore, the CŽKH's work has outstripped its time while being a logical continuity of existing prewar tendencies. Therefore, I claim that even though the historiography of the Holocaust achieved a lot since the late 1940s, the CŽKH contributed to it with a specific mixture of prewar methodological legacy, postwar urgent inventions in response to an enormous violence, and less conscious, but not less valuable introduction of multidisciplinary opportunities for the Holocaust research.

⁸⁸ Jockusch, Laura. "Historiography in Transit", 84.

⁸⁹ Laura Jockusch, "'Khurbn Forshung', 453.

2.2 Placing the Commission in its East Central European context

Groups of activists and organizations collecting and publicizing the evidence of the recent tragedy appeared in many European countries. These groups consisted mostly of survivors personally affected by the Holocaust. The documentation efforts in East Central Europe include such initiatives in Poland, Hungary and Romania. In Poland there was the Central Jewish Historical Commission (CŻKH), Hungarian Jews organized the National Relief Committee for Deportees (DEGOB), and the Romanian Jewish Community had a single activist, Matatias Carp, who alone served as the documentation agency.

According to the director of the CŻKH, Philip Friedman, no representative from Hungary attended the European Conference of the Historical Commissions in 1947. Only a short written report was sent.⁹⁰ However, the Historical Commission in Budapest was not a marginal institution, even though it did not keep strong connections with the international community. In 1945, the Jewish Community of Pest established the National Committee for Attending Deportees (Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság, DEGOB).⁹¹ Until 1946, DEGOB succeeded to gather around 4,600 interviews with survivors in Hungary. A sample list of questions was developed, so the procedure was kept as standardized as possible. Most of the interviews were taken in Hungarian with few exceptions in German and Czech. The Committee passed 16 volumes of testimonies to the YIVO research institute in New York and also 1,200 testimonies to state authorities as evidence for war crimes investigations. DEGOB staff attended some war crimes trials. Although they did not carry any publication activities, DEGOB collected a large

⁹⁰ Rita Horváth, "A Jewish Historical Commission in Budapest". *Holocaust Historiography in Context. Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements* (2008): 476.

⁹¹ Rita Horváth, "A Jewish Historical Commission in Budapest", 477.

amount of articles about the Holocaust from Hungarian press.⁹²

Matatias Carp (1904-1952) was the General Secretary of the Association of Romanian Jews. Between 1946 and 1948 he published four volumes of *The Black Book of Romanian Jewry*.⁹³ Carp was a lawyer who became a devoted chronicler and archivist of the Jewish destruction in Romania already in 1940. Based in Bucharest, without any institutional supervision, he managed to establish connections to other Jewish communities and received information from individuals and friends. Through a fellow German officer he also obtained access to German documentation. After the war, he added the evidence available during the war crimes trials. As a result, the 700-pages four volume encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Romania was published.⁹⁴ For political reasons, the book, which showed the Romanian responsibility for the war crimes was almost immediately prohibited, and all copies were destroyed by the Romanian government. *The Black Book of Romanian Jewry* was unknown for many years because it was critical towards Antonescu regime in depicting the war crimes of Romanians and highlighting the small scale of German involvement in these atrocities.⁹⁵ The Carp's publication shared the fate of the Soviet Black Book compiled by Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasyli Grossman. Carp was definitely inspired by this Soviet initiative and some similar in other countries.⁹⁶

⁹² "The Protocols" DEGOB official website: <http://degob.hu/index.php?showarticle=201>. Last accessed 4.01.2017.

⁹³ Romanian title: „Cartea Neagră. Suferințele evreilor din România 1940-1944“ (1946-1948). English edition: Matatias Carp, *Holocaust in Romania: facts and documents on the annihilation of Romania's Jews, 1940-44* (Primor Publishing, 1994).

⁹⁴ The first volume deals with the pogroms by The Iron Guard – fascist Romanian organization trained by the Gestapo. The second one gives an account on the massacre of the Jewish population in town of Iași. The third volume describes killings of Jews in the occupied by Romania territories of Transnistria, Bukovina and Bessarabia. The last volume deals with the deportation of Jews from Northern Transylvania (under the jurisdiction of Hungary).

⁹⁵ Preface and Introduction to: Matatias Carp, *Holocaust in Romania: facts and documents on the annihilation of Romania's Jews, 1940-44* (Primor Publishing, 1994), 1-14.

⁹⁶ The Black Book was one of the biggest projects of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC). It was created as a compendium of Nazi atrocities during the German occupation of the USSR and Poland. In the circumstances of the post-war USSR policy, the JAC was depicted as an anti-Soviet criminal organization. In 1948, the JAC was formally dissolved by the authorities. The materials of the Black Book ready for publication were destroyed and the book was never published in the USSR. The first complete edition appeared only in 1980 in Jerusalem. Dan Stone, ed. *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 276-8.

In Poland and in Hungary there were organized institutions for historiographic work under the Jewish communities. They consisted of activists of various professions. Historical supervision appeared only in case of the CŻKH. In the case of Romania, though many volunteers cooperated throughout the country, no centralized organization was established. The uniqueness of the effort of a single person, Matatias Carp, makes this collection an extremely valuable contribution. Another difference is that Carp started to gather information as soon as 1940, probably the earliest attempt in the whole Europe. He worked under constant danger during wartime. In contrast, Polish and Hungarian Commissions were established at the end of war, in 1944. They worked legally and openly with financial and organizational support inside and outside their countries. Carp's advantage of working during the war was getting the most detailed information directly during the events. His documentation can be compared to the activity of Emmanuel Ringelblum in the Warsaw ghetto as the unique example of a systematic effort to write the history of the Holocaust from an inside perspective.⁹⁷

Most materials created and collected were in domestic languages. The Hungarian collection is almost entirely in Hungarian.⁹⁸ Carp possessed testimonies in Romanian and some documents in German. As Carp claimed in his Preface, the publication of all his documents should have required 10-12 volumes (instead of the four he actually produced).⁹⁹ The Polish CŻKH possessed documents and testimonies in many languages, mostly Polish and Yiddish, and German original documents obtained after the liberation.

The most significant difference lays in the outcome of the work. The Hungarian DEGOB was not an academic institution, but a tool for archival creation, destined to support international research

⁹⁷ Laura Jockusch, "Historiography in Transit", 76.

⁹⁸ Some protocols were translated to English and German "The Protocols" DEGOB official website: <http://degob.hu/index.php?showarticle=201>. Last accessed 4.01.2017.

⁹⁹ Matatias Carp, *Holocaust in Romania*, 14.

centers as YIVO as well as state authorities in publicizing and punishing Nazi crimes. Carp in Romania felt responsible for realizing a publication of his material, whatever purpose it was going to serve. He cooperated with his fellow lawyers who worked with the war crimes cases after the war. However, his main reason was the will of “justice emerged from the good-will, minds and emotions of all civilized people.”¹⁰⁰

As Matatias Carp believed:

I wrote this book of blood and tears with blood and tears to help my brethren find new incentives and objectives in life by remembering the pains experienced, and blows received, in the hope that they will discover means of self-defense in the future, so that the anger and disgust created by the events presented herewith should make others acknowledge that they committed a great number of crimes against the members of our community. They must provide comfort for the pain and go a long way towards easing their conscience by accepting responsibility in the eyes of history.¹⁰¹

This could be said or written by the CŽKH historians or DEBOG staff as well. For all three countries, the major problem was the issue of local Nazi collaborators. Carp openly accused the Romanian government of slaughtering hundreds of thousands of Jews. The Hungarian database of testimonies contained broad evidence of the Arrow Cross crimes. The Polish Jewish Commission was very careful in depicting Polish collaboration. With a tendency to forget dark secrets of the past, which was the part of Stalinization results on Poland, these crimes were silenced for many years.¹⁰² All three countries were for many years under Soviet control and ignored the Holocaust. Even after the fall of the Communist regimes, national memory building did not allow the remembrance of the Jewish victims to take the place it deserves.

The three demonstrated cases of the early postwar activity for documentation of the Holocaust show clear common tendencies in Europe. First, despite the lack of resources and the often hostile

¹⁰⁰ Matatias Carp, *Holocaust in Romania*, 13.

¹⁰¹ Matatias Carp, *Holocaust in Romania*, 12.

¹⁰² On this see: Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The destruction of the Jewish community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

attitude of the title nations, Jewish survivors in Central and Eastern Europe succeeded during the second half of the 1940s in collecting and recording a significant amount of documents and witness testimonies, while memory was still fresh and emigration had not yet appeared on a large scale. They contributed to the prosecution of Nazi war criminals and supported the revelation of the bitter truth to the people worldwide. The political situation in the sphere of Soviet influence did not allow this efforts to develop into institutionalized research centers. The narrative that they created established the alternative story of World War II in opposition to the heroic versions of the title nations. The three cases belonged to different levels of documentation activity – from the personal initiative of a single individual to the broad network of the Historical Commissions sponsored and approved by the government. From randomly employed members of Jewish communities to the professional historians engaged in the creation of a completely new methodology of historical research, which would become Holocaust and Genocide studies later on. This demonstrates the range of opportunities and limitations for the Holocaust memorialization in the postwar Europe in a comparative perspective.

2.3 Who were the „historians”? Philip Friedman and his team

The Commission was, as the whole country in this transitional period, subjected to constant changes connected to people's arriving and leaving. In addition, many partners cooperated with the CŻKH from outside. The so-called Friends Society of the CŻKH [Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej], a society of Polish and Jewish activists, supported the work. During the time when he was a director of the Commission, Friedman was the professional

“backbone” of the quite patchy team.¹⁰³ Friedman's extensive contacts with Western academia helped the Commission to reach a wider interested readership. All the publications were sent on request to mostly Jewish organizations with the intention to promote knowledge on the fate of Polish Jews. Especially the album of photos depicting Nazi atrocities was popular as one of very few visual representations of the Holocaust at that time. Friedman remained the authority for his coworkers even after he immigrated and settled in the USA in 1948.¹⁰⁴

I will present here a short selection of biographies, focusing on the people who were active in the selection of books that I will discuss below. First, there were the regular employees of the Commission. In most cases, they appeared in the publications as editors of testimonies or documents, or as authors of prefaces and comments. The second category are the survivors, who were the authors of original testimonies. In some cases, they were also engaged in the research, editorial, and collection of material for the CŻKH.

By chance, most people listed here were from Lwów, Kraków or other Galician regions. Most of them left Poland after the political changes. Some ended in Israel, some in the United States or in France. Many remained engaged in Holocaust study for the rest of their lives, while others never appeared in any publications after their “debut” in the CŻKH.

Philip Friedman (1901-1961) was born in Lwów. He held a doctorate in history from the University of Vienna received in 1925.¹⁰⁵ He worked as a history teacher in the 1930s in Łódź and Warsaw, where he also taught at the University. In 1939, he left the Polish territory occupied by the Germans to return to his native Lwów occupied by the Soviet Union. He was affiliated

¹⁰³ Natalia Aleksion, „Philip Friedman and the Emergence of the Holocaust Scholarship: A Reappraisal“: 334-342.

¹⁰⁴ In the YIVO archives in New York there is a reach collection of letters to and from Friedman, with questions from Kermisz, Auerbach, Blumental and others on research and publication activities.

¹⁰⁵ Philip Friedmann, *Die galizischen Juden im Kampfe um ihre Gleichberechtigung (1848-1868)* [The Struggle of the Galician Jews for Their Equality, 1848-1868]. Frankfurt: Kauffmann, 1929.

with the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences until the German invasion. His wife and daughter were murdered in 1942, he survived in hiding. In 1944, he moved to Lublin. He was invited by the Jewish Committee to supervise the newly established Historical Commission and remained its director until his emigration in 1947. After a short stay in France and Germany, he moved permanently to New York, where he obtained a position at Columbia University. For many years later, he continued his work concentrating on Holocaust historiography and bibliography.¹⁰⁶

Józef Kermisz (1907-2005) was born in Złotniki, in the Tarnopol district. He received in 1937 a doctorate in history from Warsaw University.¹⁰⁷ During his studies he was connected with Meier Bałaban and his circles of young historians, as well as with YIVO. In 1939 Kermisz escaped to the Eastern Polish regions occupied by the USSR. He spent most of the war in hiding, then in 1944 he joined the Polish unit under Soviet command. He was employed as a history teacher in an officers' school in Zhitomir, Ukraine, and received the rank of captain. In December 1944, he joined the Historical Commission and remained its secretary-general and director of its archives until he left Poland for Israel in 1950. In 1953 he became the director of the Yad Vashem archives.¹⁰⁸

Rachela Auerbach (1903-1976) was born in Łanowice, Galicia. She grew up in Lwów, where she studied psychology and philosophy. She was a journalist and editor of the Yiddish literary journal *Tsushtayer*. In 1933 she moved to Warsaw, where she published in the Yiddish and Polish press. In 1939, she helped to organize soup kitchens in Warsaw. In 1941 she began to work with Emmanuel Ringelblum in his underground *Oyneg Shabes* archive, where she authored a study on

¹⁰⁶ Roni Stauber, "Laying the Foundations for Holocaust Research: The Impact of the Historian Philip Friedman," *Search and Research—Lectures and Papers 15*, Yad Vashem, 2009, 60.

¹⁰⁷ His dissertation was devoted to Lublin history.

¹⁰⁸ David Silberklang, "Józef Kermisz (1907–2005)—twórca badań nad Szoa." *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały 10* (2014): 304-316.

the fight against hunger in the ghetto and also started to collect testimonies from Treblinka escapees. In 1943 she fled the Warsaw ghetto and survived on the „Aryan side” under a false identity. After the liberation, Auerbach was active in the CŻKH. She immigrated to Israel in 1959 and in 1954 became head of Yad Vashem’s oral history department. She participated in the selection of the Jewish witnesses for the Eichmann trial, in which she was a witness herself.¹⁰⁹

Michał Maksymilian Borwicz (Boruchowicz) (1911-1987) was born in Kraków. He was a writer and journalist affiliated with the Poale Zion movement. He escaped the German invasion to Lwów, where in 1941 he was imprisoned in the Janowska camp. In 1943 he escaped and commanded Polish socialist (PPS) partisan units in the Jewish underground in Kraków. After the war he became the director of the Kraków branch of the CŻKH. In 1947 Borwicz immigrated to Paris, where he was the director of the Centre for the History of Polish Jews¹¹⁰ from 1947 to 1952. He earned a doctorate from the Sorbonne in sociology.¹¹¹

Maria Hochberg-Mariańska (Miriam Hochberg-Peleg) (1913-1996) was born in a village near Kraków. Before the war, she wrote books for children and edited the children’s supplement of a Kraków newspaper. She belonged to the youth movement of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). During the German occupation, she participated in the Polish underground as a Jewish representative. She survived on the “Aryan side” under a false identity. During her activity in underground she coordinated help to children and assisted in hiding many Jewish children. In 1945-1948 she coordinated the Childcare department at the Jewish Committee in Kraków. She immigrated to Israel in 1949 and worked for Yad Vashem. Together with her fellow underground

¹⁰⁹ Monika Polit, "O Racheli Auerbach." *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały* 8 (2012): 19-24.

¹¹⁰ Centre d’Étude d’Histoire des Juifs Polonais

¹¹¹ Biographical note in: Jockusch, Laura. *Collect and Record!*

member and later husband, Mieczyslaw Piotrowski (Mordechaj Peleg), she published a memoir “Among Friends and Enemies. Beyond the ghetto in occupied Kraków” (Kraków, 1988).¹¹²

Nachman Blumental (1905-1983) was born in Borszczów, Galicia. He studied literature at Warsaw University and worked as a teacher in Lublin until the war. He survived the war in hiding in Poland. He joined the CŻKH in Lublin and did extensive research on the ethnography of the Holocaust. His dictionary of occupational language “Innocent words” was published almost at the same time with Victor Klemperer’s famous “Language of the Third Reich”.¹¹³ He was the first director of the Jewish Historical Institute in 1947-1948. In 1950 he left for Israel and began cooperation with the Ghetto Fighters House and Yad Vashem.¹¹⁴

Betti Ajzensztajn (Eisenstein-Keshev) was a native of Volhynia in Ukraine, a teacher in Ostróg, who survived the Holocaust there. She wrote a Yiddish-language study of Volhynian Jews during the World War II. Friedman felt that her account was “not sufficiently documented” and “subject to question”.¹¹⁵ No further details of her life are available.

Joseph (Józef) Wulf (1912–1974) was born in Chemnitz, Germany, to Polish Jewish parents. He studied to become a rabbi in Kraków and also studied philosophy in France. In 1940 he was in the Kraków ghetto together with his family. During the war he was active in a Jewish underground resistance in the Kraków ghetto. In 1941 he was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. He escaped from a death march and returned to Kraków. After the liberation he helped to establish

¹¹² Biographical note in: Archiwum ofiar terroru nazistowskiego i komunistycznego w Krakowie 1939 - 1956 <http://www.Krakowianie1939-56.mhk.pl/pl/archiwum,1,hochberg,5266.chtm> accessed 07.05.2017.

¹¹³ Victor Klemperer, "Die unbewältigte Sprache (LTI)." Aus dem Notizbuch eines Philologen, Darmstadt (1946).

¹¹⁴ Biographical note in: Jockusch, Laura. Collect and Record!

¹¹⁵ Cited in Philip Friedman, "Ukrainian-Jewish Relations during the Nazi Occupation," in Philip Friedman ed., *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust* (New York: Conference on Jewish Social Studies, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980), 189. Citation comes from: John-Paul Himka, "Former Ukrainian Policemen in the Ukrainian National Insurgency: Continuing the Holocaust outside German Service," in: *Lower, Wendy, and Lauren Faulkner Rossi, eds. Lessons and Legacies XII: New Directions in Holocaust Research and Education. Vol. 12* (Northwestern University Press, 2017).

a local branch of the CŻKH. He left Poland in 1947 for political reasons. After short stays in Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, he settled in Paris, where together with Borwicz he led the Centre for the History of Polish Jews. In 1952 he moved to West Berlin, where he continued his Holocaust research. He authored many research works on the Third Reich and was an initiator of the Wannsee Conference museum. He committed suicide in 1974.¹¹⁶

Noe (Noe-Shloyme) Grüss (Gris) (1902-1985) was born in Kielków, Galicia. He studied in Kraków University and was a history teacher at the Zionist Tarbut schools in Lida, Grodno, and Rovno. He was also a Yiddish journalist and editor. Gruss survived the war in the Soviet Union and returned to Poland in 1945. He immigrated to Israel in 1947, and in 1952 he moved to Paris, where he worked as a teacher and headed the Hebrew and Yiddish section of the National Library.¹¹⁷

Róża Bauminger was a gymnasium teacher before the war. She was in the Kraków ghetto, from where she was taken first to Plaszow camp, and then to forced labour camps, first in Skarżysko-Kamienna, then in Schönefeld near Leipzig. She spent 28 months in camps. After liberation she cooperated with CŻKH and interviewed survivors.¹¹⁸

Janina (Janka) Heschel (Altman) was born in Lwów in 1931. Her father Henryk Heschel (1886-1941) was an editor of the daily *Chwila*, a popular Jewish Polish-language newspaper. He was murdered in July 1941 in Lwów in the so-called “prison action” pogrom. Her mother Amalia (Blumental) (1903-1943) was a Hebrew teacher before 1939, later she worked in a hospital. She committed group suicide with other inmates after the ghetto in Lwów was liquidated and she was

¹¹⁶ Nicolas Berg, “Joseph Wulf. A Forgotten Outsider Among Holocaust Scholars.” In: David Bankier, Dan Michman, eds. *Holocaust Historiography in Context. Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2008), 167–206.

¹¹⁷ Biographical note in: Jockusch, Laura. *Collect and Record!*

¹¹⁸ Róża Bauminger, *Przy pikrynie i trotylu : obóz pracy przymusowej w Skarżysku-Kamiennej. [With picrate and trinitrotoluene: forced labor camp in Skarżysko-Kamienna]* (Kraków: CŻKH, 1946), preface.

taken to Janowska camp. Janka, after unsuccessful attempts to find a hiding-place on “Aryan side”, got into Janowska camp, where she participated in underground literary meetings organized by Michal Borwicz. His friends from PPS, who assisted his escape from the camp, in October 1943 helped Janka to flee. She ended up in Kraków, where she stayed with several families on the “Aryan side”. She was taken to an orphanage run by Jadwiga Strzalecka, first in Poronin, later in Sopot, where she graduated from high school. In 1950 she immigrated to Israel. She studied chemistry at the Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa. She published in Hebrew the books "They are still alive" (1967), "What will be tomorrow?" (1972), "Goldilocks" (1991), "White Rose - students and intellectuals in Germany before Hitler came to power and after" (2007). She lives with her husband in Haifa.¹¹⁹

Rudolf Reder (1881–1968) was born in Debica, in the voivodship of Kraków, soap-chemist by profession. From the 1910s he lived in Lwów, where he stayed until 1942, when he was taken to Bełżec and selected to work in a Sonderkommando. He was the only surviving witness of the Bełżec crimes. He escaped Bełżec and remained in hiding in Lwów until 1944. After the war he stayed in Kraków. He testified before Soviet and Polish investigation commissions.¹²⁰ In 1946 Reder collaborated with Nella Rost on the booklet about Bełżec, which appeared under his name, but was probably written by her. He immigrated to Canada in the early 1950s under the assumed name of Roman Robak. In August 1960 he was in Munich, where he made a deposition at the office of the public prosecutor concerning Bełżec in preparation for the Bełżec trial, which took place in Munich in January 1965. He died in 1968 in Canada.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Janina Herscheles, *Oczyrna Dwunastoletniej Dziewczyny*, preface Ewa Kozminska-Frejłak (Warszawa, Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2015).

¹²⁰ Rudolf Reder, *Bełżec* (Kraków: CŻKH, 1946) preface

¹²¹ Rudolf Reder, “Bełżec”, translated by M. M. Rubel, in *Polin, Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 13, 2000, 276-287, 232.

Leon Weliczker (Wells) (1925-2009) was born in Stojanów near Lwów. He came from a religious family. He stayed during the war in Lwów, where he was an inmate of the Janowska camp and a member of Sonderkommando 1005, which had the task of exhuming and burning the bodies from mass graves in eastern Galicia. In November 1943 he escaped and went into hiding. After the liberation of Lwów he became acquainted with Philip Friedman. In July 1945 Weliczker left Lwów and began to study at the Polytechnic Institute in Gliwice, Silesia, while also working for the CŻKH, which published his wartime diary in 1946. In 1946 he left for the U.S. Zone of Germany. Weliczker studied engineering and mathematics at the Technische Hochschule in Munich, and until January 1947 he also worked for the Central Historical Commission in Munich. In 1949, after getting his doctorate in engineering, he immigrated to the United States. He testified at the Eichmann trial in 1961. He has published books and articles about his experience. His book *The Janowska Road* published in 1963, has been translated and published in twelve different countries.¹²²

As it can be seen, most people who participated in the publications were not historians, but most of them continued to write on Holocaust-related subjects even after they obtained “normal” professions. They were all coming from different milieus, different linguistic and political circles. Some were well educated, others not at all. Not one of them stayed in Poland after 1950s. The question on to what extent the authors of testimonies were fully the authors of their publications remains open, but the decision of the CŻKH to put the names of the survivors on the title page was in a way a symbolic gesture, which gave these books a sign of authenticity. The later biographies of the CŻKH affiliates demonstrate on what scale this Commission was the nucleus of a world-wide network of Holocaust scholarship – some of them were among the founders of

¹²² Leon Wells (Weliczker), *Who Speaks for the Vanquished?: American Jewish Leaders and the Holocaust* (Lang, Peter, Publishing Incorporated, 1987).

Yad Vashem, the Paris Center for on the History of Polish Jewry, the Wannsee Conference museum etc. Some people, like Róża Bauminger and Betti Ajzensztajn were never known before the war, they appeared on the scene in connection with their CŻKH's work and disappeared again without a trace. Nevertheless, their names, experience, and effort lives on and is well known to the world from their publications.

2.4 Collection of documents and testimonies. Methodological instructions.

The engagement of local volunteers allowed the Commission to get access to the local communities, to obtain information, artifacts and interviews. As it was highlighted, a person would tell her story to an acquaintance, a local journalist or a friend of the family, rather than to an alien historian from Warsaw. As Blumental claimed that it was important for the majority of witnesses to “speak out” about their trauma, and this opportunity should be used to collect as many details on everyday life and death as possible.¹²³ As a result, thousands of written accounts were collected.

The large team consisted of individual correspondents in the Polish regions, who were mostly not familiar with collecting oral testimony or any other history craft. Three brochures of instructions, aimed to ensure the quality of the interviews performed by non-professionals, were published in 1945 for historical, ethnographic, and the research of children experience. The guidelines contained examples of questions and methodological notes.¹²⁴ The first instruction on the general methods of collecting historical materials from the period of German occupation was prepared by the head of the CŻKH's archive, Józef Kermisz. The idea was that oral interviews

¹²³ Blumental, *Instrukcje dla zbierania materiałów etnograficznych w okresie okupacji niemieckiej*, 6.

¹²⁴ Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!* 96–97.

may substitute the lack of documentary evidence “in revealing the whole truth”.¹²⁵ The major purpose was to supply the international and domestic justice with material for indictments. The historical value of the material was of secondary importance.

Although the instruction encouraged collectors to record all the information without neglecting anything, a few main topics were considered by the CŻKH of special importance. The greatest attention should be devoted to the "representation of [Jewish] martyrdom, decent attitude, courage, valor and rebellion, [...] fight and struggle with the beast, sacrifice and heroism".¹²⁶ The Commission planned to present the image of Jews who "walked with raised heads, with a look of deadly hatred and contempt for the oppressors".¹²⁷ This attitude represents Zionist influences and may be compared to the existent, although moderate promotion of Jewish heroism in the Soviet Union. The role of the Jews in the fight with Hitlerism was at the time tolerated, as the Jewish Antifascist Committee in Moscow was still hoping to publish *The Black Book*. Soviet press has announced that the Jews held the 5th place among 182 Soviet nationalities for the military awards. The legendary Jewish Soviet journalist Ilya Ehrenburg, the voice of Soviet wartime propaganda, stated that “The Jewish people have to hold the function of accuser and will not let anyone take this function away.”¹²⁸

The characteristic feature of the Commission’s approach is the desire to show the most diverse image. Kermisz’s “Instruction” urges to cover both Jewish bravery and “signs of humiliation and betrayal, cowardice and lack of dignity”.¹²⁹ The help and rescue provided by gentiles is another

¹²⁵ Józef Kermisz, ed. *Instrukcje dla zbierania materialow historycznych z okresu okupacji niemieckiej*. [Instructions for collecting historical materials from the period of German occupation] Łódź: CŻKH, 1945, 7.

¹²⁶ Józef Kermisz, ed. *Instrukcje*, 11-12.

¹²⁷ Józef Kermisz, ed. *Instrukcje*, 12.

¹²⁸ Many Jews were decorated for their participation in the war, for example, the famous “Jewish poet and partisan [Abraham] Suckewer got the Red Star order for his heroic acts during the partisan fights”. Jewish Press Agency Bulletin BŻAP 1945-354-68 78-120130, p.118. BŻAP 1945-354-29 39-67-77, 45.

¹²⁹ Józef Kermisz, ed. *Instrukcje*, 11.

matter of importance. Historians planned not only to accuse perpetrators, but also to acknowledge the righteous. At the same time, the issue of Polish collaboration was presented in a way that made clear that only particular “evil elements” of the society had been involved. The reasons for collaboration were, according to the Commission, the “corrupting” Nazi propaganda and the desire of some people to obtain material advantage. The tradition of Polish antisemitism is not mentioned. Another characteristic element is the extremely negative picture of Jewish councils in ghettos, the so called *Judenrat*. According to one of the “Instructions”, collectors often did not want to write down a song or poem that positively flattered one or another “great” member of a Jewish council. Therefore, editors paid special attention that every piece of testimony should be recorded, even if its content did not match the collector’s opinion.¹³⁰

The interviews obtained on the children’s experience were to become a political and propaganda tool. On the research the CŻKH imposed the following tasks:

1. To give a detailed account of Nazi crimes on Jewish children.
2. To show the strength of Jewish children, to give the examples of resistance and heroic attitude, the struggle, which in a way “paralyzed Hitlerite plans”. The surviving children are themselves, according to author, a proof of this accomplishment.
3. To check the physical and psychological condition of children after several years of war experience in various circumstances: in ghettos, in hiding, on the “Arian side”, in camps, in forests, in partisan groups, etc.
4. To collect the information about future plans, political views and attitudes of the youth towards other peoples, in order to form appropriate educational agenda.
5. To analyze the attitude of the Polish society towards the Jews (both positive and negative aspects), including the scale of the Nazi propaganda impact on Poles.
6. And, finally, to deliver materials for war crimes indictment and to convince the world to “ruthlessly eradicate germs of fascism”.¹³¹

This gives a clear picture of how this data was supposed to be used: in courts, in education and propaganda agendas, in the acts of accusation, as a proof of victimhood for gentiles abroad and

¹³⁰ Nachman Blumental, *Instrukcje dla zbierania materiałów etnograficznych w okresie okupacji niemieckiej* (Łódź: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna w Polsce, 1945), 11.

¹³¹ Grüss, Noe and Silkes, Genia, *Instrukcje : dla badania przezyc dzieci Żydowskich w okresie okupacji niemieckiej* (Łódź: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna w Polsce., 1945), 3-4.

in Poland. Grüss claimed that in order to carry out the study, a person had to possess certain moral virtues, namely the conviction as to the tasks connected to the questionnaire.

The Commission did not want to get from children any exact witness account concerning the *facts* of crimes and murder, which they had already gathered from adults. They need an *emotional reflection* on what had happened to children and their families, as they assumed that children were not able to give reliable factual information. The collector of such an interview is encouraged to gather the psychologically valuable material – feelings of young victims.¹³² This approach created an extremely powerful outcome. Afterward this material was exploited for instance in the book *Dzieci oskarżają*. [The children accuse] from 1947.¹³³ According to the editor, it was supposed to become a “moral accusation of humanity”. One of the testimonies is from Nina Boniówna (born in 1930 in Warsaw) on the Warsaw ghetto liquidation in 1943:

There is an order for a new selection. Brother is lucky, mummy is taken to the "Unschlag",¹³⁴ and I was destined for a shot. I stand under the wall. I do not feel fear at all. All is flashing in my eyes and I realize that no one will ever see me. When my predecessor falls I feel the fear. They gave him two bullets and they dipped them with a bayonet. I am not that afraid of suffering as I feel a lack of someone close to me. At the last moment our friend pushes me on the cart ... January 15, 1945 entered the victorious Red Army. Only then I started to cry.¹³⁵

For the author of the ethnography instruction, Nachman Blumental, the will to speak about the traumatic experience is natural for the Nazi victims, and the process of sharing memories should help to heal their wounds. However, he admitted that sometimes a person could be damaged too much to feel anything but indifference that could prevent sharing their experience with anyone

¹³² Grüss, *Instrukcje* 8.

¹³³ Maria Hochberg-Mariańska, ed., *Dzieci oskarżają* [The children accuse] Kraków: CŻKH, 1947.

¹³⁴ The *Umschlagplatz* was the square from where people were taken to death camps during the Warsaw ghetto liquidation.

¹³⁵ Maria Hochberg-Mariańska, *Dzieci oskarżają*, 7-11.

including Historical Commission. In this case, the author suggested the explanation of the higher aim of the collection – to gain accusation material against murderers.

The range of testimonial genres was taken into consideration. First, the most fruitful genre were songs – incredibly, in each and every ghetto and camp people created songs, tragic and also funny or even obscene ones. All of them were deemed important for the ethnographic research. The second category was that of legend, story or anecdote, often describing miracles and soon-to-come relief. The third consisted of verbal expressions, proverbs, special “names”. For instance, the authors give an example of how the abbreviation SS was explained as “*sukin syn*” [Russian “Son of a bitch”]. Another option explores a series of questions about special games that were created by youth and adults during the occupation. A separate issue is the matter of life in bunkers. Other mentioned topics are the superstitions and arts.

The Commission was interested in ethnographic materials as a source for scholarship. These interviews were not valuable from the point of view of trials or future propaganda. An important task, which Blumental highlights, was the preservation of memory. Much Holocaust folklore has survived, but not the authors of this cultural layer. And the Commission saw its role in saving the ethnography of the Jewish existence during the war, paying their duty of reverence to the victims. Blumental’s “occupation language dictionary” (see *Słowa Niewinne*, CŻKH, 1946) was significantly based on the material collected with the ethnographic questionnaire.

The proposed examples shed light on the state of the CŻKH’s methodology at the moment of its development during 1944-1945. The instructions demonstrate the range of source material which was supposed to be used, as well as the approach for its analysis and the plans for its future usage.

2.5 The Holocaust research network and the Commission's legacy

The legacy of the CŻKH is, first and foremost, the Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, ŻIH) in Warsaw. Being the successor of the Commission, it has been neglected as a result of its long existence under communist rule and the inevitable mark the latter left on its work and public image. Nevertheless, the ŻIH was the only official Jewish research institution and one of the very few Jewish institutions that were allowed to exist in the Eastern Bloc. Despite its deep engagement with Marxist historiography and ideologically driven scholarship, it represents the continuity of Jewish studies in Poland. Its Bulletin served as a platform for publication on various topics in Polish and sometimes also in Yiddish.¹³⁶ Many scholars who before the war studied, for instance, the economic history of the Jews in the nineteenth century, could continue their research in postwar Poland and contribute valuable results. For example, Szymon Datner published on the sensitive topic of the Jedwabne massacre already in 1966, long before Jan Tomasz Gross provoked the long-lasting debate with his *Neighbors* (2001).¹³⁷ The ŻIH was also a center from where a contemporary generation of Polish Jewish studies grew and to which it owes its high level.

Most of the members of the CŻKH left Poland until the mid-1950s and dispersed all around the world. Philip Friedman, after he left Poland, was active in Munich, where he worked in the Historical Commission based in the Jewish DP camps, and briefly in Paris, and maintained wide contacts with documentation centers in many countries in order to create a network of Holocaust

¹³⁶ „Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego” („BŻIH”) was a periodical of ŻIH first published in Yiddish in 1950, 2/year in 1952, 4/year in 1953-2000. From 2001 published as „Kwartalnik Historii Żydów. Jewish History Quarterly”. [http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Biuletyn_Żydowskiego_Institutu_Historycznego_\(BŻIH\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Biuletyn_Żydowskiego_Institutu_Historycznego_(BŻIH)) last accessed 02.05.2017.

¹³⁷ Szymon Datner, "Eksterminacja ludności Żydowskiej w Okręgu Białostockim." *Biuletyn ŻIH* 60 (1966). Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The destruction of the Jewish community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

research.¹³⁸ In 1948 he arrived in New York, where his former supervisor Salo Baron helped him to obtain a position at Columbia University. Friedman also cooperated with YIVO and the Jewish Teacher's institute. But most important was his role as a mediator between American, West European, Israeli and Polish scholars. His extensive correspondence demonstrates his deep engagement with the ŻIH that he had abandoned and his former colleagues from the CŻKH. Despite some ideological disagreements, he always supported scholarly efforts in Poland. He organized many conferences, and until the end of his life, he was working on the possibly fullest Holocaust bibliography.

The leading members of the CŻKH, Kermisz, Blumental and Auerbach, all settled down in Israel. Kermisz participated in the establishment of Yad Vashem and was the director of its archive for many years after. Auerbach led the oral history division in the same institution, Blumental was also affiliated with Yad Vashem and also with Ghetto Fighters Center.¹³⁹ They definitely used their experience from work in Poland and their moral authority of survivor and historian to lay the foundations of Holocaust studies in Israel.

Yet, these dispersed historians and survivors could not prevent their work from becoming widely neglected. After the urgency of the first years after the war ended and Nuremberg was over, most of such collecting centers were dissolved, only few professional research centers remained active. Until the 1960s, Holocaust research was a marginal field, and the CŻKH was marginal even within it. Professional historians such as Benzion Dinur or Martin Broszat did not accept the memory creation process as a part of "serious" historiography.¹⁴⁰ What the CŻKH did by collecting diverse material from witnesses was far from the standards of the time that dictated

¹³⁸ Roni Stauber, *Laying the foundations for Holocaust research: the impact of the historian Philip Friedman* (Yad Vashem, 2009), 14-16.

¹³⁹ Laura Jockusch, "Historiography in Transit" 15-16.

¹⁴⁰ Laura Jockusch, "Historiography in Transit", 18.

that one should work on official German documents in archives and not analyzing the experience of random Jewish victims. This approach that used the Jewish perspective, individual voice, micro history, and documentation of many different aspects of the Catastrophe became appreciated only recently. With this process it became clear how much rich material the CŽKH left behind and how their work was ahead of its time. Hopefully, future research will make use of their legacy.

Chapter 3. The publications of the CŻKH

In her book *Collect and Record!*, Laura Jockusch devoted a whole chapter to the work of the CŻKH, while the rest of the book is describing activities of other Jewish organizations in Western Europe: French, German, Austrian and Italian.¹⁴¹ This chapter is the most detailed English-language account of the Commission's work, but it does not contain any details about the publications. One of the reasons could be that Jockusch used mostly Yiddish sources with a limited insight into materials in Polish, which impeded a comprehensive analysis of the collection.

While no academic study has dealt so far with the contents of these special publications as integral parts of the series, several of them were reprinted recently by the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw as part of their editorial series "The critical edition of the work of the Central Jewish Historical Commission"¹⁴². These reprints are supplemented with critical articles, biographical data, photos, documents and other material, which gives a better perspective on the original texts.

The collection of the CŻKH is special not only because it was the very first publication series about the Holocaust, but also because of its extremely diverse and multi-genre character. In this chapter, I trace major themes and specificities of these books in order to comprehensively analyze this collection as historiography. The main research question imposed here is how they wrote about camps and why they did it in this particular way.

¹⁴¹ Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁴² Wydanie krytyczne prac Centralnej Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej. Ewa Koźmińska-Frejłak „Chcemy pokazać <http://www.jhi.pl/blog/2017-03-01-chcemy-pokazac-ze-prowadzone-po-wojnie-przez-CZKH-badania-nad-zaglada-byly-bardzo-nowatorskie-ewa-kozminska-frejlak-opowiada-o-serii-wydawniczej-ZIH>, last accessed 06.05.2017.

For my research I selected a range of the Commission's diverse publications, limiting them to the topic of Nazi death and concentration camps as an iconic subject of Holocaust research. Also in comparison with ghettos and partisan movements, the topic of camps is most fully disclosed in these publications by usage of many different tools and strategies. The following genres were included in the series: methodological instructions for Holocaust research discussed in the previous chapter, memoirs written by survivors after the war or in hiding during the occupation, poetry, a dictionary of Nazi occupational language, general photo collection on extermination of Jews in Poland, transcript of the war crimes trial, literary works from and about the camps, songs, collections of documents, a Polish writer's drama, survivor's and witnesses' testimonies, demographical statistics on Jewish population losses, and historical research. Thematically they touch upon, among others, children's experience, ethnography, creativity of Jews during the Holocaust, Polish literature on Holocaust, annihilation of Jews in Lwów, Wilno, Białystok, Sosnowiec, Żółkwa, Warsaw ghetto, Kraków ghetto, Łódź ghetto, in the forced labour camp in Skarżysko-Kamienna, and in the death camps Bełżec and Treblinka.

I selected eight of the Commission's thirty-nine publications, limiting them to the topic of Nazi death and concentration camps. These publications deal mostly with Janowska camp in Lwów, Treblinka, Bełżec, forced labour camp in Skarżysko-Kamienna, and Sobibór. I find it important to reveal how the representation of these less central than Auschwitz camps was formed in the first postwar years. In order to demonstrate a research potential of this selection I list the topics of the publications:

- The underground movement in camps¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach : materiały i dokumenty. [The underground movement in ghettos and camps: materials and documents]* (Warszawa, CŻKH, 1946).

- Postwar account of a Jewish woman, historian, who inspected a death camp with investigators¹⁴⁴
- Woman's testimony on a forced labor camp¹⁴⁵
- Literature in the camp¹⁴⁶
- A diary of a twelve-year-old girl from a camp¹⁴⁷
- Accounts about children in camps¹⁴⁸
- A testimony of the only survivor of a death camp¹⁴⁹
- A diary of a Sonderkommando member¹⁵⁰

The diversity of used sources and presented genres demonstrates innovative approach in the emerging Holocaust scholarship. From the point of view of contemporary historiography, the semi-academic and non-academic forms could be used as fully legitimate sources according to the contemporary turn of methodology. In the circumstances of the postwar urgency, the Commission rather attempted to fulfill multiple functions – to research, to reflect, to remember, to judge, and to teach about the Holocaust. These all found its place in the publications' forms and character.

3.1 Characteristics of the publications.

During the years between 1945 and 1947, the CŻKH published thirty-nine books and brochures.

As most publications consist of testimonies and primary source editions, the question of

¹⁴⁴ Rachela Auerbach, *Treblinka*. (Warszawa, CŻKH, 1947).

¹⁴⁵ Róża Bauminger, *Przy pikrynie i trotylu : obóz pracy przymusowej w Skarżysku-Kamiennej. [With picrate and trinitrotoluene: forced labor camp in Skarżysko-Kamienna]* (Kraków: CŻKH, 1946).

¹⁴⁶ Michał Borwicz, *Literatura w obozie. [Literature in the camp]* (Kraków: CŻKH, 1946).

¹⁴⁷ Janina Heschel, *Oczyma dwunastoletniej dziewczyny. [Through the eyes of a twelve year old girl]* (Kraków: CŻKH, 1946).

¹⁴⁸ Maria Hochberg-Mariańska, *Dzieci oskarżają*.

¹⁴⁹ Rudolf Reder, *Bełżec*. (Kraków: CŻKH, 1946).

¹⁵⁰ Leon Weliczker (Wells), *Brygada śmierci : Sonderkommando 1005. [Death Brigade: Sonderkommando 1005]* (Łódź: CŻKH, 1946).

authorship is interesting. For some of the document collections, names of authors indicated are the names of regular CŻKH members, some of them even professional historians or specialists from education, journalism or other similar fields. However, for the publications, which are printed testimonies, the name of an author is the name of the survivor, who is not a historian, but he or she turns into an author. To what extent and how these stories were “polished” by editors and how is a matter of further research.

The book on forced labor camp by Róża Bauminger has an extremely unusual structure. It started with the editor’s preface commenting on the author and her experience, then the main part is Róża’s personal narrative on her experience in the camp. At some point, her narrative is accompanied by citations from the documents and interviews collected by CŻKH. Was it her own selection or the editors’? Did she interview her former inmates on behalf of the Commission? In a way, she is a survivor, a witness, a collector and an editor at the same time.¹⁵¹ The narrative of former school teacher Róża is impersonal but strong, authentic, and realistic. Her memoir “will remain the document after years”, when “the truth will be mythologised, will lose the smell of blood a smoke.”¹⁵²

The Commission’s members anticipated this issue of memory mythologization and wanted to capture the freshest wounds when it was still possible. A young Janka, a prisoner of Janowska camp, was smuggled out of camp and got a notebook and a pen to write her fresh memories only a few weeks after she left the camp. Her literary talent, sincerity, and good memory attracted Borwicz’s attention, so he organized her escape.¹⁵³ They prepared the text for publication when she was already fifteen and she wanted to correct some mistakes, but they did not allow “for

¹⁵¹ Róża Bauminger, *Przy pikrynie i trotylu*.

¹⁵² Michał Borwicz, Preface to: Róża Bauminger, *Przy pikrynie i trotylu*, 8.

¹⁵³ Michał Borwicz, preface to: Janina Heschels, *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny*, 12.

fundamental reasons”, so they could keep the text most close to the authentic children testimony, naïve and heart-breaking.¹⁵⁴ Her simple narrative on the same matters which were discussed after the war in research and investigation based on documents and numerous testimonies has a high value of historical document and incredible psychological value.¹⁵⁵

At the same time, other works in the collection, as for example the book on underground movements in camps and ghettos contained compiled data providing sources for personal reflections of a reader on selected events, not implying any conclusions or aspiring to a comprehensive elaboration on the issue. Moreover, Borwicz claimed that materials were presented in a simplified non-edited form. The main aim was information of a reader, not a dramatic effect.¹⁵⁶

The third category of the publications were literary works. Authors are writers and poets, who have nothing to do with history or research. Most of these works were published in the Kraków branch of the Historical Commission. Led by Michał Borwicz, a talented writer and publicist, himself a survivor of Janowska camp, this branch of the Commission was in constant dispute with the “historicizing” Warsaw/Łódź main office under Philip Friedman’s leadership.

The majority of the publications are in Polish language, only six of them are in Yiddish. There are several reasons for this prevalence. First, the Commission wanted to address as many people as possible: Polish-speaking Jews and Gentiles, Poles in the country and abroad. Second, there was a fear of anti-Semitic harassment. For instance, according to the testimony of Jonas Turkow, the Yiddish-language radio broadcast of the Central Committee experienced regular bomb threats

¹⁵⁴ Michał Borwicz, preface to: Janina Heschels, *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny*, 9.

¹⁵⁵ Michał Borwicz, preface to: Janina Heschels, *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny*, 13.

¹⁵⁶ Michał Borwicz, preface to: Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, XXIV and XXIII.

and one actual attack.¹⁵⁷ The third reason might have been the desire to avoid the impression that the Jews were trying to separate themselves from the rest of the population. Another element was the growing militant stance towards Jewish nationalism among the Soviet leaders. Another possible explanation is that the majority of Jews in Poland after the war were Polish-speaking, however, it is not supported by any documented statistics.

While the main language of publications was Polish, some documents were used in the language of the original, mostly German. The logic could be that it is better to cite original German sources to ensure trustfulness of the provided sources and that in the post-war Poland most people in one way or another knew German and were able to read it without translation, though many citations were provided with parallel translation to Polish. The question of objectivity occupied significantly the Commission's attention. They included many documents in the original form, accompanied often with a short commentary, together with accounts from survivors that they aimed to edit minimally to preserve the style and authentic sincerity of testimony. At the same time, in the urgency of their research, they wanted to get and publicize as much information as possible. As a result, they often use of Polish and especially Soviet newspapers as sources, not accompanying them with any critical response. From today's perspective, these Soviet sources are highly biased and in some cases could cause misinformation and creation of harmful Holocaust myths.

As an example of such usage can be seen in Blumental's dictionary of Nazi occupation language. The source itself is a unique linguistically-ethnographic experiment on the creation of a corpus of words from mainly German language that gained new terrifying meaning in camps and ghettos and most of them became synonyms of killing and torture. Blumental cites many Soviet

¹⁵⁷ Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*, 253.

newspapers, including reports from The Polish-Soviet Nazi Crimes Investigation Commission and the Kharkov trial of 1943-44.¹⁵⁸ It is hard to determine what events and facts described were real and which were invented by Soviet propaganda.

Ideally, the publications supposed to reach the widest readership possible. As Rachel Auerbach explained her position on a potential readership in a report on Treblinka:

I know that what I am giving here for printing is not easy reading. This is not a reading for people with weak nerves, but if something like this could happen to Jews, if the Jews who saw it could tell it, and I could write it down - other Jews should not care about their well-being and should know one-hundredth part of what was done to their nation... Let all Jews know about it, it's their national duty - to know the truth...

Whether they want it or not, also non-Jews should in all ways be encouraged to learn the truth...

Finally, people around the world will be fully aware of what fascism, totalitarianism, true political indifference and political inertia of the masses are...¹⁵⁹

This opinion was shared by other survivors and authors: “The book should reach people in as many languages as the word of truth goes to the uncorrupted hearts, on which the future of the world depends.” – states Borwicz in the preface of an account on women forced labour.¹⁶⁰

Rachel Auerbach, as a member of Ringelblum archives that has been gathering the material in Warsaw ghetto from the beginning of the occupation, studied Treblinka already from 1942 and interrogated many witnesses personally. Nevertheless, her report was proclaimed to have more character of a literary subjective essay than academic, while the facts were “compatible with what

¹⁵⁸ The Polish-Soviet Nazi Crimes Investigation Commission, established to document Nazi atrocities committed during the German occupation of Poland, ordered exhumations at Majdanek as part of its efforts to investigate Nazi mass killings in the camp. Nachman Blumental, ed. *Dokumenty i materiały do dziejów Żydów w Polsce pod okupacją niemiecką : Obozy. [Documents and materials on the history of Jews in Poland under German occupation: Camps.]* Vol. 1. 3 vols. (Łódź: CŻKH, 1946).

¹⁵⁹ Rachela Auerbach, *Treblinka*. (Warszawa, CŻKH, 1947). In Yiddish, I am using the Polish translation by Karolina Szymaniak published: “Rachela Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż"." *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 8: 25-76.

¹⁶⁰ Michał Borwicz, Preface to: Bauminger, Róża. *Przy pikrynie i trotylu*, 9.

we know today” (in 1947). However, she perceived her work as “just a sketch to a fragment of the picture that I could devote the few years of life that I still have.”¹⁶¹ Her task here is not to come up with exact details for indictment but with most cruel and moving details of a crime to get into the reader’s mind, sometimes probably she is using her own or her witnesses’ imagination. Her text is full of stylistic expressions and bitter sarcasm. Sometimes she as other authors break the narrative with exclamations as if they could no longer talk calmly: “Who are these people? How - can they?!”¹⁶² She uses colloquial language to imitate a story-telling. We can actually “hear” her. Most of the narrative is a storytelling from the car on the way to Treblinka, only a few last pages are taken place after their arrival.

The survivors, who wrote their memoirs and testimonies and brought them to Jewish, Polish and Soviet investigators, could have several reasons for doing so. First, as YIVO demonstrated in the prewar period, many young people kept some kind of diaries and it was common practice for this generation. Second, the Commission often heard the desire of traumatized survivor to speak about his or her experience to deal with this hard memory. According to Auerbach, the most important was though “the natural instinct of a Jew, who believes that his national duty, as one of the few surviving witnesses, to accuse the German criminals of rape and terrible harm done to his people.”¹⁶³

The list of publications does not contain any title that would deal directly and exclusively with the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. The book „*This is Oświęcim!*” by the Commission’s Director Philip Friedman was published in 1945 in Warsaw by Polish National Publishing House for Political Literature [Państwowe Wydawnictwo Literatury Politycznej]. This is a very important

¹⁶¹ Szymaniak “Rachel Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".”, 27.

¹⁶² Szymaniak “Rachel Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".”, 46.

¹⁶³ Rachel Auerbach preface to: Leon Weliczker (Wells), *Brygada śmierci : Sonderkommando 1005. [Death Brigade: Sonderkommando 1005]* (Łódź: CŻKH, 1946), 21.

sign of how special was the place of Auschwitz in the memory and history from the very beginning. Already in 1945, the awareness of Auschwitz's significance as an iconic metaphor for Nazi crimes, not only on Jews but also on Poles and other European nationalities, does not allow it to become an „internal“ Jewish business.¹⁶⁴ From the very beginning, it was contested to become a powerful symbol of Polish and Soviet martyrdom.

The matter of Auschwitz museum, which has to become the Polish national symbol of the occupation and tended to exclude Jewish martyrdom from the picture. In a response to the alarming letter from the CŻKH that the guide in the museum during the tour did not even mention Jewish victims of the camp, the museum's management stated that the museum is still in a process of building, and until the official tours will start, they are not taking responsibility for any of tour's content. Moreover, according to this letter from 15.11.1946, this situation “has to be temporarily tolerated.”¹⁶⁵

3.2 Key motives of the publications

I recognize several repeating themes/issues according to which I structure my research: the matter of estimations of Nazi victims, collaboration and betrayal, resistance and fight or silence and passivity, Jewish self-help or lack of it, issue of responsibility for the Holocaust, children, psychological aspects, and the role of Soviet propaganda. Another constant motive, which is a matter for further research and was not included in this work is music. Music was everywhere, in each camp in a terrifying circumstances music was a way of torturing or a source of last hope.

¹⁶⁴ Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945–1979* (Ohio University Press, 2003).

¹⁶⁵ RG-15.182M, Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna przy Centralnym Komitecie Żydów w Polsce, Sygn. 303/XX, 1944-1947. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. Folder 122. Highlighted in the original

However, music and the Holocaust is a separate field, and it will not be covered here due to space limitations.¹⁶⁶

3.2.1 Matter of Numbers

Auerbach for Treblinka uses sources of Jewish survivors' testimonies, railway documents, and reports of the Polish investigators. Polish Judge Lukaszewicz in his book on Treblinka writes about 800 000 people, his report for Polish Investigation Commission of German Crimes gives a smaller number of around 730 000 people.¹⁶⁷ The CŻKH possessed data on the non-regular additional transports after the revolt in Treblinka that allowed them to add 210 000 people and claim the total amount of victims to over a million.¹⁶⁸ Even though, concludes Auerbach, we will never know the exact amount, Treblinka was the largest mass grave of Jews in Europe.¹⁶⁹ Auerbach approaches critically the carefulness of the Polish investigators in their estimations.¹⁷⁰ Evidently, the issue with contested victimhood could influence Polish objectiveness already back then.

At the same time, while fighting Polish underestimations, the Commission understood the danger of overestimations by the Soviet propaganda: "However, no one should, in his agitation by our terrifying catastrophe, go so far as that the estimated number of Jews murdered exceeds the total number of Jews living in Europe..."¹⁷¹ Auerbach criticized Grossman, who visited Treblinka and wrote his own report just after the liberation, for incredible exaggeration.¹⁷² Grossman calculates

¹⁶⁶ For this topic see: Shirli Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust: Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps*. (Oxford University Press 2005).

¹⁶⁷ Contemporary opinion is that in Treblinka were murdered no less than 780 863 people. Libionka, Dariusz, ed. *Akcja Reinhardt: zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie*. Vol. 17. Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2004.

¹⁶⁸ Szymaniak "Rachela Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".", 56-58.

¹⁶⁹ Szymaniak "Rachela Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".", 58.

¹⁷⁰ Szymaniak "Rachela Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".", 59.

¹⁷¹ Szymaniak "Rachela Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".", 60.

¹⁷² Vasilij Semenovich Grossman, *Treblinskiy Ad* [Treblinka Hell] (Moskva, 1945).

his three million by the potential capacity of all existing gas chambers if they all were to be used at maximum capacity all the time.¹⁷³ Soviet propaganda needed large numbers to impress the Allies with Nazi crimes. However, the position of Polish Jews was that “to understand the monstrous character of Treblinka crimes, we do not need any bizarre local patriotism expressed in the exaggeration of the number of victims.”¹⁷⁴

According to Reder, the German administration in Bełżec kept record only of former and current laborers of the Sonderkommando, the number always had to be five hundred. The record of transported victims was not kept.¹⁷⁵ As per given in Reder’s book information, Bełżec functioned for around eighteenth months killing during this time around two million people.¹⁷⁶ One of the sources that were used is the testimony of Feiga Kanner from Lubaczów, who told that they were counting transports from March 1942 to January 1943 and they thought it was around two million Jews sent to Bełżec.¹⁷⁷ In Bełżec there was also a common opinion among laborers that every day there was around three transports, fifty cars each, hundred people in each car that allowed them to make simple calculations.¹⁷⁸

3.2.2 Collaboration and Betrayal

The position of the CŻKH towards collaboration of other peoples with Nazis is based on blaming Nazi propaganda and counting this thread as a part of Nazi plan for Jewish extermination. Nowhere in the publications was the traditional antisemitism of Slavs mentioned. The overall

¹⁷³ Szymaniak “Rachel Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".”, n78.

¹⁷⁴ Szymaniak “Rachel Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".”, 60.

¹⁷⁵ Rudolf Reder, *Bełżec*, 52.

¹⁷⁶ Rudolf Reder, *Bełżec*, 11. Historians contemporary estimate a death toll around 500 000 –600000: The Holocaust Encyclopedia. "Bełżec". United States Holocaust Memorial Museum <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005191>, last accessed 06.05.2017.

¹⁷⁷ Rudolf Reder, *Bełżec*, 31.

¹⁷⁸ Rudolf Reder, *Bełżec*, 45.

mode of other peoples' behavior in the publications is rather moderate with a great exception for the Ukrainian collaborators. Once also Belarusian policemen were mentioned as guards.¹⁷⁹

Collaborators acted openly and they were divided into “ideological” and “common”, which may be understood in terms of financial benefit.¹⁸⁰ Many of them belonged to marginal parts of their societies, and consisted only particular “elements”: “Also, the neighbouring element of the twilight world came out in the occupied countries and became the most important “collaborator” of the German ‘new order.’”¹⁸¹ Polish collaborators were mentioned sometimes or just called “locals”, though there was only one testimony blaming particularly the Polish underground Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK) that murdered escapees from the camps who managed to survive and joined partisan units.¹⁸²

Poles obtained a variety of roles around Jews – as fellow prisoners, capo, collaborators, underground activists or local population. In the labour camp, Poles became foremen as they had experience in the ammunition factories where workers had very good work conditions and the Jews were not accepted.¹⁸³ A young girl was wounded during the mass shooting, but after few hours she tried to escape to the forest, and she was betrayed by a local for half a liter of vodka.¹⁸⁴ The prisoners who attempted to wash clothes or themselves had to deal with a terrifying Polish woman who managed “Waschraum”, she “belonged to persons whom the perversity of the system demoralized totally”¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁹ Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, 183.

¹⁸⁰ Borwicz, Michał, Preface. Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, XV.

¹⁸¹ Rachela Auerbach, *Treblinka* (Warszawa, CŻKH, 1947). In Yiddish, I am using the translation by Karolina Szymaniak published: Rachela Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż". *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 8:25-76, 46.

¹⁸² Testimony of Zelda Metz. In: Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, 187.

¹⁸³ Róża Bauminger, *Przy pikrynie i trotylu*, 13.

¹⁸⁴ Róża Bauminger, *Przy pikrynie i trotylu*, 19.

¹⁸⁵ Róża Bauminger, *Przy pikrynie i trotylu*, 16.

The most active role, according to the publications, was played by Ukrainians. Ukrainian units were used as guards when it was needed for discipline or punishment. In Sobibór camp, for instance, only 15-16 Germans served and 400 Ukrainians. At the same time, Ukrainians were the main source of information for prisoners, for example about advancing partisan units nearby.¹⁸⁶ It was possible to bribe Ukrainian guards and often they were also open for trade or exchange that enabled survival for many prisoners.

If it comes to transports and victims of unsuccessful escape from them, the world of witnesses around transports was divided between “saviors and raiders”. In this way, CŻKH tended to represent the equal state of people’s behavior. Only Ukrainians are shown together with Germans as one-sided evil power. Moreover, in one of the publications an example of Eastern territories was given, where Ukrainian bandits were very active, and only one Polish village Kościejów was always open to help Jews with food or clothes.¹⁸⁷

The position of the USSR towards collaboration on the Soviet occupied territories should be mentioned here. Although mass persecution of those who cooperated with Nazis, especially Ukrainians, resulted in multiple post-war trials, these trials were not the show trials, but often closed military trials and they were not promoted in Soviet propaganda and media.¹⁸⁸ For example, the Soviet analogue of the CŻKH’s publications, *The Black Book*, although mentioned minor cases of Ukrainian collaboration, remained attached to the concept of “Soviet People United” fighting together the enemy.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, the open and intensive accusation of

¹⁸⁶ Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, 186.

¹⁸⁷ Rudolf Reder, *Bełżec*, 27.

¹⁸⁸ Overall number of arrested in the Ukrainian Soviet republic between 1943 and 1953 was 93,590 potential “homeland traitors and accomplices”, which is quite low number according to Tanja Penter. See: Tanja Penter, "Local Collaborators on Trial: Soviet War Crimes Trials under Stalin (1943-1953)." *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 49, no. 2/3 (2008): 341-64, 342.

¹⁸⁹ “Soviet People United” is the title of one of the chapters of *The Black Book* dealing with help provided to Jews by non-Jews. See: Ilya Ehrenburg [Il'ia Erenburg] and Vasily [Vasilii] Grossman, Eds. *The Black Book: The Ruthless*

Ukrainians in the Polish Jewish publications was a visible sign or different policies towards the Jews and Holocaust in Sovietized Poland. Interestingly, cases of persecution of Ukrainians in Polish postwar trials are not known.¹⁹⁰ In this context, notably, the only publication, which did not mention any Ukrainians was a testimony of the former Sonderkommando member in Lwów, Leon Weliczker.¹⁹¹ After the liberation, he, as many other witnesses, was first interrogated by the NKVD investigator, before his notes became available to Polish and Jewish investigators. In the meantime, his manuscript has undergone some changes.¹⁹² It is not possible to establish a character of these changes, but the possibility of Soviet censorship remains open.

Many testimonies originate from Poles, who knew very well what was going on with the mass transports, where they were going and what would happen to them.¹⁹³ The matter of Polish help to Jews was a sensitive topic covered carefully. In Bełżec, Jewish transports from Poland were full of women and children. Foreign transports were mostly male and contained not many children. Evidently, parents were able to leave kids under the care of compatriots and save them from the terrible fate.¹⁹⁴ But “each of the survivors found some Poles, who risked their lives and gave help”.¹⁹⁵

Auerbach is describing her visit to Treblinka former camp site with survivors for investigation. In 1946, on their way to the official investigation initiated by the State prosecutor, they are in danger of pogroms:

Murder of Jews by German Fascist Invaders throughout the Temporarily Occupied Regions of the Soviet Union and in the Death Camps, trans. John Glad and James Levine. New York: The Holocaust Library, 1981.

¹⁹⁰ This matter needs further research though.

¹⁹¹ Leon Weliczker (Wells), *Brygada śmierci : Sonderkommando 1005. [Death Brigade: Sonderkommando 1005]* (Łódź: CŻKH, 1946).

¹⁹² Filip Friedman, Preface to: Leon Weliczker (Wells), *Brygada śmierci*, 8.

¹⁹³ Rudolf Reder, *Bełżec*, 21.

¹⁹⁴ Rudolf Reder, *Bełżec*, 47.

¹⁹⁵ Szymaniak “Rachela Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".”, 68.

We are traveling to Kosów, where the fair is held. The militia knows we suppose to come. As we pass the market square, there is a whistle from the crowd. We remember well that eleven Jews were murdered in Kosów, that there are many enemies in the neighborhood enriched by the death camp. We remember, but we do not think about danger now.¹⁹⁶

Also, marauders came to the mass graves and put unexploded shells to get out of the ground a potential robbery together with scattered remains of people.¹⁹⁷

3.2.3 Resistance and Fight or Silence and Passivity

The matter of Jewish resistance was one of the central issues, on which the CŻKH concentrated. Its importance was already stated by the CKŻP in 1944.¹⁹⁸ One of the reasons was the desire to abolish the widespread myth of Jewish passivity that Jews were going “like sheep to slaughter”.¹⁹⁹ One of the sources for this myth was the European perception of *a Jew* as weak and passive, which functioned for centuries in the Anti-Semitic discourse and easily entered the Holocaust perception.²⁰⁰ The majority of postwar historians failed to appreciate the Jewish resistance explaining it that “so few Jewish resisters survived”.²⁰¹ Moreover, the members of the CŻKH clearly felt the neglect of the world, including most probably the American Jewry. They

¹⁹⁶ Szymaniak “Rachela Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".”, 69.

¹⁹⁷ Szymaniak “Rachela Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".”, 72.

¹⁹⁸ The early statement on the basic aims and tasks of the CKŻP was published in the first Bulletin of the Jewish Press Agency (Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej, BŻAP) on 13.11.1944 and contained the separate point: „The collection and publication of materials pertaining to the armed resistance of the Jews and their participation in the struggle against the occupier.“

¹⁹⁹ The citation from the Vilna ghetto fighter Abba Kovner who stated in 1942: “We will not be led like sheep to slaughter. True we are weak and helpless, but the only response to the murders is revolt. Brethren, it is better to die fighting like free men than to live at the mercy of the murderers. Arise, Arise with last breath. Take Courage!” Quoted in Michael Berenbaum and Yitzhak Mais, *Memory and Legacy: The Shoah Narrative of the Illinois Holocaust Museum* (Skokie, Ill.: Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, 2009), 113. Middleton-Kaplan, Richard. "The Myth of Jewish Passivity." In *Jewish Resistance against the Nazis*, edited by Henry Patrick, 3-26. Catholic University of America Press, 2014, p.6.

²⁰⁰ Richard Middleton-Kaplan, "The Myth of Jewish Passivity." In *Jewish Resistance against the Nazis*, edited by Henry Patrick, 3-26. Catholic University of America Press, 2014, 8.

²⁰¹ Richard Middleton-Kaplan, "The Myth of Jewish Passivity.", 15.

undertook the mission to fight the ignorance of existent and multiple cases of resistance as well as the circumstances that made it hard and often impossible.

The motive of resistance is highly visible in most of the CŻKH's publications. Most notably, they devoted a whole book for the underground movement in camps and ghettos.²⁰² It deals with less known examples than the Warsaw ghetto uprising, which was the separate and highly problematic issue and was a subject of a separate publication.²⁰³ They planned publications on Jewish partisan movements and “forest groups”, Jewish underground Coordinating Commission, and on the participation of Jews in non-Jewish resistance and aid groups and organizations, which were never published.²⁰⁴

Most importantly, according to Michał Borwicz, one should take into consideration the circumstances of potential resistance. His argument is based on a comparison of Jewish passivity to other people's situation, and it supposed to gain empathy of the latter, especially the Poles. For example, many accused the Polish Army of being weak in 1939, so it was quickly defeated, but then “other countries were defeated too, and they saw the difference”.²⁰⁵ Although the situation of Jews under the Nazi occupation could not have a comparison with any other cruelty, the Jews experienced total extermination of the whole nation by the fully engaged criminal Nazi apparatus, when for the time being others experienced only part of it. Other peoples were also exterminated as significant, however limited groups. Usually, resistance comes from the part of the society, which was not yet affected by violence. But what if the whole society [Jews] was affected? Therefore, the editor persuades:

²⁰² Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*.

²⁰³ Józef Kermisz, *Powstanie w getcie warszawskim. [Warsaw Ghetto Uprising]* (Łódź: CŻKH, 1946).

²⁰⁴ Michał Borwicz, Preface. Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, V.

²⁰⁵ Michał Borwicz, Preface. Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, VII.

We're giving up on easy slogans. Those who thought it was appropriate to interlace them simply because they were not in a position for destruction in the distant place, they did not feel disgusted at such an attitude. Neither because it was intended by the occupant as a part of atmosphere organized by him, a vicious circle pulling in its sphere everything and everyone.²⁰⁶

The psychological violence unequivocally was seen as a part of the extermination plan and should be counted as a dangerous weapon, which prevented many from resistance.

Many practical issues prevented an active fight. Small groups' actions would endanger the whole society, while actual results would be minor. These hopeless acts brought only the moral victory of victims.²⁰⁷ However, "German perpetrators were characterized not only by moral degeneration but also by moral stupidity ... In terms of ethics, there was nothing to catch on."²⁰⁸ All other circumstances of displaced and imprisoned persons were against resistance as well: lack of territory knowledge, lack of freedom to move, lack of contact with acquaintances, lack of safe space separated from children and elderly, lack of equipment, chaotic conditions, and lack of hiding. The surrounding populations were not helping either. Some groups that managed to escape after the action of resistance were later killed and not always by Germans.²⁰⁹ Most of these heroic groups did not have an opportunity to become known as no one was left to tell their story.

Nevertheless, the numerous resistant actions both personal and group ones took place, and many of them are known. In addition, CŻKH considers as resistant actions not only an armed fight but production sabotage in labour camps, self-help, political, and cultural activities.²¹⁰ Taking into

²⁰⁶ Michał Borwicz, Preface. Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, X.

²⁰⁷ Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, 200.

²⁰⁸ Michał Borwicz, Preface. Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, XIX.

²⁰⁹ Borwicz, Michał, Preface. Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, XV.

²¹⁰ Borwicz, Michał, Preface. Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, XII.

consideration all factors, the demonstrated scale of resistance in concentration and even extermination camps was quite significant.

Often if it came to resistance the affiliation with political groups was highlighted. For example, the heroic act of a member of Bund 22-years-old Posesorski, who saved 140 people in Nowa Swirznia camp. He was a member of the partisan group named after Zhukov in a brigade named after Chapayev. “Commander of this group was a *Russian Jew* from Minsk area. *Politrak* was a *Soviet Jew*, Wajner. They sent Posesorski to rescue a group of Jews in that camp.”²¹¹ In Nowogródek, resistance was led by a man named *Berko Joselewicz*, a teacher and member of sport Zionist organization “Makkabi”.²¹² We do not know was it his real name or a Zionist pseudonym, however even if so, the clear parallel between legendary Josel Ber and a hero of resistance was drawn. Moreover, other Zionists were also among listed organizers of the revolt and escape Abram Raruwski (Hashomer Hatzair), Jasza Lejzerowski (nonpartisan), Kantorowicz (Poale Zion).²¹³ The fact of Joselewicz’s belonging to Makkabi and his leading role in the revolt was several times highlighted and his personality was praised by a narrator.²¹⁴

Janka, who was a daughter of a prewar editor of a Zionist newspaper, also reflected on heroism and lack of resistance:

I was not afraid of the death of someone or my own, but I could not agree with that. I hugely wanted to live and felt something ring in me: live! Live! I remember one Sunday at the Jakubowicz when the issue of the heroic revolt among Jews was raised. Kleinman said: "Was it not a heroism when young girls, without regret, with a song on their lips,

²¹¹ Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, 180-182.

²¹² Berek Joselewicz (September 17, 1764 – May 15, 1809) was a Jewish-Polish merchant and a colonel of the Polish Army during the Kościuszko Uprising against Imperial Russia and the Kingdom of Prussia. Joselewicz commanded the first Jewish military formation in modern history. He became a legendary and symbolic figure in a Zionist discourse as well as a canonic example of Jewish patriotic fight in Poland. Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, 183.

²¹³ Makkabi, Hashomer Hatzair and Poale Zion – all were popular Zionist movements. Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, 183.

²¹⁴ Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, 184.

went to "Piaski" [a place of executions in Lwów]? I could not agree with that. Does it mean that with resignation and humility, as this man hanged, to be put to death, is heroism? And I'm supposed to be such a heroine? - No, I have to live!²¹⁵

According to Borwicz, the underground resistance could mostly be performed by young people, most of whom were killed during the early period of occupation. The resistance groups emerged independently in many places and did not have contact with each other, only in big cities there was some contact with the underground outside of camps and ghettos and it was rather moral support than the organizational. These groups organized spontaneous resistance actions without any qualified leadership, and non-Jewish underground organizations almost did not help. As highlighted by editors, all political-social groups were represented in the resistance, however, they constantly remained in ideological conflicts within the movements.²¹⁶ Among Jewish youth “nationalistic” [Zionist] views dominated. German and Dutch Jews (and probably other Westerners) did not participate in an underground conspiracy. Generally, western Jews in a camp did not believe in resistance, the whole organization and initiative were of the Russian and Polish Jews.²¹⁷ Finally, two aims prevailed in the majority of resistance initiatives: the defense of the nation's honor in the ghettos and camps and the organization of partisan movements to fight Germans after the liquidation of ghettos and camps.²¹⁸

3.2.4 Jewish Self-help or Lack of It

According to common critical position towards Judenrates, the highest positions in ghettos were occupied by people “with low morals”. On the lower level, often acts of social self-help resulted in even worse tragedies when provisional hospitals and orphanages became targets for special

²¹⁵ Janina Heschel, *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny*, 54.

²¹⁶ Michał Borwicz, Preface. Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*

²¹⁷ Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, 187.

²¹⁸ Michał Borwicz, Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, 201.

“actions”.²¹⁹

Among prisoners of camps, there were many cases of brutality towards fellow workers: they did not give water to the dying, they took belongings from the unconscious, they have torn gold teeth from the ill or dead.²²⁰ Róża drew an extremely negative picture of the people’s behaviours in the labour camp. The lack of help for people working with a harmful substance, “pikryna” [picrate], in the most virulent conditions who died usually within 1-2 months, they were perceived as “trash” both by perpetrators, fellow prisoners and even among themselves.²²¹ Almost all of them were murdered by Nazis during the liquidation of the camp, in order to hide to what extent people suffered from yellow deadly powder, picrate.²²²

One of the children testified how in Plaszow KL a dozen children of Jewish specialists needed by Germans were separated and the rest were sent to execution. The narrator survived only because his father served in the camp’s Jewish police that was arranged by a relative.²²³

In dramatic circumstances as in Treblinka and other camps widely functioned executioner-victim complex. The labourers themselves become criminals - they beat other prisoners, reported on them. But there were also people who remained human and they have successfully organized a rebellion in Treblinka - the only such rebellion in all German camps.²²⁴

The separate book is devoted to the literary activity on the Janowska camp as a form of resistance and self-help.²²⁵ An insane idea to organize literature reading evenings seemed to be something

²¹⁹ Michał Borwicz, Preface. Betti Ajzensztajn, *Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach*, XVII.

²²⁰ Róża Bauminger, *Przy pikrynie i trotylu*, 17

²²¹ Róża Bauminger, *Przy pikrynie i trotylu*, 29-30.

²²² Róża Bauminger, *Przy pikrynie i trotylu*, 32.

²²³ Hochberg-Mariańska, *Dzieci oskarżają*, 49.

²²⁴ Szymaniak “Rachela Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".”, 62-63.

²²⁵ Michał Borwicz, *Literatura w obozie. [Literature in the camp]* (Kraków: CŻKH, 1946).

impossible to realize in the situation of total control and constant danger. However, it turned out to be the best form of self-organization and had a healing impact on miserable prisoners. These moments gave an “illusion of a return to humanity” and normality.²²⁶ The camp militia was an obstacle, Borwicz ironized that “harmless guys, were more dependent on us then we were on them”. He simply proposed them to cover the “evenings” by standing on guard. Borwicz told them that if one betrayed them would “chew his head”. The only argument against was that the militia ...did not want to miss an event. So they agreed to repeat the reading the week after, for those who will be on guard.²²⁷ In the short break between readings, the collection of donations for sick and extremely starved was organized. With time passing, these meetings and contacts became also the foundation for more serious underground coordination.²²⁸ In a way, it allowed people also to meet to discuss conspiracy and underground resistance. That was also the way how Borwicz himself and Janka were smuggled out of camp, thanks to connections with underground resistance outside of camp established during their literary readings.

3.2.5 Who is to Blame?

According to the publications, the following were to be blamed for the Catastrophe: “[German] nation that has deteriorated, the system of Nazi rule, and also the economic, social and political issues of the time, which were the sources of this system”.²²⁹ In addition, fear was the basis of Hitler’s power.²³⁰ This system was a product of Hitler’s total system: on the one hand - the total enslavement of a man and the total robbery of him, on the other hand - his total depravity.²³¹ Even

²²⁶ Michał Borwicz, *Literatura w obozie*, 19.

²²⁷ Michał Borwicz, *Literatura w obozie*, 15-16.

²²⁸ Michał Borwicz, *Literatura w obozie*, 17.

²²⁹ Józef Sieradzki, preface to Róża Bauminger, *Przy pikrynie i trotylu*, 8.

²³⁰ Szymaniak “Rachel Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".”, 48.

²³¹ Szymaniak “Rachel Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".”, 64.

the matter of collaboration and betrayal is mostly blamed on German art of propaganda, not on nations that joined perpetrators and sometimes even outperformed them in cruelty. Witnesses agreed on a different approach of SS-men, active and passive, there were those who enjoyed violence and particularly that allowed to sentence them in the postwar trials. Those most terrible made impressions of beasts, crazy, inhuman creations.²³²

Way before Hanna Arendt wrote her article²³³ on the banality of evil, and Browning²³⁴ wrote his groundbreaking work on ordinary Germans as perpetrators, Auerbach reflected on these issues:

The problem is precisely ordinary, prosaic, normal Germans, who with the understanding and silent mastery of competent state officers have done the most monstrous acts ever committed in the world. Their participation in mass murders is the largest percentage! Arrogant, sober, with cold blood. And that is why it is so dangerous. That is why it is so incomprehensible... Were they all born anti-Semites, Nazis, demons, murderers? No! Even the devil here is very trivial and small.²³⁵

The practice of blaming others and not taking responsibility was quite common among German police units. Weliczker had even a chat (!) with one of them about the Jews. A policeman confessed that they never discovered any Jews hiding by themselves, it is always the Ukrainians who betrayed hiding Jews and in such situations, German policeman had no choice but to shoot them. It was the “supreme power” of Hitler that they obeyed. In addition, a policeman was convinced that if one of the prisoners would catch a German, he would kill him immediately too, in this way he reconciled with a conscience.²³⁶

²³² Rudolf Reder, *Bełżec*, 59.

²³³ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil*. (London: Penguin, 1963).

²³⁴ Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary men*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

²³⁵ Szymaniak “Rachela Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".”, 47, 49.

²³⁶ Leon Weliczker (Wells), *Brygada śmierci*, 102.

3.2.6 Children

The matter of children's experience and the approach of the CŻKH was already discussed in part 2.4 of the previous chapter. This part is aimed to provide some examples from the texts on how these methodological statements were realized. Children are present, of course, in all publications. Nevertheless, the Commission decided to devote a separate issue exclusively to the young victim's experience. The separate publication of the diary of a twelve-year-old girl was created and it is one of the most original among the CŻKH's works.

Janina Heschel was saved only because she had will and talent for literature in the camp.²³⁷ Through her fascination with poetry, she established the contact with an underground group which assisted her escape. Borwicz initiated her escape through Cracow Aid Council for Jews [Krakowska Rada Pomocy Żydom] in 1943. In return, they gave her a notebook and asked to write down her testimony, which she did while in hiding. They did not want her to write carefully, they wanted her to write the whole truth with children's sincerity.²³⁸

The difference between other children's interviews is that they were taken after the war in a safe atmosphere, while she wrote in hiding and still being pretty much in the camp mentally.²³⁹ Though other children were still remembering their experience, they were at least in safety: "For now I'm in Zakopane, in the orphanage and I go to school. I would like to forget about these camps, but I cannot because other children have also gone through a lot and keep talking about it."²⁴⁰

Hochberg-Mariańska highlights Janka's bravery and maturity towards traumatic experience and

²³⁷ Hochberg-Mariańska preface to: Janina Heschel, *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny*, 9.

²³⁸ Hochberg-Mariańska preface to: Janina Heschel, *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny*, 10.

²³⁹ Hochberg-Mariańska preface to: Janina Heschel, *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny*, 13-14.

²⁴⁰ Hochberg-Mariańska, *Dzieci oskarżają*, 48.

danger. Her father before his death told her not to cry and she didn't, only when no one saw. A group of girls in the camp sang cheerful songs to not to show their "pitiful state", something that many Jews did despite aggressive comments of the Gentiles. They perceived it as an "internal resistance". Janka also wanted to resist actively, but she was not allowed.²⁴¹

In Janka's testimony children were not only victims but also aggressors: [About Ukrainian street violence on Jews after the occupation of Lwów] "I saw six-year-old boys, plucking out the hair of women and beards of the elderly."²⁴² Janka describes many situations when children were taken and their parents followed them, or mothers sacrificed themselves to give a small chance to a child to survive, including her own mother.²⁴³ She describes a lot of life situations about the way people around her behaved and reacted, providing fewer facts on events, more literary expression of emotions.

The children's accusation to the world in a form of publication edited by Maria Hochberg-Mariańska contains among others few accounts about children in camps, which I selected to represent here. Some of them are preceded by some biographical data on a child, sometimes there are no details about the person in case the testimony was sent by an accidental person and/or nor a child or its family survived. Not all testimonies are on the Nazi camps in occupied Poland, some of them, deal with camps in Germany, as for instance Mauthausen mentioning liberation by Americans, not as most of CŻKH's material by the Red Army.²⁴⁴

During the occupation, a whole range of children's games was created, reflecting the adult life then. Children played in "actions", led "to death", used to play with words such as "tsvay un tsvay

²⁴¹ Hochberg-Mariańska preface to: Janina Heschel, *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny*, 15-16.

²⁴² Janina Heschel, *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny*, 19.

²⁴³ Janina Heschel, *Oczyrna dwunastoletniej dziewczyny*, 30-43.

²⁴⁴ Hochberg-Mariańska, *Dzieci oskarżają*, 41.

iz a firer" etc.²⁴⁵ As one of the survivors noted:

"I recall the childish play. The young child takes sand and says, "I had so many children." Throws the sand up, part falls to the ground, "so much has died," says the child, grabs the rest: "and so many lives." This way for five years we were thrown and sifted."²⁴⁶

These testimonies similarly to Janka's were edited to a certain extent – to leave a reader with a feeling of authentic naiveté of an innocent little victim. One of the girls describes how she arrived with her mother from the town of Tarnow to Plaszów concentration camp in Kraków: "In the camp, we were terribly met... They insulted us with the worst words, during the "appeal" it was constant fall and rise into mud and water. I do not know why everyone was so fierce with people from Tarnów."²⁴⁷

3.2.7 Psychological Aspects

The German strategy of genocide was very well-understood by the CŻKH already in these early postwar years:

Germany could exploit it all brilliantly. In the strategy of the murder of nations, as we call it today, psychophysics played no lesser role than the ordinary technician. The psychological and psychosocial mechanisms of the victims were exposed to the machine of their own death. The same rules apply during ghettos, on the way, on the spot, in the death camp itself. Kill as many people as you can, in the long run, earn as much as possible with the least amount of damage, damage and losses! Here is the goal. All the other means of its achievement. Physical and moral damage, both as a group and as a person. Combat all rebellious reflects, attract the largest percentage of people, almost voluntarily, to their death. Distribute, organize, divide, and split every group, every family. Hunger and thirst, pressure, haste, terror - all serve the same purpose - the gigantic murder of the Jews. But the most powerful of all things was the lie.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Yiddish, means „two and two is a firer“, -er is the plural ending and four is „fir“, while German „Fürer“ would be a plural of four.

²⁴⁶ Hochberg-Mariańska, *Dzieci oskarżaja*, 43.

²⁴⁷ Hochberg-Mariańska, *Dzieci oskarżaja*, 44.

²⁴⁸ Szymaniak "Rachel Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż".", 38.

There were two main features necessary to survive: people needed to have low morals and be strong physically and mentally.²⁴⁹ Working among Lwów bandits Weliczker, for instance, managed to “keep in his heart a moral maximum learned from home, from mother”.²⁵⁰ He told the interviewer that some members of the commando used “bad vocabulary talking about dead bodies”, which he disapproved of. After the liberation, he met one of the Jews who denounced people back in camp and did not reveal him to authorities because “he has a wife and two kids”. Auerbach saw this attitude also among the Treblinka survivors, and she is convinced: “It is problematic though typically Jewish ethical dilemma”.²⁵¹

The testimony of a survivor, who was very close to death and experienced almost all those things that did victims, plays a role of a source of what never would be known – what these people thought and felt? Repeating reflections, in some texts more, in some less, create an impression of moral and ethical dilemmas:

Raise your head, man, and spit at least to the face of murderers! Nobody does it, because what he will have from it. Probably only additional torture. Maybe it can accelerate death? Or maybe you should not have to renounce your life? Maybe there will be another miracle that will save us? The miracle that so many hundreds of thousands of people for two years were waiting for, and what if now, within the few minutes we have before us, it would be fulfilled? I wondered if I had ever been guiltier than the others, that I had first to see the death of my parents and siblings to follow their fate now. I am a despicable coward, afraid of death "saved himself" in the camp, I saw brothers undressing to die, so twelve days later to go myself the same way.

The rain continues to sprinkle.²⁵²

The temporary horror that lasted for few years was not perceived by prisoners as part of their “normal” life. The fact of Holocaust was not accepted as something that would change the

²⁴⁹ Rachel Auerbach preface to: Leon Weliczker (Wells), *Brygada śmierci*, 13.

²⁵⁰ Rachel Auerbach preface to: Leon Weliczker (Wells), *Brygada śmierci*, 15.

²⁵¹ Rachel Auerbach preface to: Leon Weliczker (Wells), *Brygada śmierci*, 15-16.

²⁵² Leon Weliczker (Wells), *Brygada śmierci*, 36.

direction of their prewar activities. Borwicz mentions a writer called Drezdner, who refused to write for the underground literary “club” because he was tired ragged and hungry to the limit. At the same time, he confessed that his dream is to write a couple of essays... on classic Polish poets Mickiewicz and Krasiński: “He quoted in this matter the theses with which he wanted to argue, documented his statements by memorized bits of texts. I understood then why in the camp he could not write: he lacked the university library, bibliography ... and peaceful reading room. Poor Karol!”²⁵³

Borwicz himself listed in one of his CŻKH publications on the last page, where usually were listed other published or prepared CŻKH books, his works on philosophy and literature theory from the late 1930s with a short note “out of print.”²⁵⁴ Obviously, he saw continuity between his past academic activities and the present creation of the Holocaust historiography and he probably also planned to get back to the old topic once the urgent need of documentation will be satisfied. He also undergoes a transformation within his book on literature in camps: in the first part, he is a prisoner who talks about his experience in the camp and his role in the organization of the underground resistance. However, in the second part, he performs analysis of literature in camps as a professional theoretician of literature, in a way he transforms from the camp’s inmate to literary critic within the book.²⁵⁵ He is not discussing the creations, he is not citing the texts. His aim is to provide an image of how and why literature existed in a camp. It existed in this terrible conditions because the crowd of convicts desired it. The most common comment about the ability to document their experience in literary form: “Is it possible to describe it at all?” In a way,

²⁵³ Michał Borwicz, *Literatura w obozie*, 20-21.

²⁵⁴ Michał Borwicz, *Literatura w obozie*, 73.

²⁵⁵ Michał Borwicz, *Literatura w obozie*, 68-69.

literature gave a hope for an upcoming “normal” future and the indicator of the value of their suffering at least for revealing the truth and history in future.²⁵⁶

3.2.8 The role of Soviet propaganda

The published version of Janka’s memoir begins with the sentence “Russian troops started to withdraw from Lwów”. Her narrative does not include what happened between 1939 and 1941. Neither was she able to reflect on the reasons of the Ukrainian pogrom of Jews, which she describes. What happened she has revealed in her recent interview. Her father was arrested by NKVD as a Zionist, kept in prison in Lwów and then sent to Russia. He came back three months before the war between Nazi Germany and the USSR broke out. Despite his traumatic experience in Soviet prison, he was trying to convince the family to escape to Russia, however, his wife did not agree to go back to “enemies”. As a result, he was murdered during the first day of German occupation in Lwów. It was the period of mass violence on Jewish population connected to the Soviet terror in the city since 1939 as well as to the fact that Soviets set all prisons in the city on fire before they left. The latter served as a pretext to the pogroms in June and July 1941 that resulted in few thousands of victims.²⁵⁷ I was not able to compare the published 73-pages-long memoir to Janka’s 142-pages-long handwritten original and learn did she mention any of these events and it was censored by the CŻKH or she herself was aware of the unacceptable character of this content and did not include it in her story.

Similarly, Weliczker after the entry of the Red Army to Lwów went back to his prewar school.

²⁵⁶ Michał Borwicz, *Literatura w obozie*, 71.

²⁵⁷ Janina Altman (Hescheles) interview to the project Lwówprzedwojenny.eu, published on Jan 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkaSGaLcJmM> last accessed 24.05.2017.

But already in August 1945, “as a Polish repatriate, I left Lwów and moved to Silesia, to the city of Gliwice.”²⁵⁸ In my opinion, this careful formulation for Soviet annexation of Eastern Polish territories was also dictated by the cooperation of Weliczker with Soviet investigators. Both Weliczker and Reder were interviewed by the Soviet commission first, then by Polish and only after that they could give their witness account to the Central Jewish Historical Commission. They both met in Lwów trusted by Kremlin Soviet journalist Vladimir Belyaev, who arrived in Lwów together with Soviet prosecutors and as a result created many articles and reports for the Soviet press depicting Nazi crimes. Weliczker’s account was given to the Soviet Extraordinary Commission (ChGK) and it was considered as extremely valuable evidence. The report of the Soviet Commission published in *Pravda*, 23.7.1944 *partially* is based on the Weliczker’s account. He also received official acknowledgments from the ChGK²⁵⁹

The only survived witness for Bełżec extermination camp was Reder, no German documents were available at the time of publication.²⁶⁰ However, the investigation was problematic, as Reder did not provide the exact description of the gas chamber, and the way of killing was uncertain. The medical section of the Friends Society of the CŻKH²⁶¹ analyzed known facts and concluded that it should have been flue gas used for killing, not Cyclone B.²⁶² The Soviet daily *Izvestiya* from 15 December 1945 published a report from Nuremberg, where prosecutor provided two documents, one about practice of “Gazewagens”, called popularly “dushogubki”. Based on this data taken from the Soviet report, the Society assumed that the technology of slow gassing by the

²⁵⁸ Leon Weliczker (Wells), *Brygada śmierci*, 27.

²⁵⁹ Leon Weliczker (Wells), *Brygada śmierci*, 8.

²⁶⁰ Rudolf Reder, *Bełżec*, 31.

²⁶¹ Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Żydowskiej Komisji Historycznej. It was the community of Polish and Jewish activists who were not CŻKH’s employees but they took active part support the work of the Commission.

²⁶² Rudolf Reder, *Bełżec*, 32.

flue gas could have been used in Bełżec as well, as the faces of victims were not deformed.²⁶³

3.3 The Fate of the Publications

The example of what happened to the publications of the CŻKH demonstrates the overall tendency in the development of the Holocaust studies. Most of them were forgotten for many years, though generous gesture of the Commission allowed them to send the books to many Jewish communities and research centers all around the world.

The underground movement in ghettos and camps, *With picrate and trinitrotoluene*, and *Literature in the camp* were never reprinted and rather ignored by the scholarship. Auerbach's *Treblinka* was for many years available only in Yiddish to a limited readership until it was translated to Polish recently.²⁶⁴ Blumental's dictionary of Nazi language was published unsuccessfully at the same time with its German analog written by Klemperer, which became for some reason much more popular. In addition, the idea of publishing the second volume of the dictionary was never realized and the Blumental's edition contains only letters A to L.²⁶⁵

Children's testimonies were a popular genre after the war, Munich historical commission, for instance, also gathered and published this kind of material. Therefore, the Hochberg-Marianska's book was translated into English only in 1996 and republished in Polish in 1993.²⁶⁶ Janka's diary in 1958 was published in German translation collection in a collection of five diaries.²⁶⁷ It was

²⁶³ Rudolf Reder, *Bełżec*, 33.

²⁶⁴ The Polish translation by Karolina Szymaniak published: "Rachela Auerbach. "Treblinka. Reportaż"." *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 8: 25-76.

²⁶⁵ Victor Klemperer, "Die unbewältigte Sprache (LTI)." Aus dem Notizbuch eines Philologen, Darmstadt (1946).

²⁶⁶ *The Children Accuse* (London: Vallentine-Mitchell, 1996). *Dzieci Żydowskie oskarżają*, (Fundacja Shalom, 1993).

²⁶⁷ Janina Heschles: Mit den Augen eines zwölfjährigen Mädchens. In: Im Feuer vergangen. Tagebücher aus dem Ghetto. Übersetzung aus dem Polnischen Viktor Mika. Vorwort Arnold Zweig. Rütten & Loening, Berlin 1958, S. 345-411

also translated into many languages recently, including Ukrainian, and the author was invited to Lwów to meet the new generation of her readers.²⁶⁸

Rudolf Reder's testimony on was for a long time one of the very few available sources on Belzec, that could determine his and his book's popularity. However, the first full English translation was published only in 2000.²⁶⁹ Similar was the fate of the Weliczker's *Sonderkommando 1005*. It was recently reprinted by the theater and memory center Brama Grodzka Teatr NN in Lublin.²⁷⁰

Most of these books were forgotten for many years. Many of them became a subject of popular interest and research in recent years that indicates the rapid turn in the understanding of the early Holocaust testimonies, literature and historiography. Contemporary popularity of the first-hand accounts and less critical approach of academia towards this kind of sources allows the CŻKH's series of publication to reincarnate and serve for the future Holocaust studies and memory.

²⁶⁸ For example, in Spanish: Janina Heschel-Altman: *Con los ojos de una niña de doce años*. Hermida Editores S.L., 2014. In Ukrainian: Яніна Гешелес: *Очіма 12-річної дівчинки* (Переклав Андрій Павлишин). Дух і Літера, Київ 2011.

²⁶⁹ Rudolf Reder, „Belzec“, tranl. M.M. Rubel, *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry vol.13* (2000), 270-289.

²⁷⁰ Leon Weliczker, *Brygada śmierci (Sonderkommando 1005)*. *Pamiętnik* (Lublin, 2012).

Conclusion

The overriding purpose of this study was to examine the content of the CŽKH's publications in the light of the political, ideological, historiographical, and methodological conditions of their time. I discussed the complex situation of Polish Jews after the war, described the structure of its institutional representation, and placed the Commission within this structure. The main achievement in this work was the presentation the collection of publications as a result of the four years of the systematic work of group of authors. Detection of major opinions and judgments of the survivors and/or historians led to the understanding of the period and the stage of arts and state of minds at the initial stage of Holocaust research. I endeavored to go beyond the well-established image of this topic in historiography, thus I concentrated on the declarations and opinions of less central Commission members that its director Philip Friedman since his position was important but not the only existing within the CŽKH.

The Commission succeeded in collecting and publishing a significant corpus of historical sources, guided by the intension of using testimonies together with documents. The disregard of historical scholarship towards these efforts of the Commission lasted for a long time. Nowadays, the heterogeneous methodology of their publications coincides much better with the new interdisciplinary standards of a historiography that has opened up to the fields such as oral history or literary representation. My analysis of the selected publications evaluates these sources from this angle and to recommends them to the further study. Using the range of secondary sources and declarations published by the Commission, I drafted the overview of its historiographical roots, fields of innovation, and methodology of collecting testimonies. My work differed from the previous literature, insofar as I have combined the study of the author's theoretical background with an analysis of the practical result of their work in order to provide a more

detailed picture. The additional the topics, which I explored: the comparison of the Commission with other similar initiatives in Eastern Central Europe and the participation in the process of transitional justice, - proposed these so far marginalized aspects of the Commission's activity to the further research.

In my opinion, all of the Commission's publications from the researched period shared a common background and should be studied as a whole. My selection of the material covers the wide range of publications that appeared on the topic of Nazi camps: this allowed me to identify common ideas, approaches, and methods concerning the study of camps. I traced the themes most present in the narratives, indicating the questions and dilemmas that were most important for the community to Jewish survivors and how they were approached. The presence of these elements in most of the selected books demonstrated the existence of a consensus among the members of CŽKH. The characteristic features are the centrality of Jewish resistance, the silencing of Polish antisemitism, and the open accusations of Ukrainian collaborators, the wide usage of psychological effects to engage the reader, and the adoption of the functionalist thesis with respect to the reasons of the Holocaust. Already in 1945, the CŽKH was convinced that the murder of the Jews was a well-planned operation guided from above and that the behaviors and choices of all perpetrators should be blamed on the Nazi propaganda.

Therefore, my work study calls attention to the necessity of a deeper analysis of the whole collection of CŽKH's publications. A turn in academic interest was already manifest in the few first critical reprints issued by the Jewish Historical Institute. My present study sets a limited framework insofar as it does not cover the entire scope of the collection, and this limitation, albeit necessary, is regrettable in my opinion. My proposed focus is thus only one of the many possibilities to approach the collection. A future study could be grouped around the topic of the

ghettoes, or it could be based on the close reading of the published testimonies of survivors, which can be compared to the original interview texts from the Commission's archives.

Finally, I suggest the possibility of a comparative studies on the attempts to document the Holocaust in the East, for instance by researching parallels between the Jewish Historical Commission and the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in Moscow. With a more easily feasible comparison that I have explores here, the CŻKH can be described as a part of the East Central European Holocaust documentation efforts that were made during the transitional postwar period just before all these countries were becoming satellites of the USSR.

One of the questions that I strived to respond to in my research was that of the Soviet influence on the formation of Holocaust historiography in Poland. As a result I demonstrated how the Soviet agenda occupied a central place in the official narratives of the Committee of Polish Jews as well as in the Jewish press. The most popular expressions of loyalty were manifest in the overall gratitude of the Jewish population towards the liberating Red Army. At the same time, with growing Soviet power in Poland, traces of censorship can be detected in the periodical press and the book publications. The major impact of the USSR was in the policy of publicly documenting and denouncing Nazi crimes, a policy that in Poland assured state support and even a considerable amount of freedom to the research on the Holocaust undertaken during the early postwar period. This effect did not last, and with the Stalinization of Poland, the policy towards Jews and the Holocaust writing changed dramatically. Nevertheless, the collected and produced material as well as established international network of the research on the Catastrophe, proved the short existence of the Commission to be indeed a foundational element what later became Holocaust studies.

My thesis thus opens an opportunity to fill the existing gap in scholarship on how the Holocaust was researched in the Eastern countries. The peculiar circumstances and features of this research distinguish it significantly from the emerging Western narrative on the Holocaust.

I complemented my study of the original editions with a short elaboration on the fate of these books and their authors during the later years. However, the limitations of research focus and space forced me to limit these insights to brief statements. My observations concerning the myth of silence could be updated with the evidence of the active participation of the Commission members in further research, as well as the constant presence of the publications from the 1940s in the Holocaust discourse of different countries, especially in Germany. The early Polish historiography on the Holocaust has been understudied, but it has been far from inconsequential.

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