THE FAR SIDE OF TIME

MEMORIALIZING THE JEWS OF TYKOCIN, A POLISH TOWN

"Might it not be … that we … have appointments to keep in the past, in what has gone before and is for the most part extinguished, and must go there in search of places and people who have had some connection with us on the far side of time, so to speak?"

W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

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Alan Duben

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I dedicate this book to my mother, the loving link between the old Jewish world of my ancestors and myself.

Note

Some of the names referred to in this book are actual names, some pseudonyms. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the individuals concerned and are indicated with a (†).

INTRODUCTION

"Tykocin is a gem of the Baroque, a meeting place of Polish and Jewish cultures, a sleepy and quiet town, as if painted by Chagall, a [*sic*] one which lives on [*sic*] the memories of its glorious past even today."

Polska: Official Website of the Republic of Poland

Tykocin, the Exemplar *Shtetl*

I discovered my grandmother's imperial Russian identity papers which she carried with her to America in 1907 among my mother's papers soon after her death in 2010. Those were the days before passports were required for entry into the United States. My grandmother's birth name was given on the document as Chaya, Chaya Faiga Kurlander, the first of many surprises I was to encounter on my search for the people of my past. The family knew grandmother as Ida.

Chaya Faiga's identity papers were to be my passport to Tykocin (pronounced Tickochin), the Polish town where she had spent the first fourteen years of her life. Grandmother Ida described Tykocin, which she referred to using its Yiddish name Tiktin, as a poor, backward *shtetl*, or little town. Today the town, though only half the size it was in 1907, could hardly be more different. It is now a major tourist attraction, the kind of place that has been referred to as a "destination museum,"[1] displaying an erstwhile Jewish world that now exists only as an imperfectly constructed past for today's many Jewish and gentile visitors to the town. I began my sojourn to the world of Tykocin with grandmother's "passport" in hand.

Tykocin is often described in both the Jewish and Polish literature as the exemplar shtetl, a real-life Anatevka, the fictional Eastern European Jewish town in *Fiddler on the Roof*. This little town of 2,000, less than half the size it was when grandmother lived there, and since 1941 bereft of its Jewish population, has been the subject of numerous documentary films, has often been used as a location for Polish historical feature films set in prewar times, and is the subject of a novel, short stories, the popular press, and academic study. Interest derives both from its current fame as a frequently idealized Polish shtetl, the beauty and importance of its synagogue, and from tragedy. In August of 1941 occupying Germans murdered almost the entire Jewish population of the town. Local Christian Poles kept the much-diminished town alive over the following years. In the 1970s, at the heyday of the Communist regime, the Polish government took the unusual step of renovating the town's stately sixteenth century Baroque synagogue and repurposing it as a museum and exhibition center of Jewish life.

Beginning with the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, Tykocin became transformed into a major Polish-Jewish tourist destination and opened up its gates to increasing flocks of Poles, Israelis, and diaspora Jewish tourists who "rediscovered" Tykocin's both distinguished and tragic Jewish past. Tykocin is now an important stop on many international Jewish heritage tours and Holocaust remembrance routes. Heritage and remembrance tours for young people like "The March of the Living," and other Israeli and diaspora student tours, and Israeli mandatory military tours of Jewish death sites in Poland had during the pre-Covid period brought upwards of 100,000 tourists to Tykocin annually,[2] presenting it as one of the prime examples of small-town Jewish life in the past. Tykocin is a place that deserves special attention, both in and for itself, and as a microcosm of larger issues concerning the presentation and use of the Jewish past in Poland.

Memorializing Tykocin's Jews

The major objective of this book is to relate the ways in which Jews and the Jewish past of the Polish town of Tykocin are imagined, shaped, portrayed, and publicly memorialized and, variously, understood by international, Polish, and the local stakeholders. Visiting Israeli tourists, especially those who come on organized tours, too often only see the town as a ghostlike place where Jews once lived and were so cruelly murdered. Many diaspora Jews with family connections come to Tykocin as a site of mourning. In most

instances visiting Jews have virtually no interaction with the current residents of the town. Locals also maintain their distance from these visitors. Christian Polish visitors are themselves of various minds about Tykocin and its erstwhile Jews. Some come to Tykocin's evocative Jewish memory sites with a sense of nostalgia for a multicultural Poland that no longer exists, and others to a place where a strange, exotic, often denigrated, perhaps despised, people once lived. All of these current attitudes and experiences impact on the various popular understandings of the Holocaust in Poland and the composition and nature of Polish society past, present, and future.

I examine the town's synagogue-museum, an ongoing private exhibition of local memorabilia and visual and oral documents, the old Jewish cemetery, the town's "Jewish" restaurants, a theatrical performance, and memorial events and ceremonies as major focal points of attention. I am especially interested in the *publicly-presented* face of the Jewish past of the town. I do not attempt to assay the largely unvoiced, privately held thoughts, feelings, and representations of the current denizens of Tykocin regarding the Jewish past of their hometown. In any case, there is hardly anyone alive today who could describe that lost world firsthand. I am also interested in understanding the many ways visiting Jews from Israel and the diaspora, including Poland, as well as Christian Poles, attribute often quite diverse, sometimes strikingly different, meanings to what they see and experience. In the words of Polish historian Joanna Michlic,

> … we cannot ignore the simultaneous presence of coinciding, conflicting memories of Jews and the Holocaust. Only when we analyze the conflicting memories side by side, can we gain a deeper insight into the complexities of the entire spectrum of the Jewish memory project in Poland today … and thereby acquire an understanding of how conflicting memories work at a particular period under certain political, social, and economic circumstances.[3]

My Tykocin?

This book is, in the first instance, an account of the ways in which the Jewish past is presented to the public in Tykocin as viewed from my dual vantage points as foreign anthropologist and a descendant of a local Jewish family. It is, inevitably, also about aspects of the Jewish past in Polish society as I construct my narrative in the larger context of Poland, past and present. The narrative is largely in the first person. I explore the town and meet and talk with a number of people there, as well as in the nearby city of Białystok and in Warsaw. At the same time, this is an outsider's effort to understand the social and historical context of the various narratives publicly presented and variously understood about the Jews of the Tykocin past.

Throughout my research experience in Tykocin, surprisingly to me, I never felt like an outsider or the foreign ethnographer that I am. There was always that ineffable special connection; I felt that a part of me belonged to Tykocin, though that feeling ebbed and flowed depending on context and circumstance. In 2016, my participation as a descendant of a Tykocin family at the seventy-fifth anniversary memorial of the destruction of the Jews of the town in 1941 was a particularly high point in my identification and connection with Tykocin. Depths of emotion were shared by the "Tiktiners,"[4] a kindhearted referent to the descendants of the town's Jews who participated in the memorial ceremonies. Sadly, such feelings and sense of neighborly solidarity, of *gemeinschaft*, were largely not shared between the visiting Jewish participants and the local gentiles.

I visited Tykocin frequently between 2014 and 2020 until the Covid epidemic set in and I had to put a stop to my visits. Subsequent persistent illness has prevented me from returning to Tykocin since 2020. Over time, I developed genuine friendships and a level of understanding with a small number of people

there, some of whom sought every opportunity to draw me in and publicly present me as the grandson of a Tykocin Jew—that is, almost one of them. My personal friendships with a number of Tykocin residents eager to connect with the living descendants of the town's Jews gave me a sense of what might have been. They were, in my mind, like the neighbors that might have been had the world been a different place. Unexpectedly, we discovered that we complemented each other, that we each shared one side of a common need to connect with the past, so to speak. There is something ineffable about my relationship with Tykocin. It is not the town itself, charming as it is, or the beauty of nature, nor is it the Jewish religion or Jewish traditions or customs of my ancestors, with which I cannot easily relate, that draw me to Tykocin. If anything, my connection is with the most intangible thing about the town; it is with a sense of belonging to a place that has a past within which I can in the most ephemeral of ways locate myself.

What This Book Is Not About

To avoid confusion and possible mistaken expectations on the part of the reader, I feel obliged to provide a few words about what this book is *not* about. This is not a history of Tykocin or of the Jews of the town. Nor is it a study of how Jews lived in past times, except as that history is relevant to the main goal of the book, which is to examine how the Jewish past is conceived of, shaped, and publicly displayed *today* in Tykocin. This may or may not be related to how Jews lived in Tykocin over hundreds of years up until 1941.

There are numerous works examining the shtetl of the past, from scholarly studies of the meaning of the shtetl in Jewish life, and of life in the shtetl itself, to personal and more anecdotal sorts of accounts of the so-called "generic" shtetl of past times, as well as the numerous fictional accounts—stories, novels, and theatrical and cinematic productions set in shtetls.[5] The most famous of those theatrical and cinematic productions is without doubt Joseph Stein's *Fiddler on the Roof*, based on the well-known Yiddish stories of Sholem Aleichem.[6]

The indiscriminate use of the term shtetl to describe the small towns and villages where Jews lived in the past in Eastern Europe has led to unfortunate distortions and simplifications of local realities, perhaps the most outstanding of which is that the shtetl was a tiny, primitive village, and that only Jews lived in such places.[7] This was certainly the overwhelming impression I got from the stories told by elders in my family when I was a child. No one ever mentioned Poles living in those places or even in close proximity to the Jews.

Further, this book is not a study of the Holocaust as it played out in Tykocin, though there is significant focus on the mass murder of the town's Jews in 1941 as a central element of my effort to understand the town today. As I indicated, my focus is on the public presentation of the Jewish past in the town. Although I begin this book with the story of my maternal grandmother, this is not a family history. My grandmother's story provides a lead into the main body of the book. Further, this is not a search for my roots in the old Jewish Pale of Settlement, though in the process of researching and writing this book I have come to a new and more fulfilling understanding of my origins.

I never imagined I would visit and revisit the remote Polish town where my mother's mother was born. Until recently, I thought that it no longer existed, and in any case, I had little interest in the Old Jewish World. I certainly never could have imagined that I would develop a special affection for the place where my grandmother was born and an emotional connection to a world that is almost as alien to me as was the Turkish society that I have spent most of my adult life studying as an

anthropologist. Turkey has not only become my field of study but also my home, now a familiar place where I have lived on and off for more than thirty of the past fifty years. My relationship with Tykocin is much more recent and, though short in actual years, now seems long in the years I constructed in my mind as I projected back into the past and into my personal and family connection with the town. Incongruous as it may seem at first glance, my experience in Turkey has been an asset in understanding the Jewish past in Tykocin. I will explain.

Grandmother's Tiktin, My Tykocin, Their Tykocin

My grandparents left their homelands during a time of great turmoil and transition in Europe, most prominently during the years of social and political unrest leading up to the collapse of the major empires of Central and Eastern Europe—the Austro-Hungarian, the German, the Russian, and the Ottoman—during the first decades of the twentieth century. The demise of those great empires took place amidst the rise of powerful radical political as well as identity-driven nationalist movements in those parts of the world, transformations that continue to have an impact on societies in the region even today. Though there are great differences in the events surrounding the long roads leading to imperial collapse and the emergence of new nations in their place in Eastern and Central Europe and the Near East, there are significant parallels as well. From the perspective of this work perhaps the most painful product of these parallel paths to collapse was the perilous interplay of majority and minority, dominant and dominated peoples and cultures–from Greeks and Armenians in Turkey in the south to Jews, Poles, Ukrainians, and others caught in the midst of a class war in imperial Russia in the north, the larger world of which the little town of Tykocin was a part.

In the early years of the twentieth century Central and Eastern Europe were experiencing massive upheavals and movements of peoples across short and long distances, revolutions, the redefining of nations and borders, and, as if that were not enough, a fundamental questioning and restructuring of allegiances to nation, people, place, and social class, most often involving not just a transformation of the present, but at the same time a reimagining and rewriting of the past in accord with the perspective and needs of the present and the imagined future.

As I sought a site for study, I looked toward my familial roots. All four of my grandparents migrated to the United States from the pre-World War I premodern, Polish and Russian worlds, from places as different as Tykocin; Warsaw, the capital of the Polish world; Minsk, now the capital of Belarus; and the town of Ratne in what is now western Ukraine. All lived under various modes of Russian imperial domination in and around what came to be called the Pale of Jewish Settlement, and all of them came to the United States as Russian subjects. The independent state of Poland did not exist when they left their homelands in the pre-World War I years. Despite these important differences in location and lifestyle, all my grandparents shared a common Yiddish language and a common Eastern European Jewish culture—a culture of Yiddishkeit, a rather secular, though distinctively Jewish, culture. I chose to study one of those places under the supposition that the place I chose would make available common themes and issues in variant forms also found in the other locations where my ancestors and other Jews were born and lived. This study largely takes place in Tykocin, but it is not just about that small town. I hope that I will have been able to set the goings-on in the town in that larger historical and conceptual context, drawing out the local manifestations and variations of connections to the larger issues in the Polish, Jewish, and Russian worlds.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes the relationship between what he refers to as the anthropologist's "locus of study"–the *place* where the research is undertaken–and the broader, more global or theoretical issues, which know no such geographic bounds and on which he or she is focused. He writes that "social actions are comments on more than themselves; … where an interpretation comes from does not determine where it can be impelled to go. Small facts speak to large issues … *because they are made to*,"[8] because of where the anthropologist "takes them" as a result of his or her theoretical proclivities, and what they select as "relevant" from the natural flow of events in terms of their research goals, methods, and modes of explanation. While my focus and the selection of what is relevant have been guided by a number of theoretical concerns emerging from social and cultural anthropology, this book is a methodological hybrid, neither pure anthropology nor purely personal account.

An "Appointment with the Past"

I elected my maternal grandmother's hometown, Tykocin, for what I will call an "appointment with the past," paraphrasing W.G. Sebald in *Austerlitz*.[9] I had no idea then that my appointment with the past would actually begin in the *present*, would, indeed, be experienced so intensely in the here and now. Tykocin turned out to be a most propitious place from which to look back–and forth–while remaining in what we designate as the present.

I had been exposed to some anecdotal information about Tykocin from my grandmother, information which made the place more real in my mind, whereas for the birthplaces of my other grandparents I had no personal accounts to stimulate my interest. My paternal grandmother's Warsaw and my maternal grandfather's Minsk were big cities, too big to grasp as a whole. To compound that, I was not able to locate any family records in either place, or for Ratne, the little town in western Ukraine where my father's father was born. Tykocin was a small place compared to Warsaw or Minsk, but it was not *that* small. It was a town of some 5,000 inhabitants when my grandmother was growing up there. It had a vibrant marketplace and numerous shops manufacturing and selling all sorts of goods and offering a multitude of services, most of which were provided by Jews. It was a market town for the outlying agricultural villages. Its river, the Narew, was a major avenue of commerce carrying raw materials and commercial goods from Tykocin throughout Eastern Europe. It was also an important religious site for Jews and Christians alike, with a very impressive Baroque synagogue and church drawing in worshippers of the two faiths. Further, in the interwar period it had a fairly well-developed civil society in which Jews played an active part, ranging from a volunteer fire brigade to amateur theater groups. For a town of its size, it had a rather diverse Jewish population ranging from Hassidim to secular-minded socialists and Zionists.

The town of Tykocin lies on the south bank of the Narew River, a tributary of the Bug, in what today is northeastern Poland, set amidst wetlands and rich green fields of flat, expansive countryside dotted with copses of trees and woodlands breaking the vast open vistas of tilled land. In a part of the world where so much of human heritage has been destroyed by the ravages of time and war, a large number of Tykocin's old wooden homes have been preserved in their natural setting, and one gets a real sense of what the town must have looked like in the past. Storks perch on utility poles and on elevated platforms specially built for them as they journey north and south from season to season. Tourists also flock to the town, many of them Poles who come to partake of the beauties of nature and, along with the Jews, to experience in

Old Tykocin, 1920s.

diverse ways what in their minds is the small-town Polish-Russian world as it once was.

Tykocin is home to a grand early-seventeenth century synagogue, now a museum and exhibition center of Jewish culture and life, and a magnificent eighteenth-century cathedral with two imposing bell towers. There is a reconstructed Lithuanian castle and what was once a retirement lodge for Polish army officers of noble birth, now a hotel-restaurant serving fine local food. Tykocin has frequently been selected as a location for feature films about prewar Poland. It is touted as a "Baroque pearl" in Polish-language brochures. Busloads of visitors, Polish and Jewish, come to Tykocin to visit the synagogue-museum and walk around the town, allowing themselves to be swept away into "the past." Jews come from around the world to visit the place where their families originated, lived or died, the descendants of the few survivors and others to remember and mourn those murdered in 1941. Christian Poles come to get a feeling for the now exotic lost world of Jews, the immemorial "other" in everyday Polish life.

Tykocin is one of the "must" stops on now popular Jewish heritage or Holocaust remembrance tours, which include visiting World War II German killing sites located in today's

Poland. Tykocin, and what it has come to stand for, are in the forefront of the popular imagination of visitors to Poland as well as to Poles themselves. When one thinks of Tykocin in this sense, one thinks of small-town Jewish life in the past. Its tragic history is set in an environment of great natural and man-made beauty. An odd and disturbing place: from the moment I arrived, I felt the painful void that permeates the town even after more than three-quarters of a century. The Jews are long gone, never to return, and yet it is possible for those who focus on the Jewish past to sense their preternatural presence. Their synagogue, set prominently near the center of town, parallels in size, architectural importance, and historical presence the town's impressive church at the other end. For today's visiting Jews, the synagogue, bereft of its congregation, majestically invokes their spiritual presence and incorporeal continuity.

August 1941 not only witnessed the destruction of the Jews of Tykocin but also left an unnatural abyss in the lives of the Polish Christian population. The scars of that brutal human excision remain, even from the vantage point of the present. Though there is not a single Jew living in Tykocin today, the present-day identity of the town is intimately bound up with its Jewish past and with the ways in which that past is publicly imagined and presented. It is difficult to assay the feelings of the local gentile population for the now absent Jews of the past. Almost none of them had direct interactions with local Jews; what they know are second-hand stories and lots of general information about Jewish life and customs. This has been referred to as postmemory. For them, Jews of the past are an abstraction. They do not have person-to-person relationships with Jews today. The closest they get to knowing a Jew is by observing from a distance the many Jews young and old who visit Tykocin in various groups and constructing in their minds something of a Jewish profile. Just as the Jews of the

Tykocin past were very diverse–ranging from Hassidic or ultra-Orthodox to secular Bundist or Zionist–the Jews whom they gaze at wandering the streets of the town or visiting the synagogue are a diverse mixture of young and old, Israeli and diaspora, Orthodox and secular of various persuasions. The same is true for the visiting Jews, who never get to meet any of the local Poles, and have only fleeting, limited interactions with Poles during their travels with whom, with some exceptions, they are not able to converse. The categories Jew and Pole that are used are often stereotypical, too broad and almost arbitrarily open to definition based on customary meaning, hearsay, and other second-hand or superficial personal experience, and frequently shifting in meaning over time.

Like people everywhere, locals are most interested in moving on with their lives as best as they can, and choose not to burden themselves with the past, especially a past so painful and potentially threatening to whatever peace of mind they have been able to achieve from the present. There were some exceptions to the silent majority, Poles who had an overwhelming need to know, to experience what they could of the local impact of the Holocaust. Two such individuals, Maria Markiewicz and Józef Markiewicz, mother and son, stand out with their local knowledge, openness and commitment to understanding and to building an open future based on the knowable past. My ongoing conversation with Józef, anthropologist, POLIN museum staff member responsible for oral history projects, and descendant of a local gentile family, in particular, have provided constant guidance and a firm underpinning for my work and has opened up innumerable avenues of thought. Both he and Maria have shared many invaluable documentary sources from their family archives. Maria's commitment to her town and to unveiling its people and its past wherever that may lead has been an inspiration to me.

Tykocin in today's Poland.

Discovering Tykocin

My first visit to Tykocin in 2014 was exploratory. I knew that the Jewish population of the town had been murdered in 1941 and that there were no longer any Jews living there. But I did not know what else to expect, or on what I would focus. I had few preconceived notions about contemporary Tykocin. I was hoping to find a few threads of connection with my family's past. I soon came to realize that such a connection was not to be had, except for some odd records I came across with the help of local friends. What I did find, what I could not avoid experiencing, was a profound absence and a deadening silence. A deadening silence, but at the same time there were, as I have said, voices, ranging from official to private to commercial, with many Polish gentiles attempting against all odds to fill in that void, to recognize and publicly give voice to the Jewish past of Tykocin. I have spent my time in Tykocin listening to those voices.

I made numerous research trips to Tykocin, Białystok and Warsaw between 2014 and 2020, observing, doing interviews, and gathering written information in order to make sense of those voices. The COVID-19 pandemic put an end to my visits, though I continued to maintain contact with my friends and interlocutors there since that time. With some exceptions, most of what I describe dates from the time of the inquiries I made between 2014 and 2020. I have made updates when possible. Rather than describing each trip separately, I have decided to combine them in this book as a single narrative. Though there have been a number of changes in the ways in which Tykocin presents its Jewish past over the few years of my encounter with the town, continuities predominate. Under such circumstances I decided that a composite account would provide greater clarity than numerous disjointed, separate ones set up chronologically with each covering short sequences of time. In doing so, I have made a special effort not to present contemporary Tykocin as a place out of the flow of time. Where there are significant changes in the rendition of the Jewish past over the years, I have tried to describe them as such. Perhaps the most promising change has been an increased interest in Tykocin's heritage by various levels of government in Poland. In 2019 Tykocin was recognized as a Historical Monument by the National Heritage Board of Poland. Both the local state-run museum and an ongoing private exhibition have increased public focus on the everyday lives of Tykocin's Jews, accompanied by increasing support from the mayor, the local municipality, and the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage–all this at a time when conservative ethno-nationalist politics had come to dominate Poland.

On August 25, 2021, at the eightieth memorial to the murdered Jews of the town, the municipality dedicated a plaque on which the family names of all the Jews murdered on August 25 and 26, 1941 were inscribed. That was the first time since the Second World War that the totality of the Jewish victims of the Tykocin Holocaust were recognized and permanently memorialized by name *within the town* in which they once lived, right in the center next to the old synagogue. This symbolic "homecoming" is an especially meaningful and inclusive step in the memorialization of Tykocin's old Jewish community. It was a harbinger of promise for Tykocin and for a more complete remembrance of the town's past and its people at a time when narrow, non-inclusive ethnic nationalist politics reigned at the national level. I am encouraged by the results of the 2023 election as a sign of hope for greater inter-communal understanding in Polish towns like Tykocin.

I have made extensive use of secondary sources in constructing the broader picture within which Tykocin stands and has stood over the centuries. I relate the events of the Holocaust in Tykocin using many written or oral witness statements collected

by other researchers as well as those found in secondary sources. My concern as an anthropologist is not with the Holocaust per se, but rather to construct an ethnography of Tykocin in the present, to examine present-day renditions of the past as experienced and publicly shared in that singular town in such a way as to resonate with and perhaps contribute to our understanding of the Polish-Jewish experience today.

Observations and Conversations

Much of what I write about contemporary Tykocin and elsewhere is based on my own direct observations, and in particular on conversations I have had with numerous individuals. Some of those conversations were conducted in English, some in Polish with the help of an interpreter. Trusted interpreters and translators with whom I have worked and been in continuous conversation have opened doors to the kinds of subtle understandings that might otherwise not have been available to me in the Polish language. To protect their privacy and anonymity I have used pseudonyms for many of the persons referred to or quoted in the text particularly if they have indicated that they wish to remain anonymous. I indicate the use of a pseudonym where appropriate. I refer to many of the individuals in this account using their first names, especially if they are children or are individuals with whom I have developed a personal "first-name" relationship.

Given the nigh impossibility of finding witnesses to the events of prewar and wartime Tykocin some seventy-five or more years after the events themselves, I have relied to some extent on invaluable interviews with elderly witnesses conducted earlier by others, largely with individuals no longer alive. Some of the interviews were obtained from published sources, others from transcriptions of taped interviews made available to me by friends and interlocutors from Tykocin or from their personal archives, and still others from the Yad Vashem archive in Israel or from the archive of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. I have also made extensive use of witness accounts from the few survivors of the Tykocin mass murder found in the Tykocin yizkor or memorial book, *Sefer Tiktin*,[10] originally written in Hebrew and published in Israel in 1959, now partially available in English translation online, and from other witness accounts provided to me by descendants of survivors whom I met at the seventy-fifth anniversary memorial events in Tykocin in 2016.

It goes without saying that these witness accounts do not meet the criteria for a "scientific" sample. In the first instance, they are in name, *survivors*' accounts. With a few exceptions, those who did not survive have left no such records. To what extent are the accounts reliable? That is difficult to ascertain. Given this paucity of data, it is easy to succumb to the temptation of accepting an account just because it exists. Building a credible account of events based on scarce and questionable evidence has been the subject of serious methodological and philosophical debate in anthropology and history. In the introduction to the more than sixty memorial books on which it is based, *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry*, the editors, anthropologists Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin state in no uncertain terms that "they are the richest sources that we have on everyday life in Eastern Europe."[11] In testimony to their reliability, they tell us that "most memorial book contributors are deeply concerned with the accuracy of what they have set down… In large measure this is due to the foresight of editors and contributors, who wanted future scholars to turn to the books."[12]

The Tykocin Jewish survivor accounts are particularly consistent with each other, and despite the great emotional burden of the events described by the witnesses, they are, by and large,

balanced in content and rhetorical style. They are in accord with relevant secondary sources. One of the best markers of reliability of the Tykocin memorial book is the degree to which the Jewish survivors, typically writing soon after the war and as victims of crimes committed by the Germans as well as some of their Polish neighbors and compatriots, not only described those crimes but also recounted many instances of gentiles assisting them in hiding after the massacre. They further describe the moral and practical dilemmas and inconsistencies of behavior faced by those who came to their aid. To do so would require an unusual sense of equanimity under such dire circumstances and lends significant credulity to the accounts.

Ongoing discussions with friends and acquaintances in Warsaw, Białystok, and Tykocin over the years have provided me with a critical local sounding board for my ideas and efforts, as well as suggestions for paths to follow as the project moved along. I participated in a conference on the Jews of eastern Poland held on June 20 and 21, 2016, at Białystok University. There, I presented some preliminary findings of my research, titled "What Remains?: Shaping a Jewish Past for Tykocin," to an Eastern European scholarly audience. The article was published in Polish in 2017 in *Zydzi Wschodniej Polskia, Seria V* (Jews of Eastern Poland, Series V),[13] a Białystok University Jewish Studies annual. Comments, suggestions, and encouragement from a number of Polish scholars helped me find my way as I pursued my research in subsequent years. The help I have received from Polish colleagues and friends has been like a ship guiding me through a vast unknown ocean.

It is very difficult to generalize about the atmosphere in Tykocin during the war years and the years just preceding the cataclysmic event of 1941. The information we have is scanty, unbalanced, and is open to much critical scrutiny. That is hardly surprising given the heavy emotional load both Jews and Poles who lived through those years carried and given the need some felt to relate what they experienced close up or to justify what they or others did or did not do in the midst of the horrors of a war from which they suffered or benefitted, or both. Amid a devastating war and under great stress, many individuals are called upon to act on the spur of the moment and often have little time for or interest in cogitating on why they choose to act one way or the other as they are desperately swept along by events and the actions of others. Examined in retrospect, such actions, especially those of a dubious nature, may be presented in the context of present needs and perspectives, remote in time and context from the relevant past. In the end, the stories we tell of the past are necessarily incomplete. The past "as it was" is irretrievable. No amount of research and documentation can fill that bottomless lacuna. The harder we try, the more we come to understand the ultimate futility of the pursuit. Yet, aware of such limitations, we move ahead, constructing and reconstructing a past usable for us. Our goal is verisimilitude, not verity.

Living with Grandmother Ida

I spent the first five years of my life in my grandmother Chaya's home. Chaya's name became Ida in America, and it was with that name that everyone knew and addressed her. I had never even heard of her natal name, Chaya, until I discovered her official Russian papers at my mother's place in 2010. In this book I will refer to grandmother as Chaya in the context of Tykocin, and Ida when I refer to her by name in America.

In December 1941 the United States entered the Second World War. My father enlisted in the Navy in 1942. I was born in New York City in 1943, right in the middle of the war. My world

began with "The War," both literally and in the most subjective sense of the time the imagined world began for me. One of the first sentences I uttered was "Daddy sailor boy." Among my first memories were war stories told by family veterans and neighbors. When my father was assigned to overseas duty soon after my birth, my mother moved from the apartment she and my father had rented in New York City to her parents,' my maternal grandparents,' home for the duration of the war. Our stay there was extended until 1948 when my father was finally able to purchase a home in a New Jersey suburb with the help of a GI loan and a down payment contributed by my mother's father. My mother's brother, grandmother's youngest son, had returned from service in the Pacific at the end of the war and lived with all of us until he got married and, like us, left and set up his own home in 1948. In grandmother Ida's household I was treated something like the youngest of her sons. As soon as I was up on two legs and able to walk, I spent many happy hours exploring every nook and cranny in the apartment, and my grandmother nicknamed me "the *zukher*," the Yiddish word for searcher. She would catch me raiding drawers and closets in the apartment, gently admonishing me with "*Vas zukhst du tateleh*?" (What are you searching for little guy [literally, little father]?).

With grandmother Ida.

My grandmother dominated her home, an environment in which Yiddish was frequently spoken, and the everyday rituals of life followed the cycle of Eastern European Jewish custom: a world of Yiddishkeit in New York. Grandmother Ida's home was a traditional but not a religious one. The Sabbath was observed with the lighting of candles every Friday evening, grandmother kept a kosher kitchen, and the holidays were faithfully observed as well, but no more than that. My grandfather, Harry, formerly Chaim, kept his hardware store open on Saturdays and never went to *shul* except on the High Holy Holidays. Still the house was very "Jewish" in a million silent ways. It even smelled Jewish I came to learn. I remember hearing my grandmother talk disparagingly of the disturbing odor of a *goyishe* (gentile) home, something she would attribute to their eating *trayf* (non-kosher foods). For some reason, that most evanescent of cultural markers stayed with me. I only came to understand what she meant when I experienced such olfactory stimulation in person. That was after we had moved to New Jersey, and I was in and out of our gentile neighbors' homes which looked much the same as ours but had that distinctive *goyishe* smell grandmother had told me about. Or was I imagining things? Where grandmother was repulsed by the thought, I developed a special attraction to pork products. I often went visiting our very next-door neighbor with the hope that I would be offered some ham, as my mother never served pork, with the exception of bacon, to the family.

My Family Moves to Mainstream America

I went to kindergarten in New York City. We moved to our New Jersey home in 1948, and I started first grade there. My family was among the innumerable urban Americans who migrated en masse to the suburbs in the post-war decades, opening what would

become a transformational chapter in the history of American society–the suburban way of life. Our home was in a largely Christian neighborhood; our neighbors and my playmates and schoolmates were mostly gentile, and I was on occasion the brunt of hurtful antisemitic insults. Suburbia was in so many ways a new world for all of us because living there thrust us out from under the dense protective shield of the Jewish community of the city and exposed us to the implacable bane of antisemitism. For the first time in the short history of our family in America we stepped out of a dominantly Jewish world and into the so-called mainstream. Soon all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins followed. Suburbia became our world. I don't believe my parents experienced any antisemitism themselves in suburbia, but kids can be very cruel repositories and voices of the ancient prejudices and contemptuous labels which their parents are too polite to utter in Jewish company.

In New Jersey, our home was resolutely secular, my mother adapting to new domestic rules set by my now liberated father, no longer keeping a kosher kitchen as her mother faithfully did. But that was as far as she could go. She never could bring herself to serve pork to us–except, that is, in the form of bacon, which we chose to think of as a separate entity, just "bacon." Mother also never served us milk with meat. My irreligious father dominated our home life, determined to leave behind the "backward" shtetl-like world of his childhood, and in particular that of his wife's family. My mother, though not religious in any overt way, never gave up the diffuse emotional bonds she had with the traditional Jewish world of her parents. I was bar mitzvah'd at thirteen over the objections of my father and, following in his footsteps, from that time on, distanced myself from religion. Nevertheless, and largely unbeknown to me, Jewish ways of being in the world continued to have a subliminal place in my gestalt–despite myself.

Sixty years later–to my surprise–I have, in a sense, re-connected with the world of my ancestors. This re-connection, while touching something deeply evocative in me, does not embrace religious belief or practice, or any sort of identification with a religious, or any sort of Jewish way of life. But it does rest on my newfound connection to a *real place*, to Tykocin, to Tiktin, to a place that only existed in my imagination. And though I could not identify with it, that is, identify with a past so culturally alien to me, it was, nevertheless, a past from which I came to understand I had emerged, a past which, indeed, has made it possible for me to have the present I have.

Who Am I to Understand Tykocin?

The book that emerged from my explorations in and around Tykocin is about Poland, the town of Tykocin, the Jews who once lived there, and, in many ways about me as I decided what to look at, with whom to talk, what to focus on, and how to present my findings and perspectives to the public. Who am I, and where do I stand as I try to examine the ways people today think of Tykocin's Jews in past times? Though objectivity is my goal, I can only be objective about the issues within certain limits. I am, after all, a Jew with a grandmother originating from Tykocin, and a person with a visceral sort of familiarity with the mindset and tastes of the Eastern European Jewish world. But I am also an American, an anthropologist, a person who by profession as well as by avocation, unfailingly looks at the world at once from multiple perspectives, steeped in the relativism of his profession. I have a constitutional aversion to facile stereotyping and typecasting. I have spent most of my adult life living in Turkey, and even after such a long time immersed in Turkish society, I am keenly aware of the challenges one faces in trying to understand

and navigate in a foreign culture. Politically, I am a liberal and a highly secular individual. The world I encountered in old Tykocin was in a literal sense "familiar" to me, but, in another, quite as exotic as Turkish society was when I first encountered it as a budding ethnographer more than fifty years ago.

Both my personal life and my professional experience and inclinations come into play as I attempt to describe the many ways in which the Jewish past in Tykocin is publicly presented. Given the intricacies of the long, historical face-to-face relationship between Jews and Poles, it is not possible to understand the Jewish past in Polish lands without understanding the ways in which many Poles see *their* past and *their* relationship with Jews. In addition to a reading of the extensive literature on Poles and Jews, one of my primary sources for that perspective on these two peoples bound to each other has been the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

My personal ethical stance, one of the central vantage points from which I view the world and its various peoples, leads me quite naturally to try and understand the many ways Christian Poles see the world around them. I am aware that the way Poles have viewed their relationship with Jews has changed over the long run. In Tykocin there were significantly different relationships between Jews and Polish Christians during the multicultural Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, later under Russian imperial domination and the rising nationalisms of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, under the increasingly nationalist Polish Republic in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, under Russian and German occupation during World War II, under Communist rule until 1989, and under the dominant ethno-nationalism of recent years. I am also aware of alternative and critical Polish perspectives on their history and culture emerging in recent decades, especially

coming from young people in major urban centers who have taken important strides in viewing their history and culture in a less nationalistic, more inclusive way, with which I share much sympathy, many with a longing for Poland's prewar multicultural past.

I present the various "Polish" perspectives on intercommunal life and strife alongside multiple "Jewish" perspectives, incompatible or conflictual as they sometimes may be. I believe that is the only fair and accurate way to describe in a holistic way the world of Jews and Poles in the Tykocin past. After all, just as Jews are people like any other people in the world–good, bad, and otherwise–so are Poles. That is my foundational position. Such a position does not entail a quest for ethical parity. The result may be unsatisfactory to some Christian Poles as well as to some Jews, Polish or otherwise, as well as to others, in particular to those who are looking to reproduce and further legitimate long-held beliefs and prejudices, often reading unintended purposes into acts of the "other." I see no value in such one-sided ways of describing the social world except when viewed, anthropologically, as part of the cultural baggage of the actors. Social reality is usually more complex, inconsistent, and contradictory than the simplifications of partisans on either side would have us believe it is.

Antisemitism and Antipolonism: Nuance, Ambiguity, Context

A few cautious words are called for about the accusation of antisemitism that many Jews and others level against Poles as a people, and the blanket antipolonism of many Jews. It is important to know that, though almost entirely ethnically Polish and Catholic, today's Poland is not a monolithic society. There is a significant diversity of lifestyle and opinion in the various

regions of the country and between urban and rural areas. As we shall see, recent studies show that antisemitism has been on the decrease in the society. Indeed, for some years, particularly in major urban centers, there has been a visible focus on what might be called "anti-antisemitism," a position involving the rejection of antisemitic discourse.[14]

My perspective on Jews and Poles rests on the knowledge that there are many different ways of being Jewish and of being Polish–there were "then" and there are now. This is an anthropological verity that applies to all peoples in the world, with variations depending upon how complex and differentiated the societies in question are. Though common everywhere, generalizing from afar about the purported negative attributes of a race, a people, a nation, or a group without clearly differentiating among them, can easily morph into harmful acts against all of them justified by such "attributes," acts ranging from discrimination to attempted annihilation. Antisemitism, antipolonism, and the like, are most often based on an abstract construct of a person or group, an imagined, stereotyped composite Jew or Pole or other, viewed through the preexisting cultural lens of one's society. At the same time, a person's actual face-to-face interaction with that person may be problem-free. Such abstractions in the form of stereotypes are by their very nature reductionist simplifications of an oftentimes more complex, nuanced reality, and miss the ambiguity, contradictions, and varying contexts in which antisemitism is manifest.

Open or subliminal accusations or assumptions of antisemitic-based crimes committed by locals against the town's Jews during the war are a significant part of the cultural baggage of many Jewish visitors to Tykocin. Such accusations need to be put into perspective. It is important to be clear that it is impossible to make across the board judgments about the behavior of the town's

gentiles in relation to their Jewish fellow-townsmen during the war. There is much that we do not and cannot know about what happened over eighty years ago, much that has been concealed, and much that has been irretrievably lost with the passing of those who were of age during those years. There is much that is too painful, too demeaning to be told.

In addition to these abundant negative associations, oddly, the "abstract Jew" has also come to be associated with philosemitism in Poland, symbolically evoking the greater tolerance of difference that many hold to have characterized the pluralist Polish society of "past times." This is a society that many people, especially young, educated urbanites, feel a special affinity for as their indigenous alternative to the Catholic ethno-nationalism prevalent in the now more homogeneous Poland of the early twenty-first century.[15] For some young Poles being Jewish is now as "in" as it once was, and for many still is, "out."

There is no doubt that much of the story of what happened in Tykocin in the years prior to, during, and soon after the Second World War, remains incomplete. In the extraordinarily volatile environment of war, where life-and-death decisions are often made at the spur of a moment, our understanding of the motives of individuals is necessarily incomplete. We may surmise such motives of those who assisted Jews, those who harmed them, and those who both assisted and harmed them based on existing evidence, but we will never be entirely clear about the important nuances and ambiguities in their motives and the role of the wartime context of their actions or inactions. The various motives–religious, personal, material, envy, or greed–were not unvarying, often shifting depending upon a host of unpredictable, changing circumstances. A person may shelter a Jew for some time, feed him, or less likely her, care for him, even show compassion toward him, and then as a result of fear or

covetousness or desperation turn him in, betray or even murder him. Polish Academy of Sciences Professor Joanna Tokarska-Bakir provides many examples of such heartrending behavior based on her intensive reading of accounts from both Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and Poles who helped them survive, now kept in the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.[16]

An Overview

I begin my story about Tykocin by describing my first experiences in Warsaw in 2014 at the start of my journey in Poland. I then introduce my grandmother Chaya. When Chaya left Tykocin, the town had a population of nearly 5,000 inhabitants, roughly half Jewish, half gentile. I introduce Chaya and her family and describe her voyage across Europe from Tykocin, to the Port of Rotterdam, and from there, across the Atlantic Ocean to New York City, where she joined two of her three brothers. This is a story told a million-fold by each and every immigrant reaching America's shores from all parts of Europe during those extraordinary years of upheaval in European societies. I relate the local history of this erstwhile important town, once a regional center of commerce and Jewish learning, focusing on the symbiotic relationship between Jews and Christians that, for better or for worse, continued until the destruction of the Jewish community by the occupying Germans in 1941.

In Chapter II, I take up the defining historical issues in Tykocin and the wider world during the war, examining both the larger context of war, destruction, and Holocaust in Poland and the local Jewish tragedy in Tykocin. I discuss the place and historical significance of antisemitism in Poland. I describe the events leading up to the mass murder of the town's Jews, and the stories the few survivors of the disaster brought back with them. I discuss the contentious role of bystanders, those complicit in the crimes against the Jews, and those who assisted and were able to save Jews at mortal risk.

One of the most engaging and informative stops in Poland, other than Tykocin, on my first visit in 2014 was the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews located in Warsaw. I returned to the museum on every visit I made during subsequent years. The permanent exhibition and the library there have been important sources for my work and have provided essential guidelines for my peregrinations in Poland. A second key stop was the once "very Jewish" city of Białystok, located only thirty kilometers from Tykocin. In Chapter III, I take up a number of perduring issues in relation to the public memorialization of Jews in today's Poland, focusing on the core exhibition of the museum and the cemeteries of Białystok as examples.

In Chapter IV, I discuss the old Tykocin synagogue, now a museum run by the state, that is a site of memorialization of Jews, as well as an innovative private exhibition that brings insights into the everyday life of the town's Jewish and Christian past.[17] I discuss Tykocin as the so-called exemplar shtetl and tourist mecca with its contentious offerings of oddly stereotyped "Jewish" figurines, theatrical costumes, and "Jewish" food.

In Chapter V, I shift my focus from Tykocin as a major destination for Jewish tourism to examine a contingent of foreign Jews, all descendants of Tykocin's Jews–including me–who attended the seventy-fifth anniversary memorial service for the Jews murdered by the Germans in 1941. I describe my experience as a participant and the perspective of various other players in that fraught event.

In Chapter VI, I view Tykocin as "living theater," discussing the meaning and implications of a *Purimspiel*, an old Jewish Purim holiday play which, in the absence of any local Jews as players, was for many years acted out annually by local amateur Christian players. I then return to the war years and tell the story of the

deportation of the adult Christian population of the town by the Germans in 1944, interwoven with the story of a little Jewish girl left behind as her mother, a Jew living in Tykocin under "Aryan papers," was taken away along with the town's Christians. There is also Tykocin as the much-preferred location for films set in prewar small-town Poland, with local extras walking around town costumed in "Jewish garb" as if they were revenants of the now long-gone Jews of the town. Within this context, I raise issues of memory, murder and revenge, theater and reality, identity and authenticity, and redemption.

I analyze a talk I was invited to give at the Tykocin synagogue-museum in 2018 about my grandmother, my connection to Tykocin, and my perspective on the ways in which the Jewish past was being related to visitors to the town. I discuss some of the responses I got from the local audience and the meanings I attribute to those responses, concluding with a discussion of just what comes to be remembered when we attempt to memorialize the Jews of Tykocin.

I conclude with a discussion of the speeches given at the eightieth anniversary memorial for the Jews murdered in Tykocin in 1941. This was an extraordinary memorial in that, for the first time, recognition was given right in the center of the town to those murdered in the Łopuchowo forest in August 1941. A plaque was dedicated with the family names of all those killed, and a number of speeches were delivered, by the vice administrative officer of the Białystok district, the mayor of the town, the head of the museum, and by me (in absentia). The speeches present an array of thinking about remembering the town's Jews, from divisive Polish ethno-nationalist to a more inclusive vision of the local community, echoing the still unresolved issues of remembrance of the Jews and the place of Jews in Polish society.

"The Far Side of Time"

W.G. Sebald had the following to say about the relationship between the past and the present in coming to terms with the Nazi period in Germany, his natal country. "Might it not be," he writes "that we … have appointments to keep in the past, in what has gone before and for the most part is extinguished, and must go there in search of places and people who have some connection with us on the far side of time, so to speak?"[18]

When we cross into what Sebald calls the "far side of time" we are not entering the past, but rather find ourselves at the threshold of time, an elusive spot where one can mix time, place, person, and context, using the imperfect tools of today, and create a fragile alloy of now and then, a place where the present can only be understood by revisiting the past. Sebald's words describe the kind of journey I have taken to Tykocin, passing through an imperceptible threshold to a past once unknown to me as I come to terms with the hazy fragments of a world that I can only glean from the present. As a Tykocin tourism brochure tells us, "Tykocin is a town where history co-exists with the present." True though that may be, in order to understand the meaning of that deceptively simple sentence, we must look with some depth and with some care into the many and divergent meanings of Tykocin's past and of the various ways in which the town's past remains so much a part of its present.

I

CHAYA'S TIKTIN

"They lived in Tykocin for four hundred and nineteen years. Nobles and kings entrusted them with their businesses and fortunes… The town of Tykocin blossomed. Rafts and barges floated down the river. Grain was shipped. Ships were built. Goods were imported from overseas. Doctors from Tykocin were famous for their knowledge, rabbis for their wisdom, and the synagogue for miracles."

From Polish-Jewish writer Hanna Krall's short story, "Teatr" [Theater], 1998.

Breakfast in New York

It was Spring of 2014. I was ordering breakfast at a café on Lexington Avenue in New York City. The server had an unfamiliar accent. Perhaps a bit too inquisitively, I asked her where she was from.

"Poland."

"Oh, my grandmother was born in a small town in Poland."

"Where is that?"

"A tiny place called Tiktin."

"You mean Tykocin. That's what it's called in Polish. Sure, I know it. It's near Białystok."

"You know it?"

"Sure, it's a well-known tourist spot."

"Tiktin? Tykocin? A tourist spot?"

So Tiktin, or rather, Tykocin, was, it turns out, a real place. It was then and there that I decided to try to find out what this faraway Polish town, where Jews once lived, was like and if any traces of their lives–the lives of my ancestors–remain there in the depths of Poland. Now I knew that there was the shtetl of family lore named Tiktin and a place, a real place on the map, existing today, referred to by a different name, a name I had never heard: Tykocin, a name that even my mother might not have recognized. I also came to learn that even the names by which my grandmother and her siblings were known in America were not the same as those they went by in the Tiktin of their childhood. So it was with the people and places of my past. Uncertain ground, impalpable places; people, their names the same or different, their lives, habits, fears, and hopes an enigma. What could I learn about them so late, so long after the fact?

This was to be my second attempt to connect with my Eastern European Jewish past. I had first traveled to Poland in the summer of 1966 on my way home from Peace Corps service in Turkey with a rather inchoate inclination to visit my grandmother's birthplace in a shtetl I knew to be somewhere near the city of Białystok in the northeastern part of the country. I flew to Warsaw, overwhelmed by the absence of Jewish life in the city, and soon convinced myself that there was no point in heading all the way out to Białystok as the Jews there had either emigrated before the war or had been murdered by the Nazis, and that my grandmother's shtetl probably didn't even exist any longer. By chance, I befriended some Polish students who invited me home for vodka on my last night in the city, and I drank them all under the table, shot by shot, and in the wee hours of the morning somehow made it back to my hotel but missed my early morning flight to East Berlin.

In May 2014 I began what would become a long and serendipitously consequential revisit to Poland. My first stop was, naturally, Warsaw. But this time, I made sure to set off for Białystok and Tykocin, the place where in 1893 Chaya Faiga Kurlander, my maternal grandmother, was born and lived until she was fourteen. In 1907, Chaya left her place of birth, her mother and father, her younger sister, one of her brothers, and all her friends and relatives, and emigrated to the United States all by herself. She was then only fourteen, though her age was indicated as seventeen on the manifest of the ship that would transport her across the Atlantic. Her height was indicated as a diminutive four feet, one half inch. When Chaya left Tykocin, then part of the Russian Empire, the town had a population of nearly 5,000 inhabitants, roughly half Jewish, half gentile. Chaya set off by train all across Europe to the Port of Rotterdam, and from there by steamer across the Atlantic to the Port of New York where she was to join her two brothers then living in New York.

Tykocin

I took the train from Warsaw, heading northeast to the city of Białystok, of bialy fame, not far from the Belarus border. From there I rented a car to take me to nearby Tykocin. The drive would take less than half an hour, I was told. The first part of the thirty-kilometer trip was on an expressway, the remainder along a lovely, narrow country road. I wanted to see and feel the landscape up close and have the freedom to drive around in the environs of Tykocin. I drove through verdant fields of grain as I approached Tykocin, filling my lungs with fresh country air and thinking about my imminent arrival in the remote shtetl where my grandmother was born and had spent her childhood, so far from the dense urban world of New York, which I knew as her home.

I would soon walk the same places she walked over a hundred years ago, walk the same streets, past the same houses–no doubt–along the same river that flowed through the town when she was there–the same, but for the striking absence of half the population, the Jews, who once lived there. I came to Tykocin thinking about what, if anything, remained of Jewish

The Narew river slowly flows.

life in the town and what was forever gone, about how half the town was exterminated in just two days, swallowed up by the earth in August of 1941, and how they are now remembered or represented–if, indeed, they are. I had not given any thought to the Polish, that is, Christian, half of the town. As far as I knew from grandmother, the town was entirely Jewish.

Chaya Leaves for America

My grandmother, Chaya, left Tykocin for America with Russian imperial identity papers that described her as of average height, with auburn hair and of the "Hebrew faith." She left home with Russian identity papers, as those shifting Polish lands were then under Russian rule. Her father's name was given in her identity papers as Arie. With the surname Kurlander, might her father's family have come from Courland in what today is Latvia? I have encountered no record of other Kurlanders in Tykocin. Chaya set off for America from Tykocin by horse and wagon, loaded with a small trunk filled with her clothes, a quilt, and a few personal belongings.

The first leg of her long journey was to the bustling industrial city of Białystok, where the main rail line crossed the wide-open northern Polish plain en route to Warsaw and other points west. At the slow pace she traveled along what were no doubt poor roads, the trip to Białystok may have taken five or six hours. It now takes thirty minutes by car. From the only

Grandmother's Russian identity papers.

Białystok train station, where Chaya left en route to America, 1907.

surviving photograph of her, we clearly see her strong-minded mother, Lebe, who had been with her in the wagon. Perhaps even her very religious father, Arie, had taken time off from study and prayer and his duties at the town synagogue to accompany his daughter on this farewell journey, thus sending off his third child to faraway America.

At the Białystok train station Chaya parted with her parents and boarded the train to Warsaw to journey across the entire European continent to the Port of Rotterdam. The separation at the train station must have been painful for all, but we have no idea what actually happened. Chaya was not accompanied by any family members as far as we know. It is highly unlikely that she arrived from such a long, and challenging journey across the continent by rail just in time for the sailing, so she very likely had to spend a few nights at one of the many miserable pensions established for the multitude of impecunious emigrants from all over Europe who were camped there awaiting boarding and passage. On August 17, 1907, fourteen-year-old Chaya boarded an enormous Dutch steamer, the *Ryndam*, a vessel like none she

The *Ryndam* crossing the Atlantic en route to the Port of New York.

had ever seen or could have imagined, as a steerage passenger headed for the Port of New York.

Among the multitudes waiting for passage at European Atlantic ports during those years was my paternal grandfather Chaim, like many Jewish immigrants bearing the same name, soon to change it to Hymie in New York. Chaim left the little town of Ratne in what is now western Ukraine in 1913, a year before the war broke out. He told the story of his passage to America to his children and grandchildren at his ninetieth birthday party held at the Windsor Hotel in the borscht-belt Catskill Mountains where he spent long summers playing pinochle from morning until night. As it turns out, Grandpa Hymie missed his boat to America, and had to wait in port for some time for the next departing vessel. In 1917, just three years after his arrival in the U.S., he was drafted into the army and shipped off to the war in Europe to serve as a mortarman in the deadly battlefields of the Western Front, having hardly made his adjustment to life in America. Hymie became an American by fire. He was naturalized in 1926.

Photographs remain of *Ryndam*'s plush first-class cabins and lounges. There is no pictorial record of the packed steerage

quarters deep in the bowels of the great vessel where Chaya and hundreds of others like her, coming from all over Europe and uttering a babble of mutually incomprehensible languages, made the passage. The *Ryndam* docked in New York harbor on August 26, 1907 after ten days at sea. The passage that must have seemed even longer to the hordes of immigrants camped in the cramped, malodorous steerage quarters than it did to the well-off, upper-deck passengers ensconced in their stately cabins.

In 1907, Chaya was just one little girl joining hundreds of thousands like her that record-breaking year, the peak year for Jewish emigration to the United States. It appears that she traveled alone on the ship, as there are no other family members listed with her in the manifest, where passenger names were entered family by family. Perhaps her mother arranged for a friend or acquaintance also emigrating to New York to look after her on the journey, but there is no record of such an escort. Did her parents then know as they said their goodbyes to Chaya at the railway station in Białystok that they would never see their daughter again? Could Chaya have imagined she would never see her mother and father, family and friends, ever again?

Times must have been hard economically and politically for the family, because her parents parted with all of their children but one, a handicapped son named Josef who wouldn't have been acceptable by U.S. immigration standards.[1] Sending off their elder daughter was no doubt a critical decision for Chaya's parents. Yet, how important could going to America have been to a fourteen-year-old girl at the cost of leaving her mother and father, her sister and brother, her friends, and the familiar world of her little town of Tiktin? Chaya was the third Kurlander child to go, following in the footsteps of her two elder brothers, Chaim and Moishe. She may very well not have known then that she would be reunited in New York with her younger sister Mindel in three years' time.

Emigration, Immigration, Assimilation

It is difficult to know precisely why Chaya and Mindel left Tykocin, or to be more precise, why their mother and father sent them off, sent all but one of their children off to America. If asked, the girls themselves might have known only part of the story. They talked of poverty, but we have no measure of *how* poor the family was, if indeed, it was very poor. Conditions were not good in the economically precarious town, but one must look at the situation in relative terms. Though I have not been able to corroborate his statements, according to Alter Lipschitz, the author of a section of the *Pincus Tiktin*, dating from 1927, an amateur historical account of the town published in 1948 by Tykocin Jews living in Chicago, it appears that "compared with its present [1927] status, one must say that Tiktin [in the 'past'] was a prosperous town."[2] By way of example, Lipschitz tells us that prior to World War I, Tykocin had a very active lumber business, which we know relied on the Narew River to transport logs following riverine routes throughout Eastern Europe. Lipschitz believed the lumber business had a major local economic impact. There was also, he notes, a brush factory in the town which, he indicates, employed eighty workers. Prayer shawls (*tallitot*) were also manufactured in the town during those years, perhaps earlier. The pre-World War I years were a time when Tykocin was economically connected to the larger Russian imperial economy, which collapsed after the 1917 revolution and the founding of the Polish Republic in 1918, with local and regional implications. During the war, Tykocin was occupied by the Imperial Russians, the Germans, and the Bolsheviks. Both the brush factory and the manufacturing of tallit no longer continued in operation after the conflict was over. According to Lipschitz, "The economic stability of Tiktin had sunk to its lowest level [by 1927]." The economic situation only got worse with the coming of the depression during the 1930s.

We return to prewar times, times economically better off than they were to become after the Great War and into the 1930s. Chaya's mother earned a living dyeing fabric and her father worked as a *shammes*, a beadle, in the synagogue. Between the two they managed to put together enough money to send their first son off to America to begin the sibling chain of support that would eventually bring over the rest of their children. As a result, it is difficult to conclude that the poverty of–we do not know *how* poor they were in relation to others in the town–my Tykocin family was a major force in their leaving their homeland. Perhaps it was to some unknowable extent, the call of America and a better future for the Kurlander children that was a major force.

Chaya's journey to America, though desirable, was no doubt made more psychologically palatable because her brothers were already there, paying the way for their younger sisters. The sisters surely knew something about what America was like from their brothers and from the intense local chatter about "the Promised Land." America was in the air: a hope, a dream, where virtually none had existed for those in Tykocin–at least, that may have been the way their self-sacrificing mother and father read the family's future.

Certainly, the Kishinev pogrom of 1903 in what today is Moldova which attracted worldwide attention to the plight of Jews in the Russian empire, anti-Jewish violence throughout 1904, the 1905 Russian Revolution, the first shots of which were fired in nearby Białystok in 1904,[3] and the pogrom of 1906 in that city, had left their disquieting mark and further unsettled Jews in the region. In Białystok alone, two hundred Jews were killed and seven hundred injured during the 1906 pogrom, entirely planned and instigated by the Russian authorities.[4] Closer to home, in 1904, anti-Jewish violence–the slaughter of a Jewish family of six in the little village of Jozeve about six miles from Tykocin by a local Christian who was never convicted–drove out the total Jewish population of the village, fearing for its safety. Many took shelter in Tykocin. No doubt, everyone in the town knew what had taken place. In 1927, there still were no Jews living in that village.

So, their economic situation and the prospect of well-being in America may have been motives for Chaya's parents. The other major concern might very well have been their children's safety and well-being as Jews. It is likely that the pogroms of the period were a significant factor in Chaya's parents' decision to send their children to America. The historical record gives no evidence of pogroms in Tykocin itself during the first decade of the twentieth century when the Kurlander children left. The 1905 Revolution created great unrest and led to a backlash of antisemitism in those parts of what was then the most heavily industrialized region of the Russian Empire. Six hundred and ninety pogroms occurred in various places in the Jewish Pale of Settlement within two weeks of the 1905 revolutionary manifesto.[5] The year 1905 was a watershed for the Jews in the Empire.

The ire of many Poles and Russians, sanctioned and even provoked by the Russian imperial government, was directed at an old theme in new garb: the Jews as internal enemies–this time both as revolutionary instigators of the left and as rapacious capitalists of the right. Jews, rich and poor, bore the brunt of hatred at both ends of the class spectrum. Jews went from being exploiters–an ancient theme–to being *seditious* in the minds of the authorities and much of the populace, all this hatred a product of rising nationalist sentiment. Christian antisemitism, now lit with the flames of nationalism in the dangerous crucible of the Eastern European world, had turned decidedly for the worse.

Historical Poland was home to the world's largest Jewish population leading up to the Second World War, a place where Jews lived in relative peace until the late nineteenth century

after fleeing medieval central and western Europe as a result of persistent hostility and anti-Jewish violence. Premodern Poland was welcoming to Jews in many ways, and Jewish society flourished. In the words of Israeli historian, Moshe Rosman, "While there was no shortage of antagonism toward Jews of Poland throughout their history there, the story must have also had an abundance of salutary themes or else the Polish Jewish community would have been much smaller and its history less interesting."[6] Rosman then goes on to describe Jewish achievements in Polish lands, such as a highly developed system of local autonomy, numerous important synagogues, academies of higher learning, and "rich literary and legal legacies."[7] Despite growing antisemitism and the persistence of Christian anti-Judaism in Polish folk culture during the interwar period,[8] there were also impressive modern industrial Jewish economic enterprises, as well as an increasingly prominent secular culture of the visual arts, music, literature, science and medicine, journalism, theater, athletics, and rapidly emerging civil society organizations in the country.[9] Looking back in time, in the final analysis, whether or not the pre-nineteenth century premodern world of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth can be characterized as a *Paradisus Iudaeorum*, a "Paradise for Jews," as some scholars hold, is a controversy much debated among both Poles and Jews.[10] The Warsaw POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews has highlighted the question on a wall at the entrance to the gallery dealing with the Commonwealth period leaving visitors free to find their own answers.[11]

In 1897, four years after Chaya was born, there were 5.2 million Jews in the Russian Empire of which the Kingdom of Poland was then a part. Between 1880 and 1914, 1.6 million Jews emigrated from the Empire. About one-third of all Jews living in Eastern Europe left during those years.[12] Economist Simon Kuznets argues that it was not so much the "push" of worsening economic and social or political conditions at home, but the "pull" of better economic conditions in the United States that had the greater impact on *short-term* immigration to that country, more immediately influencing the decision about *when*, not *if*, to leave. He argues, further, that the economic dislocation that Jews experienced because of the rapid industrialization in Russia beginning in the 1880s, even without the unrest and persecution, would have been a sufficient inducement for them to migrate overseas. According to historian Heiko Haumann,[13] a significant number of the emigrants were impoverished craftsmen and skilled workers, those most vulnerable in a rapidly industrializing economy. Tykocin was, after all, an economic backwater by the early twentieth century, and Chaya's mother was a suffering, increasingly out-of-step artisan, dyeing fabrics by hand under primitive conditions and in poor competition with the massive industrial production of textiles in nearby Białystok. We know she dyed by hand because grandmother so vividly described her mother's deeply stained hands to us. Tykocin's economic situation declined following the January Uprising of 1863 in which both gentiles and many Jews participated. The regional economic position of Tykocin received a serious blow following the opening of the Warsaw-Petersburg railway in 1862, railway lines to the nearby towns of Knyszyn and Grajewo, and a road connection between Warsaw, Grodno, and Vilnius, all of which bypassed Tykocin. Many Jews and gentiles left Eastern Europe during the following years, especially after the 1880s—preferably for America if they could. By the time Chaya and her siblings left Tykocin, the population of the town had already declined significantly, with many more Jews than gentiles departing.[14]

Henry Morgenthau, American-Jewish Assimilationist

World War I was over, and in the United States a backlash was developing against the massive flood of immigrants–Jews, Italians, Greeks, Chinese and others–who had been arriving at American shores in large numbers since the late nineteenth century. A little more than ten years after Chaya and Harry emigrated to New York, met each other, and married, the American government began to voice serious concern about the condition of Jews in the newly established Polish Republic. The concern was not with the living conditions of the Jews themselves, but rather, that the life circumstances of the huge, troubled Jewish population in Eastern Europe could have a direct impact on immigration to the United States, an occurrence which nativist Americans increasingly sought to curtail in the post-World War I years.

In 1919 Henry Morgenthau, Sr., former U.S. ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, was appointed head of an American fact-finding commission to the newly established Polish Republic to investigate "alleged Polish pogroms" and "the treatment of the Jewish people" in Poland.[15] Morgenthau was born in Germany to a well-to-do Jewish family. Woodrow Wilson had appointed him as ambassador to Constantinople (Istanbul) trying to entice him with the assurance that the Ottoman imperial government "was the point at which the interest of American Jews in the welfare of Jews in Palestine is focused, and it is almost indispensable that I have a Jew in that post."[16] The "Jewish" nature of the appointment rankled assimilationist Morgenthau, who had been hoping for a cabinet position.

Morgenthau's ethnic affiliation again provided him with a U.S. government mission, this time to Poland, where once more he was to focus on the plight of the Jews. The Morgenthau Report, as it came to be known, was made available to the general public in the *New York Times* on October 3, 1919.[17] Sympathetic

to assimilationist Jews like himself in Poland, and aware of his delicate position as a Jew, Morgenthau made every effort to be objective and tended not to be as critical of the Polish authorities as some might have wished, minimizing the significance of the violence against Jews that had attracted international attention at the time and which was presumed to be a cause of their desire to leave Poland.

At a time when "genocide" or crimes against humanity had not yet been formulated as a legal category or accepted as a violation of international law,[18] it is perhaps not surprising that Morgenthau avoided the use of the word pogrom, noting the imprecision of the word, which "is applied to everything from petty outrages to premeditated and carefully organized massacres."[19] He also avoided clearly labeling the many violent incidents after the war as purely antisemitic in nature: "These excesses were … political as well as anti-Semitic in character. The responsibility … is borne for the most part by the undisciplined and ill-equipped Polish recruits who … sought to profit at the expense of that portion of the population which they regarded as alien and hostile to Polish nationality and aspirations." He continues, "… it would be … unfair to condemn the Polish nation as a whole for the violence committed by uncontrolled troops or local mobs." But then he backtracks and locates "these excesses" in a "widespread anti-Semitic prejudice aggravated by the belief that Jewish citizens were politically hostile to the Polish State." This argument is further developed later in the Report but then, he writes that, "Polish nationalist feeling is irritated by what is regarded as the 'alien' character of the great mass of the Jewish population." This "alien character," he notes, "is constantly brought home to the Poles by the fact that the majority of Jews affect a distinctive dress, observe the Sabbath on Saturday, conduct business on Sunday, have separate dietary laws, wear long beards,

and speak a language of their own. … The concentration of the Jews in certain districts or quarters in Polish cities also emphasizes the line of demarcation separating them from other citizens."[20]

This litany of the ancient habits and customs that characterized the overwhelming majority of unassimilated Jews in Poland in those days is clearly more fundamentally cultural than political in origin. Morgenthau's sympathies lay with those seeking to assimilate and integrate themselves into the new Polish state, much as many German Jews were doing in Germany at the time, and as he and his family, as well as many German Jewish immigrants, had done in their new home in the United States. Morgenthau's wish, like that of many assimilationist Poles and Russians at the time, was that Polish Jews discard their alien habits and looks and do just that.

In line with his universalist proclivities, Morgenthau promoted American efforts to ensure the equality of all citizens in Poland during the turbulent post-World War I years. He had argued earlier in his report that "the present anti-Semitic feeling took a definite turn after the Russian Revolution of 1905."[21] After nearly fifty years of intermittent but escalating pogroms and the like, the Morgenthau Commission visited Poland to take stock of the worsening situation as a Polish republic was being assembled from the disjointed pieces of over two hundred years of dismembered Polish lands. The report, produced after two months of investigation, lays blame here and there, variously on the Polish military, on local mobs, and on age-old antisemitism, as well as on the nigh intractable "alien" situation of the Jews themselves.[22] Oddly, it did not focus on the economic situation and growing aspirations of the Jews, a significant factor in their desire to leave their old homelands.

It was from the unassimilated world that Morgenthau and other assimilated Jews of Western and Central European origin

disparaged as backward and ridden with outdated beliefs and superstitions–a world in which most Jews regarded themselves as fundamentally different from the majority gentile population–that my grandmother Chaya left for the United States. Her family was certainly not among the *maskilim*, the so-called "enlightened," assimilated Jews of the big cities of Poland whose numbers were increasing during those years. Chaya was proud to be an American, but always saw herself as separate, as somehow alien from the world of Christian Americans, Yankees, or "*Yenkeez*," as she would sardonically refer to those, to her mind, impenetrable Anglo-Saxon creatures in charge of her new homeland.

Leaving Behind the Old Jewish Way of Life

For Chaya and the millions like her, life in the shtetl of her childhood old Eastern Europe would come to be regarded as a Jewish way of life of the past, a world diminishing in her emerging vision of a new life in America. Quite naturally, the Tiktin of her memories faded with the passage of time and as her conversations with fellow Jews from the Old World transposed and condensed her past into merely one element in the larger collective imagination: Old World tales passed on to children and grandchildren. My grandparents' departure from the troubled sanctuaries of Jewish life in eastern Poland and western Russia which had been home to Jews like herself for generations, their emigration to America, and their almost mythic struggle as poor immigrants in the Lower East Side of New York, fed the stories they told to their families and provided them with the emotional content that made those stories real for us. I grew up with tales of the shtetl, the passage to America, and of making a living in the sweatshops of Lower Manhattan. My grandparents arrived in the United States just after the turn of the century. American history

before the twentieth century, before they came, did not seem to be *my* history. It was the history of another people, especially as one moved back century by century into the increasingly Anglo-Saxon past, about which I read in school history books–a timeline that transported me all the way back and purported to root me in the Magna Carta and the land of the kings of medieval England.

It was not as if I had had an alternative past in Eastern Europe, because, ironically, although Jews are a people with a long history, the history of my family, of so many Jewish families, had been erased from the face of the earth. I had no history–or so it seemed. The world of my ancestors was irrevocably gone in my mind, abandoned at the turn of the century by my grandparents, and then totally expunged from existence by the Nazis. My grandparents brought nothing of lasting value with them from Russia and Poland except their identity papers, a few coins, some trinkets, the clothes on their backs, the stories they told, and hope for a better future. They left no traces of themselves in the now-obliterated worlds of their childhood, and their relatives who stayed behind were murdered. Times were bad when Lebe sent her children off to America, but she could never have conceived of how unspeakably horrific life would later become for the Jews of Tykocin, when, in the summer of 1941, the Germans invaded eastern Poland abrogating the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, a non-aggression treaty that had divided Poland into German and Russian spheres.

From the only photograph of her that remains, Chaya's mother Lebe appears to have been a tough woman, tempered by a life of hard work and innumerable losses. She was neatly and simply dressed for the photograph she had taken to send off to her children in New York. Wrinkles ring her woeful eyes. Throughout those years she managed her own little textile-dyeing business to support the family, as her husband, whose real vocation was one

Great-grandmother Lebe.

of prayer and religious study, made little as the *shammes* in the synagogue and is virtually non-existent in family memory. He passed away in 1915, in what must have been his mid-sixties, a moderately long lifespan in those days for places like Tykocin in Eastern Europe. The photo of a dour-looking Lebe was very likely taken during the interwar period after she had already sent two sons and two daughters off to America. She had lost her husband in 1915 at the beginning of the war, somehow surviving in Tykocin with a handicapped son to look after. Sometime after that, she married Józef Smurla, the man listed as her husband in the record of victims of August 1941.[23] But she appears not to have had any children by him. Lebe was probably around forty-five when her first husband died. We do not know when she remarried, but it was very likely as soon as possible. In those times, a lone woman would have needed the support which a man in the house could offer. But it was too late for more children. In any case, why would she have wanted more children when she had already sent all but one of her own to America and was just barely getting by? Mother Lebe continued writing to her children in New York until the war began, and they to her, putting a few dollars in each letter they posted to Tykocin.

Chaya's brothers paid for her passage; that is the way it is indicated in the ship manifests for both Chaya and Mindel, and that is the way my mother told me about their passage when I spoke with her at length about her family history. Chaim, the older of her two brothers, was working in a clothing shop; after

the war, he would run a successful haberdashery business of his own in New Jersey. Moishe, the younger of the two, was to become a rabbi later in life. It is not clear how they put the money together for both their sisters' travel. As it turns out, inexplicably, Chaya was met in New York not by one of her brothers, but by someone named Jacob Pakewitz, who is listed as a stepbrother in the ship's manifest in the column indicating the person whom the passenger was going to join in the United States. Jacob's surname was almost certainly the same as Chaya's mother's maiden name, spelled Piekarewicz in Polish. The Piekarewicz's were a large Jewish family in Tykocin, and many of them are listed among those murdered by the Germans in August 1941. There is a separate standing monument to the Piekarewicz family at the killing site in the forest. It seems that Jacob was more likely a cousin or an uncle than a stepbrother. It is unclear to me why he was the relative who formally sponsored her passage.

Chaya had not traveled anywhere before leaving for America. She spoke only Yiddish before arriving in America. The only place she knew was Tykocin, and perhaps nearby Białystok. But what could such a young girl have known of a crowded, tumultuous, cosmopolitan industrial city like Białystok? Chaya had $7.50 in her pocket upon arrival in New York, or at least that's what she declared for the ship's manifest. In today's money that is a little under $200. Her train fare from Białystok to Rotterdam may have cost $15 or $20, and steerage fare to New York about $35 or $40 at that time. In today's money all of this adds up to a rather significant sum for a poor Jewish family from Eastern Europe—more than a thousand dollars.

In New York, Chaya's brothers did not take her in with them. We don't know why. Instead, they found her a place as a boarder with a family named Horowitz from Minsk in a Lower Manhattan tenement building in a neighborhood teaming with immigrants

like her. The New York garment industry was overwhelmingly Jewish, and her brother Chaim, later to adopt the name Hymie, found her a job in a bloomer factory. Ten years later, in 1917, Chaya married one of the Horowitz boys, who by that time was going by the American name Harry. Harry was born in 1894 and arrived in the United States in 1904, accompanied by his mother and four siblings. Their passage was paid for by Harry's father, who was waiting for his family in New York. By the time she married, Chaya had already changed her first name to the more American-sounding Ida, as did many other Chayas, one of whom was my father's mother. The photograph of her as a young woman, the earliest one that exists, was taken some years before her marriage. Perhaps she was seventeen or eighteen then. Ida gave birth to three children: Irving in 1917, Edith in 1921, and Marvin in 1926. Edith also had three children: me, Marcia, and the youngest, Laura, who was named after our great-grandmother from Tykocin, Lebe, and even resembled her a bit. Both died tragically: one murdered by the Germans, the other of cancer.

Chaya, under her American name, Ida, became a U.S. citizen quite late, in 1943, the year I was born. It's unclear why she waited for thirty-six years to complete her naturalization. Her husband-to-be, Harry, had been naturalized in 1926, nine years after arriving. Ida died in New York in 1976. She never saw Tykocin again and did not express any interest in returning for a visit. She never made reference to having been

Grandmother Ida.

born in a country named "Poland." That is hardly surprising, as no such country had existed since the partitions of the late eighteenth century and would only emerge again in 1918 in the form of the Second Polish Republic, more than ten years after she had left Tykocin. Chaya's official childhood identity was as a Russian, and when asked, she would always say that she was born in Russia. She held Russian identity papers and brought some Russian currency along with her to the U.S. I still have some of the small change she brought over with her. Ida's personal identity was, above all else, as a Jew. She spoke Yiddish as her native language, and later English with a distinctive accent which she often playfully exaggerated for our amusement. Ida was very proud to be an American, an American Jew.

Two Stories in One

There are actually two different beginnings to the story of my discovery of Tykocin. Both are true. The difference is one of sequence, not fact. One story starts with the conversation I had with the Polish server at the Lexington Avenue diner, the other with my discovery of my grandmother's Russian identity papers after my mother had passed away in 2010. I cannot remember which came first. I have, variously, begun my account with one or the other story, though the identity papers were, without doubt, the more meaningful of the two for me. But since both versions are true, it is best to think of them as one.

Grandmother's Russian identification papers brought her to America and was, as things would have it, my passport back to Tykocin and the erstwhile world of my family and my newly discovered ancestors. I brought grandmother's identity papers back to Poland, back to the place where she started off on her journey to America, on my first trip in 2014.

Luckily, I was able to have the document, which was printed in old Cyrillic characters, translated by a Polish friend I met in Tykocin. Surely enough, there was her name and her birthplace, Tykocin, on the document. I had not known that her family name was Kurlander. I did know we had some distant relatives with the last name Kurlander, a dentist and his family, but I didn't make the connection to grandmother's brothers who were never in my life. Grandmother's sister Mindel, our always cheerful, always delightful childless Aunt Minnie, looked after the children of the Kurlanders and related to all of us kids as if we were her own grandchildren. Not only did I not know that grandmother's maiden name was Kurlander, but I also did not know that her original first name was Chaya, not Ida. Who really were all these family elders in my life who came to America so long ago from strange, seemingly unknowable, now almost non-existent places? How was I connected to them? What could that connection possibly be?

With the revelation surrounding grandmother's name I took a few small steps toward her remote origins in a seemingly unreachable place somewhere "on the far side of time," as W. G. Sebald describes the often-opaque past.[24] If Ida was Chaya, then what might the birth name of my father's mother, also an Ida, have been? Very likely, also Chaya, I realized. And grandfather Harry or my paternal grandfather Hymie? Hymie was very likely Chaim. I'm not sure about Harry, whom we sometimes also called Grandpa John for some reason I cannot fathom. If I didn't know their original names, then who were these people? I began to see that they were, or had been, part of another world, a world reaching back into the depths of time, a distant and now inaccessible world, lying far behind the curtain of their Americanized names. Chaya's passport also contained her father's name, Arie.

Tiktin: Jewish Tykocin

Tiktin, as the town was known to the Jews, was a shtetl, literally meaning small town in Yiddish. The Jews of my grandmother's childhood, like her, residing in the Jewish Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire were overwhelmingly an urban people, though the towns they lived ranged from tiny poor village-like places to big cities like Warsaw. In 1897 only 13.5 percent of Russia Jews lived in the countryside, the rest were the denizens of towns and cities of various sizes. As the nineteenth century came to a close, more and more Jews opted for the big cities that provided them with economic and social opportunities they could not hope to find in their little shtetls. Shtetl is a diminutive of the Yiddish *shtot* (German *stadt*) or city, meaning small city or town. According to Jewish Studies professor Jeffrey Shandler, "*shtetl* has become a key word in Jewish life and Jewish studies by dint of the trajectory of Jewish vernacular culture in Eastern Europe…"[25]

In 1907 Tykocin–or grandmother's Tiktin–had a population of nearly 5,000 inhabitants, more than half of whom were Jews. In my childhood mind, the shtetl was a poor little village where only Jews lived, an intimate, timeless community later further mythologized for us as Anatevka in *Fiddler on the Roof*, the prototypical fantasy locus of East European Jewish life.[26] Contrary to what I had imagined, the real Tykocin was not just a place where Jews lived. There were Jews

Map showing the partition of Poland.

The old Jewish market place, 1916.

and there were Christians in the town throughout history, and largely in parity. The Jews lived at one end of the town in a district known as Kaczorowo, and the Catholics at the other, though the division was not entirely clear-cut, and some Jewish and gentile families were interspersed.

Jews and gentiles: two peoples bound to each other by a social economy of necessity often set in a culture of mutual mistrust and even disdain. Jews and Poles, as these two peoples are often referred to even today, marked as separate identities in the popular mind. "Do you know what makes every town Polish?" the nineteenth-century literary figure Ignacy Kraszewski once asked. "The Jews," we are told. "When there are no more Jews, we enter an alien country…"[27] Jews and Catholic Poles were bound together over many centuries in intimate space, abiding in parallel worlds both very familiar and yet profoundly unknown to each other. Jews were sometimes referred to by Poles with the often-pejorative diminutive *zydki*, translated as something like "little Jew," or even "Jewboy," and Poles, in turn, were referred to pejoratively as the *goyim*, the gentiles, by the Jews.

Interior of old cinema, once owned by a Jew.

In the nineteenth century, to the dismay of traditionalists, some of the more assimilated Jews of the big cities began to see themselves as Poles, that is, Poles "of Jewish origin," and as members of an imagined modern Polish nation. Though small in number, there were also Jewish converts to Christianity, apostates who were regarded with disdain by traditional religious Jews and, depending on the period, greeted with various degrees of approval and acceptance or with skepticism or rebuff by gentiles.

Photographs taken in Tykocin during the interwar period reveal a town with many very modern, sophisticated looking Jewish families, not just the poor, backward Jews of the proverbial shtetl. Today, remembrance of the Jewish past in Tykocin focuses disproportionately on the now "lost" exotic elements of the Jewish community, the Orthodox and Hasidic communities. It is easy to forget that like many other Polish towns, the denizens of Tykocin included both traditionalists and modernists: Zionist-socialists, Bundists, communists, and a world of secular Yiddishkeit along with that of traditional religious-based culture. The town had a lively local Jewish amateur theater troupe performing works like *King Lear*. The gentiles also had their own theater group. During the 1930s, there was a town cinema, owned by a Jew.

Some Members of the Old Jewish Community

We are introduced to some of the Jewish families of the town living during the early twentieth century in an exhibition on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the extermination of the town's Jews, titled "We, the Jewish People Came to Tykocin Ages Ago…" The exhibition relies heavily on information from the Polish translation of *Sefer Tiktin*. In remembering the Holocaust, the exhibition recognizes the Jews of the town as individuals and as families living quite diverse lives, not just as the proverbial Jewish merchants, craftsmen, and traders, but as citizens active in the town's civil society and local government. Unfortunately there is little information available about the women of the community. We will probably never know how many young or older women were working alongside the men of their families in shops or at the market in addition to tending to their household and family responsibilities.

The mayor of Tykocin during the German occupation of the town during the First World War, from 1915 to 1918, was a Jew named Zev Gold, a longtime member of the town council.

Tykocin Jewish Theater troupe, 1920.

A number of Tykocin merchants were involved in the lumber business and Zev Gold worked as an expert in that area. He was also active in the Zionist movement. Jewish physician Abraham Turek, from a highly educated family of doctors and lawyers, was a member of the town council and vice mayor, as well as a member of the ethnically-mixed local voluntary fire brigade. He too was an active Zionist. His son, Menachem, was a lawyer and worked in Białystok.

By contrast, there was Moishe Rawicz, grocery store owner, Hassid, devoted Talmudic scholar, and member of the Tykocin *kahal*. David Zolty, another very religious townsman, was also a member of the Hassidic community, and together with his wife Rachel, ran a bakery. A photograph of the family speaks for itself, clearly projecting generational contrast: Moishe and his wife, dressed in traditional garb, are seated, while their children, standing behind them, could not be more modern looking. Within the same family, there were those who lived a more traditional life, memorialized in the figurines sold today, and those who lived a more modern style of life. Alter Bursztejn was a *shohet*, a ritual

David Zolty and family.

Tykocin city council, early 20th century.

slaughterer, sometime teacher and carpenter. He was a member of the town council and chairman of the trade association, representing the interests of small craftsmen. From the same family, there was Dow Gimpel Bursztejn, a devoted Hassid, who ran a *cheder*, a religious school for children.

Cirla Lisanska, the only woman in the exhibition for whom we have information, was, it seems, quite an extraordinary person. She managed a fabric dyeing workshop. Cirla received training in medicine and pharmacology and was renowned in Tykocin as a medic, pharmacist, and midwife, known to all as the "grandmother of Tykocin children." But then, centuries before her there was Rebecca bat Meir Tiktiner, who lived in Tykocin during the second half of the sixteenth century and died in 1605. Rebecca wrote a book in Yiddish on Jewish ethics, social practices, and manners–the first known woman to publish a book in Yiddish. Who knows how many other women whom we do not know about were actively engaged in work other than the traditional household chores and domestic religious duties. Lebe does not appear in any of the photographs but was, we know, running a fabric dyeing shop.

"We the Jewish People."

There was Izrael Buber who established the first reform cheder in the town, providing instruction in the increasingly fashionable Hebrew rather than in Yiddish. He was also active in the town's Zionist movement. He taught religion at the Jewish Public School founded in 1922 just four years after the establishment of the republic. Notably, Tykocin was the only town in Poland with a Jewish public school during those years. The school had both gentile and Jewish teachers. Another educator, Jaakow Dawid Szwarc, opened a reformed cheder for both girls and boys providing instruction in foreign languages as well as Hebrew. In an entirely different mode, Moishe Israel Choroszucha,

The *meshuggener*: Who is laughing at whom?

Tykocin, 1916, occupying German soldiers.

another denizen of the local Jewish community, was accused of involvement in revolutionary activities by the Russian authorities and in 1912 was exiled to the Russian interior. How many other Tykocin men or women were involved in the upheaval that led to the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917?

Abraham Mordechai Olsztejn extended the social and economic outreach of Tykocin's residents by founding a bus company in 1922, transporting passengers to Białystok, Lomza, and Warsaw. His sons Choneg, Judke, and Zyskind were the drivers. Izhak Jaakow Charlaf was a cantor and *shohet*, a ritual slaughterer, as well as a member of the town council and an activist for the town's poor. How many others were there, men and women, who have left little trace of themselves for posterity?

Tykocin in Past Times

Founded in 1425, Tykocin welcomed its first Jews a hundred years later, in 1522. It is the oldest Jewish community in the Podlasie region of present-day northeastern Poland and the site of the first Jewish cemetery in the region. In the past, both

Interior of the Tykocin synagogue.

major religious communities in the town, the Catholics and the Jews, had their places of worship: the Jews had an elegant, early seventeenth-century fortress-like masonry and brick synagogue strong enough to survive the ravages of war, and the Catholics a magnificent eighteenth-century Baroque cathedral, around which the communal lives of both congregations once flourished. These monumental structures had replaced earlier, more modest houses of worship. There was also a small Protestant community in the town, as well as some Orthodox Christians. Few traces of them remain today. In 1642, when the extant synagogue was built, it was very likely larger than the then old town church, predecessor to the current cathedral. Allowing Jews to build and maintain such a prominent and important symbol of community presence is a clear and concrete sign of the open reception the Jewish community received by the gentiles of the town and the central authorities of the state from the very beginning. Even today, the two magnificent houses of worship bear witness to the two communities that were once the backbones of Tykocin.

In today's diminished village, hardly a town anymore, both grand houses of worship—monuments to a more illustrious

The Church of the Holy Trinity under renovation.

past—feel somewhat incongruous. Tykocin today derives some of its income and its newfound fame from both the glories of its centuries-old past and the inglorious devastation it experienced during World War II. From the sixteenth to the late eighteenth century, Tykocin was an important center of long-distance trade, with a river port and shipyard and a flourishing market. Its strategic river location allowed the town's merchants to trade with major cities like Königsberg, Vilnius, Poznań, and Lublin, among others. In addition to Poles and Jews, the town was also inhabited by some ethnic Lithuanians, Germans, and Ruthenians.[28] Tykocin was home as well to a fortress built by King Zygmunt August between 1550 and 1572, at that time the largest fortress in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1795), housing royal jewels, treasures, a royal mint, archives, a library, and other royal collections.[29] So, while far from Warsaw, Tykocin was not peripheral in importance. During its early fluorescence, the town was also home to numerous craftsmen, builders, doctors, scholars, and others serving royal interests.[30] Another indication of the erstwhile importance of Tykocin, at least up until the late eighteenth century, was its selection as a residence for retired

Filming in the synagogue with local extras.

Polish military officers of noble descent. The residence, located next to the cathedral, still stands today as a hotel and restaurant known as Alumnat. In her history of the town, Ewa Rogelewska of the National Memory Institute and former staff member of the Tykocin museum, makes reference to a "certain theatricality" of the town during past times. Tykocin's theatricality continues today, though with new players and a new, disquieting theme which we will examine in some depth in the following chapters.

The Jews of Tykocin not only engaged in trade but also in crafts and often served as intermediaries for the enterprises of the local nobility.[31] Tykocin was one of the most important communities in the Podlasie region of the Commonwealth. By the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth, it had become the dominant center of Jewish life in a radius of about a hundred kilometers, including the now much larger city of Białystok to the east. Jewish merchants dominated both local and international trade in Tykocin. They were engaged in tax and tariff farming as well as in commerce in grain, the manufacturing of textiles, distilling and milling, and the sale and transportation of timber.[32] "The marketplace defined much of Jews' community life and their relationship with their neighbors,"[33] writes Shandler. "The power of the marketplace was key," he continues,[34] discussing the old shtetl in general terms. It was the wealth generated by the town that made it possible to employ well-known, highly educated rabbis from near and afar and thus facilitate the development of Tykocin as a place renowned for its learned scholars. But it was not just the scholars of Tykocin who were able to read. Jewish Tykocin was a highly literate town. The town had a library containing important religious books in Hebrew in the *besmedresh*, the study house of the synagogue, the collection dating back to the early years of the community in the sixteenth century. A secular library in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish meeting the changing needs of a changing local population dated back to the early twentieth century. Though no doubt subject to some hyperbole, Małgorzata Choińska, the Podlasie regional librarian tells us in her 2004 description of the Jewish libraries of Tykocin, that "Everyone [that is all Jews] . . . had the ability to read and write." Among the town craftsmen there were even one or two book binders. No doubt prayer and other religious books could be found in almost all Jewish homes. Some of the wealthy Jews even had their own private collections of books. We will never know anything about the extent of those collections, because all the books and documents kept by the community, both those in the *besmedresh* (Talmudic study house) and in private homes, were destroyed either by the Germans or by locals during the war.[35]

The first record of the Jewish population of Tykocin I have been able to locate is from 1559. Fifty homes or households are listed, no doubt a rounded number, adding up to a total of perhaps 250 people.[36] By 1655, the Jewish population had doubled to 540 inhabitants.[37] Census records from 1765 report a total of 2,694 Jews living in the town and outlying villages.[38] In 1827, the population of this prospering town had grown considerably

Faces of Tykocin from the new permanent exhibition. "Tykocin in the Stream of History."
Tykocin Museum.

to 4,248 inhabitants, almost two-thirds of whom were Jews.[39] In 1857, there were 3,456 Jews living in Tykocin, seventy percent of the total population of nearly 5,000.[40] Tykocin had really become a Jewish town. Jews in the late nineteenth century Russian Empire were overwhelmingly and increasingly an urban people.[41] According to Haumann, in 1897 eighty-seven percent of all Jews in the empire lived in towns and cities.[42] By 1897, the total population of Tykocin had diminished to 4,210, almost sixty percent of which was Jewish.[43] The population loss is very likely due to outmigration, and the departure from Tykocin did not just affect Jews, though a somewhat larger percentage of Jews than gentiles did leave their home town for a better life elsewhere. Very likely, the poor economic conditions in that part of Poland during those years were beginning to drive both peoples out of their homeland. This was also a time of increasing political disarray in eastern and southern Europe emerging from the rise of nationalisms that by the early twentieth century had led to the shattering of the great empires of the region and the emergence of new nation-states. For millions there was also, we should not forget, the decision to leave under the immense pull of places like America during those decades leading up to World War I.[44]

In 1771, as a result of its much-weakened economic and political position in the region, and the rise of other neighboring communities, Tykocin ceded its *kahal* (local Jewish religious and juridical authority) to Białystok. Between 1795 and 1807 during the Third Partition of Poland, the town came under the jurisdiction of Prussia. It was during that time that all residents were required to adopt surnames. After 1807 Tykocin fell under Russian rule. The economic situation in Tykocin was quite dynamic during the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1840, for example, Tykocin had eight active watermills, four windmills, four horse-driven mills, five small comb factories, and two textile mills, as well as a sugar

mill, a textile mill, and a hat factory. The owners of the large mills were largely Christian, with Jews owning the smaller ones. During that period there were more than 350 craftsmen in the town, most of them Jews.[45]

The economic position of Tykocin was seriously diminished in importance after 1862 with the opening of the Warsaw-Petersburg railway, as well as the establishment of rail connections to the towns of Knyszyn and Grajewo and a road built between Warsaw, Grodno, and Vilnius, all of which bypassed Tykocin. Tykocin would never again regain its pre-nineteenth century regional economic status. A customs border was established in 1831 between the Kingdom of Poland and the Russian Empire in those largely ethnic Polish lands. As a border town, Tykocin benefitted from the practice of smuggling, which, it seems, was largely a Jewish enterprise.[46]

By the late nineteenth century, urbanization, industrialization, and the opening of the railway had clearly favored Białystok, which was transformed into a major manufacturing center, especially for textiles, overwhelmingly populated by Jews, both as capitalist owners and as workers and as active members of the Bund, the Jewish Workers League. Though Tykocin declined in economic importance, the population of the town continued to grow. When Chaya was born just before the end of the century there were approximately 2,500 Jews in then more populous Tykocin, Jews making up about sixty percent of the total. By 1921, with the impact of emigration and war, the town's Jewish population had diminished to less than 1,500, or about fifty percent of the total population.[47] During the interwar period Jews were, as we have seen, largely engaged in small-scale commerce and crafts, as well as in the production of tallit, or prayer shawl.[48] Though most businesses in the town were in the hands of Jews, boycotts of Jewish businesses during the 1930s

seriously stifled their economic position. By the late 1930s, at the outbreak of World War II, there were approximately 2,000 Jews in Tykocin and its environs, perhaps about 1,500 in the town itself. Approximately 2,000 Jews were murdered on August 25 and 26, 1941, not all of whom were from the town; some came in from nearby villages seeking safety, tragically mistaken.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, Tykocin had been a major center of Jewish learning, home to important Talmudic scholars who were widely known and respected in the Commonwealth. Another sign of the town's importance was that until 1771 the Tykocin *kahal*, the local religious and juridical authority of the Jewish community, had jurisdiction over all the *kahals* in the towns within its regional sphere of influence.[49]

Tykocin, like most other towns in the region, suffered economically as a result of the Partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century. In 1807, Tykocin was incorporated into the Duchy of Warsaw, and in 1815 into the Kingdom of Poland, or Congress Poland, as it was then known. "Congress" refers to the Congress of Vienna of 1815, at which the borders of nineteenth-century Poland had been set. In actuality, all these territories were under Russian Imperial rule.[50] As Davies succinctly describes the situation, during the long Russia Partition of Poland, which ended in 1918, "Contradictory though it may seem, Poland was an integral part of Russia … and the Poles of Russia … were subjects of the Tsar."[51]

An economic survey conducted in 1929 gives us some indication of business activity in the period just preceding the demise of old Tykocin.[52] At the time of the survey there were five windmills in operation and three establishments dealing in grain in the town. There were two dentists, a doctor, a barber, two pharmacists, a veterinarian, and a midwife. There were also two banks, a notary, two hairdressers, two haberdashers, twelve

tailors and ten shops selling fabrics. There was one tanner, two wheelwrights, eight bakers, and eight butchers, as well as two shops selling oil, one selling and grinding coffee beans, three cobblers, four small café-restaurants and two regular restaurants, two teahouses, two shops selling spirits, and an indeterminate number of shops selling such things as religious objects, office furniture, and agricultural tools and equipment. There were three carpenters, two ironmongers, one tinsmith, a blacksmith, two leatherworking shops, twenty-three grocers, four cobblers, three locksmiths, a watchmaker, two makers of caps, a dry cleaner, and two cooperatives. There was also, of course, the weekly market, which was the main commercial event in the town, regularly bringing Jews and gentiles face to face in commerce.

There were altogether 143 businesses or professions of various sizes and types listed for the year 1929. The names of the owners of the businesses are included in the list, but it is difficult to be precise about how many of the businesses were Christian as opposed to Jewish-owned from the names given. A local resident and local historian with considerable knowledge of the local population examined the names in the survey for me and classified approximately two-thirds of them as Jewish. For more information about professions during the interwar period, we turn to a local farmer Jan Zimnoch's *Mój dawny Tykocin* (My Old Tykocin) about the prewar Tykocin we earlier encountered. Zimnoch notes that during the interwar period, "there were very few [of what he referred to as] intelligentsia in Tykocin, no more than 40 people: a dozen or so teachers, four priests, two doctors, several civil servants in the municipality and [as he described them] several pensioners. The town had two seven-grade schools. One was Polish, the other Jewish, and was 'near the synagogue.'"[53] Give the difficulty of corroboration, these figures should be taken as approximations only.

This town, far from the centers of state or imperial power, has been the scene of multiple invasions over the centuries, from the north by Sweden, from the west by the armies of Prussia, then Imperial Germany, and from the east by Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. In the past, world history played itself out on a grand scale, often with great brutality in this town that rarely exceeded 5,000 inhabitants.

One gets the feeling today that in the aftermath of the traumas of its past, Tykocin, now diminished in numbers and sidelined, is left celebrating its past, gazing back in a state of silent disquietude. Flocks of Polish and Jewish tourists come to experience the nostalgia of a quaint "old-time" Polish town or of an idealized Jewish shtetl, or both. Others come to remember the Jews murdered in 1941. Both the nostalgia of an idealized past, the horrors of the destruction of the Jewish community, and the suffering of Christian residents at the hands of the Germans and the Soviets are indelible parts of the heritage of Tykocin. Tykocin today derives some of its income, and its newfound fame from tourism—an unsettling tourism built both on its past and present character and beauties, as well as the devastation the town experienced during World War II.

While much is known about the history of Tykocin, there is little record of the lives of the majority of people who ever lived there. It is not possible to tell the story of Tykocin of the past without telling a tale of both Christians and Jews, as the lives of these two peoples were densely intertwined as neighbors and in the marketplace, while at the same time quite separate in many ways. Their lives were at the same time both very familiar and very alien to each other. The historical character of Tykocin was built on that complex relationship and the mutual dependency of farmers and traders and craftsmen, Christians and Jews, and the relationship of noblemen and priests and rabbis with all of them.

Objects from the exhibition "133 Stories," which I discuss below, attest to those dense interrelationships.

During past decades, a "new" history has emerged, a history seeking to tell the story of the way ordinary people lived their lives. Some refer to this as a kind of "history from below" in contrast to the glorious histories of kings and queens, the church, wars, and conquests that we all know so well from school. There are few records of the mundane, everyday existence of the overwhelming majority. Most people live and die without leaving much of a trace for future use by historians or others. Objects from the past survive in homes often by chance, their provenance and local meaning frequently lost. Some objects emerge from the earth, often in pieces, others from dusty basements and attics. Luck is an important factor in their survival and rediscovery. When they reemerge, they are fair game for a second life and reinterpretation.

On another level there are church and state records: of births, baptisms, marriages, and of deaths. Collated as seemingly dry statistics, such figures have the potential to bring to life patterns of everyday life unknown even to those living at the time of recording. There are various legal documents, community records, and for the Jews, the memorial books written by survivors after the war. And there are the material objects that have been passed down the generations. Among these are the old homes themselves that have survived the ravages of war and time, odd tools, household furnishings and goods, personal possessions, photographs, letters, and the like. When possible, our understanding of the most recent past can also rest on retrospective oral accounts. Here, the limitations of a life span and of memory set the boundaries of understanding.

Might displaying the everyday things found in this exhibition serve as a starting point, perhaps one might even say an *aide-mémoire* or a "talking point," in understanding the way people lived in Tykocin in the past? Do such objects or documents "speak for themselves;" are they repositories of local or domestic memory, or are they mute and dependent upon meanings we apply to them? If we do not know the provenance of an object is its story lost, its meaning diminished? Who is to tell the story of quotidian objects: the most recent owners, former owners, or outsiders who are able to put diverse sources together in a way locals often cannot? Everyone's home is a kind of museum in this sense, and all the objects found there carry various degrees of meaning, some even distinct memories, for its residents. Some carry memories known to the family, for others the memories may have been lost over the generations; for still others, objects found in homes today may carry painful or regretful connections with the past which are difficult to deal with. What other surprises, what other objects from the lives of the people of Tykocin might lie hidden in the attics of their homes, might have long gone unnoticed on dusty shelves, been locked away and forgotten in drawers or chests, or stored in closets, yet to be brought to life again and shared? What will all of this mean?

Opening in 2018, Tykocin philologist and local activist Maria Markiewicz together with her son, anthropologist Józef Markiewicz, transformed puart of her family's historic wooden house on the main square of Tykocin into a museum of everyday life in the town in past times, known as the "133 Stories" exhibition. The exhibition displays found and collected objects, photographs, films, and sound recordings, all of which speak to us about the many ways in which the denizens of Tykocin, both Christian and Jewish, once lived their everyday lives. See Chapter 4 for an in-depth look at the exhibition.

Jews and Gentiles

There are very few shops or businesses in Tykocin today. The population in 2018 was 1,980,[54] just over half of what it was in 1929. And now there are no Jews, the proprietors of most of the businesses in the past. The commercial life of Tykocin has diminished to several groceries and a few other shops. That is not just because the Jews are gone. The nature of commerce in Poland and elsewhere in the world has irrevocably changed in radical ways especially in recent years. Commerce has become centralized and globalized. There is no longer any need to shop locally, and hardly anything is manufactured at the local level. Today people hop in their cars and shop at the large malls in and around Białystok, only about a thirty-minute drive away, and purchase products entering the local market from around the globe. When I asked a local schoolteacher about why there were so few shops and so little apparent economic activity in Tykocin today, that was the answer I got. If the Jews of Tykocin were alive today, they would in all likelihood not be tending shops or engaged in petty manufacturing in the town. Most of them probably would not even be living in Tykocin, having left over the years for the more promising economic and social opportunities and the greater security offered by big cities in the region.

The Jewish and Catholic quarters of old Tykocin were separated by a small stream that today is a dry gulley. The separation was not strict; there were some Catholic farming families living on the outskirts of the Jewish quarter and a few Jews in the predominantly gentile quarter. There was a market square at the edge of the Jewish quarter, which today houses tiny makeshift shops offering kebabs and other once exotic food one could never have imagined finding in a place like Tykocin. Right across from the synagogue on Piłsudski Street, the main street of the town named after Marshal Józef Klemens Piłsudski, the founder

of the interwar Second Polish Republic, there is a row of what were once the substantial masonry homes of Jewish merchants, setting themselves off in their presumed permanency from those of the less privileged denizens of the town, who typically lived in hand-hewed traditional wooden houses. There were also homes of the better-off Jews on the street behind the synagogue. By chance, I was staying in one of the homes of the once privileged which had a direct view of the front of the synagogue. It may have been a Jewish home, though I could find no trace of a *mezuzah* on the doorpost to bless the threshold. Time, or, more likely, an intentional removal may have eliminated any trace of the Jewish owners of the past.

Historically, the better-off Jews of Tykocin made a living by trade, and trade made it possible for the fortunate beneficiaries of such commerce to devote time to religious learning and scholarship and to afford to employ well-known rabbis and Talmudic scholars. By Chaya's time, all of this local activity, commercial and religious intellectual, was remote history, and Tykocin was quite literally a poor backwater for both Jews and Poles.

A Polish Historian Teaches about the Jews at the Local Museum

Jan is a history teacher by profession and a person with a strong critical sensibility. I interviewed him in his home in Tykocin, set in a lush garden sloping down to the river. His home also serves as a bed and breakfast lodge, supplementing his salary at the Tykocin museum, where he worked full-time when I interviewed him. Jan is not originally from Tykocin but has been living there for many years. Like other devoted Poles I met, he has given himself to ensuring that the Jewish past in his country is remembered. Jan has taught history at the secondary level, and, though not

Jewish, runs educational programs on Jewish history and culture for young people at the synagogue-museum. He believes that the younger generation is more attuned to their past than is the senior generation and that Poland can begin to construct a better, more self-aware society with them. We might say that the results of the 2023 election have proven him correct.

Jan ushered me straight into his kitchen, where he offered me some coffee. He is a man caught between two worlds in Poland: the oppressive, restrictive Soviet-dominated one of his youth and young adulthood, and the new American-dominated market-driven world of globalization and consumerism with all its opportunities and dangers of today's Poland. He showed me an old map of Poland dated 1831 indicating the border between the Kingdom of Poland, to the west, and Russia to the east at the Narew River.

We spoke about the pre-World War I population and economy of Tykocin during the interwar period when economic conditions deteriorated for everyone, Poles and Jews alike. Jan attributed the somewhat better local economy in the pre-World War I period to the region being part of the larger and more far-reaching economy of the old Russian Empire at the time, rather than the fledgling Polish Republic as it confronted the Great Depression. When my grandmother was a child, Białystok was part of Russia and Tykocin the Kingdom of Poland, though, as we have seen, both were under Russian imperial domination.

To my regret, I was never able to interview my grandmother about Tykocin, her Tiktin. A million unanswered questions go through my mind, answers lost forever. I dream about taking my grandmother back to Tykocin, walking with her street by street, locating her old home and the homes of family and friends, observing her reaction to all that she had left behind, all that she remembers, all that is now lost. Or better still, I would be thrilled

to walk beside her when she was a child in Tykocin and see her life as she lived it then rather than the life she remembers with all the inevitable memory distortions played out by time. The details of our lives slip away so easily. In a generation or two they are gone, and then we can only put together a poor rendition of "the other side of time."

August 1941: Chaya's Mother and Brother are Murdered

On August 25 and 26, 1941 Lebe and her remaining son, Josef, along with approximately two thousand other Jews from Tykocin and its environs, were marched or, in the case of the elderly or children, transported by truck to the nearby Łopuchowo forest where they were ordered to strip and then were brutally machine-gunned by the Germans and thrown into large pits prepared earlier by local Poles on German orders. Only a few incredibly lucky or determined people, almost all young men, survived. Chaya's mother appears on a list of murdered Tykocin Jews compiled for the fifty-fifth anniversary memorial of the killing based on *Sefer Tiktin*, the Tykocin Memorial Book compiled by survivors after the war. Her name was spelled Liba Kurland in the list of murdered Jews, probably due to the vagaries of transliteration from the Yiddish or from Cyrillic characters. She is listed as the wife of a man named Josef Smurla, a name I had never heard of. My research showed that Chaya's father Arie had died, presumably naturally, many years earlier, in 1915. Research at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw brought to light a burial record for a man bearing his name in the Cmentarz [cemetery] Farny in Białystok. Arie Kurlander's name is engraved on a tombstone, a *matzevah*, that is still extant. Would a man from Tykocin have been buried in Białystok some thirty kilometers away from his home? We will

never know for sure, but if he did die there, that would have made practical sense. According to scripture Jewish burials should take place within twenty-four hours of death. My family members in the United States must have known that Lebe had remarried sometime after Arie Kurlander's death.

The Past in the Present

August 25 and 26, 1941 were a defining moment in the history of Tykocin, bringing an abrupt end to over four hundred years of Jewish existence in the town. The deadly events of those two days not only destroyed the Jews of Tykocin but left an unnatural abyss in the lives of the Polish Christian population of the town. The scars of that brutal human excision remain even now, more than eighty years after the destruction of the Jewish community. Though there is not a single Jew living in Tykocin today, for Jews, the identity of the town is intimately bound up with its Jewish past and with the ways in which that past is publicly imagined and presented. One cannot fully understand the Jewish past in Tykocin or the town today without coming to terms with what happened in August of 1941 and with the roles of both Poles and Germans in the wartime events. It is difficult to ascertain the meaning of the destruction of the old Jewish community of Tykocin and the absence of local Jews for present-day gentiles in Tykocin, none of whom are old enough to have had any lived experience with Jews of the town. Though there are no longer any Jews living in Tykocin, locals are continually reminded of their erstwhile existence by the presence of thousands upon thousands of visitors, Jewish and gentile, who come the town every year. Locals are not in a position to remember anything, yet are–perhaps reluctantly–witness to the many who come to memorialize the onetime neighbors of their family.

II

THE DAY AFTER

"… we had the feeling that we had arrived in another world, alien and strange."

Menachem Turek, upon his return to Tykocin after the war in the east ended, August 1944.[1]

Bringing the Jews to Life

Until August 25, 1941, the Tykocin pharmacy had been run by two men, Zygmunt Bohdanowicz, a Catholic, and Abraham Lijb, a Jew. At the end of each day, they would both conscientiously sign the store books. On August 25th only the gentile pharmacist was there to sign.[2]

When I first visited Tykocin in 2014, the remains of the once extensive Jewish cemetery in Tykocin had a marker, a sign at the edge in Polish and Hebrew, which translates into English as: "Tykocin Jewish Cemetery: 1522-1941," the beginning and the end of the long Jewish presence in that part of Poland. The sign has since disappeared.

In his classical study, *The Jews in Polish Culture* published in Paris in 1961 where he had taken refuge during the war, Aleksander Hertz, distinguished Polish-Jewish sociologist and scholar of prewar Polish-Jewish society, proposed that the memory, the legend, as he put it, of the Jews murdered during the war will bring them "to life" again. But to life as what? As revenants from a world that is no more? "Poland will never be able to forget her Jews," writes Hertz, "… they will live on, if only in a legend of those who had ceased even to be ghosts, and the legend seems to bring them to life again."[3] If that is the case, in what form will we come to know the Jews of Tykocin? There will, to be sure, be so-called legends passed down from generation to generation about those increasingly remote people. The legends, inevitably a construction of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, will be reshaped and retold every

The prewar local pharmacy.

Tykocin Jewish cemetery 1522-1941.

new generation and given new meaning and legitimation in the context of their social and institutional positioning, the legends invariably subject to the needs and interests of the tellers. The telling will become less grounded and more abstract as time elapses and any firsthand knowledge of persons, places, and events disappears over the generations.

"This Should Not Have Happened"

In 2011, I spent a semester as a visiting professor at the European University Viadrina, a German university with a strong focus on Eastern Europe. The university was located at the edge of the Oder River, which since the Second World War has been the German-Polish border. I frequently walked across the bridge over the Oder into what, before the war, was Germany. I became keenly aware of the historically shifting borders of Poland and the tremendous upheavals of the lives of the peoples, German and Polish, who lived in and around Polish lands.

As I contemplated my upcoming stay in the German capital where I decided to reside during my stay in Germany, I could not

Nazis herding Jews to their death.
Drawing by Józef Charyton, the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw.

get my mind off the Holocaust. I had visited Germany, East and West, numerous times in the past. But soon to be there for an extended time, living in Berlin, teaching at a German university, Germany came to take on a very different meaning for me. On the flight from Istanbul, I read Yehuda Bauer's *Rethinking the Holocaust*, one of the best overviews of historical writing on the Holocaust, written by one of the most distinguished Holocaust scholars. I had decided to live in Berlin rather than Frankfurt an der Oder, the small border town where the university is located, and commute to the university as did many of the faculty members. With Bauer's help I hoped to use my free time in Berlin to think about the Holocaust and its impact on today's Germany.

In Istanbul, I had recently become quite friendly with a liberal-minded German academician. Later, I befriended some of the faculty members at Viadrina. I had begun to read W.G. Sebald around that time and, to my surprise, started to think about the Germans of my generation who abhorred the Nazi project, people like Sebald, and my new German colleagues and friends. I began to think about how difficult it must be for people like them to come to terms with this dark side of their national history. Disturbing as it was initially, I tried to come to terms with the idea of German suffering, in the first instance the suffering of innocent German civilians who were indiscriminately killed in the bombing of cities like Dresden, Hamburg, or Berlin, and then of those who, like my German friends, decades after the fact, are burdened with the deeply fraught Nazi past that one may call post-suffering. The suffering of German civilians who experienced the war was easier to understand. What their responsibility was for German atrocities and whether they did or did not deserve to suffer some sort of collective punishment were questions I struggled with. The post-suffering of my German friends and colleagues burdened with their history was more remote, more inward-turned, and at first difficult to emote. But, over time, as I absorbed Sebald's thought and got to know my German friends better I came to empathize with their irresoluble dilemma.

I sublet a flat in the vicinity of the Berlin Jewish Museum, which I frequently visited on the days I was not teaching. At the terminus of my mindful walks through the various museum exhibitions of Jewish life in Germany set in chronological order, I came across a number of films dealing with the post-war aftermath and the fate of the major actors of the horror. Among them was a filmed interview with Hanna Arendt. Arendt summed up the meaning and, by example, the continuing risk, that the Holocaust, that genocide still posed to the world in the most epigrammatic of words: "This should not have happened."

"And then came the war..." Exhibition on the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, September 17-30, 2020.*

A fictive true story

The summer of 1939 brought much delight to the inhabitants of Tykocin. Bounteous harvests of wheat, apples, and vegetables were accompanied by the hope of a generous income for both farmers and other residents that year. The town was slowly recovering from the economic crisis of the previous few years, though life was still difficult for the many craftsmen and shopkeepers who struggled to find enough buyers for their goods. Józef Kurowski, the energetic commander of the Volunteer Fire Brigade, recently assumed the position of town mayor, another factor bringing with it hope for improved living conditions. Two primary schools, two libraries, one Polish, the other Jewish, a scout troop, the fire brigade, and other organizations were all active in the town at that time. Newspapers and the radio repeatedly carried ominous news of a possible war with Germany. But here on the banks of the Narew nobody took this information seriously. Both Poles and Jews believed that Hitler could be stopped, if not by diplomatic means, then by force. At every step of the way we were assured that the Polish Army and the Allied forces of Great Britain and France would be guarantors of peace. There were posters on the streets presenting beautifully uniformed Polish soldiers with modern military equipment. That is how I remember the town then.

Are you asking about the Jews? Yes, I knew many of them. In Tykocin they made up half of the population. They mostly lived in the Kaczorowo district where they had their synagogue. They were involved in trade and crafts, but among them there were also a surgeon Dr. Abraham Turek, and a few teachers. Most of them lived very modestly. Only on the Sabbath and on other holidays could such people afford to partake of satisfactory meals. In the 1920s, several dozen Jews left the town, some for the United States, others for Palestine. Those whom I remember were religious, and they tried to raise their children in the faith accordingly. Unfortunately, at that time, some of the youngsters, especially the poorer ones, were attracted to leftist politics.

What else can I tell you about old Tykocin? Poles mostly lived in the center and the newer parts of the town. The majority of them had farms from which they made a living. There were also a few Polish cobblers, bricklayers, a butcher, and a baker. There were also some clerks, teachers, policemen, and of course priests. In those days the church played a really central role in the life of Tykocin. That much was obvious even from photos taken at the time. You could see how many people gathered for the Corpus Christi Procession or on Constitution Day. It has to be said that in the city, there were also extreme nationalists who were acting harshly towards Jewish merchants.

And then came the war...

Do I remember the first of September? Of course, I do, though I have to say that it was still peaceful in Tykocin at that time. There were only those radio broadcasts continuously crying "War, War"... Several boys from Tykocin went to the front. I didn't know all of them, but later I heard that Capt. Tadeusz Kurowski was captured by the Germans. A similar fate befell Całko Galar, the tailor from Piłsudski Street. Some were killed,

* See the exhibition brochure of the same name, edited by this author.

some went missing–that is the way of war. The Germans entered Tykocin for the first time during the second week of September. They gathered all the men of the town in the church and kept them there for three days.

Again, we saw German soldiers on September 24, 1939, on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur. The Germans looted several Jewish shops and then left town. On the same day, a column of Soviet vehicles appeared in the city and for the next year the Communists governed. In October 1939, Tykocin was officially incorporated into Soviet Belarus, a militia was organized, a sielsowiet or village council was established, and the former Polish school was converted into a Belarussian one. Then arrests and deportations began. We were all suspects. The families of woodsmen, town officials, and wealthier farmers, but also the majority of the refugees who had fled from western Poland to Tykocin shortly after the outbreak of the war were sent off to Siberia.

Soviet rule took a toll on all of us–with its constant terror, its shortages, and forced labor for the benefit of the state. Unexpectedly, on June 22, 1941, we learned that the Germans had attacked the Soviet Union. So, were we at war again? It didn't take long for the following events to unfold. The Soviets withdrew in panic; there were some encounters with German troops nearby. Shortly after that the German army reappeared in Tykocin. A month later government officials arrived and a police force was formed. Everyone was issued documents marked "Bezirk Białystok"–that is what our homeland was now named.

One evening we heard the sound of drumming coming from Czarniecki Square. This was the way official messages were announced to the public in Tykocin in those days. The drummer announced that at dawn of the next day, that is on

August 25, 1941, all Jews–men, women, and children–were to be present at the market square. At 6 a.m., a crowd of several thousand gathered in and around the square. They were surrounded by a group of German soldiers and policemen. The Jews were then ordered to form columns four abreast, and that is how they were swiftly marched down the road to Zawady. A band of musicians marched at the head of the column, drowning out the sounds of their agitated talk and of the crying of the children. At the time we did not know what would happen to them.

After a few days, everything became quite clear–in the Łopuchowo forest there was freshly dug soil. None of the Jews returned. I heard that several people had escaped, some of them went in hiding–apparently only 21 survived the war. After the slaughter of the Jews, Tykocin was a deserted town. Jewish homes were plundered. In the synagogue, the Germans set up a warehouse. We lived in constant fear; we were afraid of informers, of arrests, and deportations to forced labor camps.

The Łopuchowo Forest: the stillness of death..

Impact of the War

It is impossible to understand the many ways people conceive of, memorialize, or construct Jewish life of the past in Tykocin without understanding what happened to the Jews in the summer of 1941 and henceforth during the war and its aftermath. There is the world of Tykocin before August 25 and 26, 1941, and that of another Tykocin following those two days of horror. Nothing in the little town of Tykocin, and even in Poland as a nation, was ever to be the same after what happened between 1939 and 1944. The impact of that event above all others in the town's history on the few Jewish survivors and their descendants, as well as on the Jews who left before 1941 and their descendants, was enormous. So too was the impact of those disastrous events on the Christians of Tykocin and on their children and grandchildren, who now live in the aftermath of August 1941—even if they choose not to think about or dwell upon that event and its long-term implications for living in the town. Indeed, if the town's Jews were still there today, Tykocin—indeed Poland—would be a radically different place than it now is.

However diversely the gentiles and Jews may have in the past perceived and today remember or memorialize their relationship in the pre-war past, there was a centuries-old "relationship" binding these two peoples in a face-to-face world. That world had its own history, a history of the two separate communities of faith and of the overarching community that bound them, a community that went back hundreds of years in time and that no one alive today has experienced. That larger community consisted of a relationship that extended from marketplace to neighborhood, that was oftentimes purely instrumental, sometimes congenial, even close and amicable, perhaps even intimate, and at times hostile or outright conflictual. The nature of that relationship changed with the times. Beginning in the late nineteenth century,

The synagogue in ruins, 1945

the relationship turned increasingly discordant, and during the interwar years sometimes hostile, sometimes even deadly. Today it is impossible to get a sense for the complex dimensions of those relationships of neighbors or friends, or buyers and sellers, of people who passed and greeted each other on the street, may have chatted with each other, whose children may have played with each other, relationships carrying the often undifferentiated expectations of the multifaceted and often inscrutable roles people tend to carry. I emphasize the word "relationship" here. Today, it is not possible to get a direct sense for the importance of that multiplex relationship between Jews and Poles in the past, a relationship which made the everyday world of old Tykocin what it was.

My description of Tykocin during the Second World War is largely based on witness testimony from the Tykocin Memorial Book, *Sefer Tiktin*, published in Israel in 1959, from the *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities in Poland: Warsaw and its Region*[4] published by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust

Remembrance Center in Israel, from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) archives, from individual testimonies of the few Tykocin Jews who survived the massacre, and from witness and other accounts of a number of local Christians. Any such effort is limited by the few firsthand sources available, by the often questionable level of objectivity of the witnesses and the quality of these sources, by the march of time, and by the difficulties of assaying people's intentions and actions based on those sources. The primary focus of this chapter is on relationships during the war, on relationships during the harshest imaginable circumstances. With a few exceptions, I have not interviewed local residents about their memory or post-memory of the intercommunal past during the war. Any conclusions I reach are bound to be controversial given the intensity of feelings both Poles and Jews have invested in the local beneficences and brutalities of World War II.

Tykocin Survivors

After the war, survivors from the Jewish towns and villages in Eastern Europe that Nazis and their local accomplices devastated assembled what are known as *yizker bikher*, memorial books, the originals written in Hebrew or Yiddish. The books contain all that could be remembered about the lives and death of the Jews of the towns, including the history of the town, incidents from everyday life, descriptions of important townspeople, and where available, lists of those murdered by the Germans. Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, both American anthropologists and Jewish Studies professors, mined such books for their *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry*,[5] an edited collection of excerpts from the memorial books and a source for understanding Jewish life in prewar Eastern Europe. They wrote

that, "Survivors felt obligated not only to bear witness to the Nazi destruction but to the world the Nazis sought to destroy."[6] Hundreds of such books have been written and serve as a kind of textual memorial to the dead. The horrifying details of what happened in Tykocin are available from a number of sources. Witness accounts, some of which are quoted here, can be found in *Sefer Tiktin*, the Tykocin memorial book.[7] Ten of the eleven survivor accounts available are written by men, and one by a woman, the sister of one of the men. The account by Isaac Turek, a survivor whom I also quote, was obtained through the generosity of his descendants now living in Australia.[8]

The Jewish witness accounts I rely upon are consistent; they are unsparing in their revelations about local Poles who were known to be virulent antisemites, those who were complicit with the Nazis, those who plundered Jewish property and/or harmed or mistreated Jews or benefitted materially from such acts. Most survivors also relate accounts of Christian Poles who exhibited great concern and cared for them, who hid them, and provided them with food and shelter at great risk to themselves and their families. They were, as described, a small minority. On the other hand, it was also a small minority of locals who collaborated with the Nazis or betrayed their Jewish neighbors to the Nazi occupiers. There were many local gentiles who raided and looted Jewish homes at various times, especially during the early war years, people whom some Tykocin survivors described, perhaps euphemistically, as "hotheaded" youths or "hooligans." Some of the accounts portray these young people as particularly cruel to former Jewish friends and classmates, often seeking retribution for the cooperation they more than likely imagined between Jews and the Russians, the historical enemy of the Poles, during the time the Soviet army occupied Tykocin from 1939 to 1941 prior to Operation Barbarossa.[9]

Similar accounts of Jewish-Russian cooperation were common in many parts of wartime Poland and looked upon as treacherous by the Germans and treasonous by Polish neighbors. Eliezer Olsztajn,[10] one of the surviving Tykocin Jews in hiding after the mass killing, attributed the German targeting of Tykocin Jews in hiding, in particular, and not those from nearby Knyszyn or other places in the area, to Tykocin Jews' purported "cooperation with the Russians." As we shall see later in this chapter, quantitative social scientists Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, the authors of *Intimate Violence*, dismiss such allegations of significant Jewish collaboration with the Soviets on the basis of their study.[11]

Little is or can be written or said about the great majority of Tykocin Christians, the "bystanders," as they were referred to by the renowned Holocaust scholar Raul Hilberg in *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945*.[12] These were people whose desultory inaction during the course of events may just as well have been beneficial as detrimental to their Jewish neighbors. Some of the Christian witnesses who left accounts offered critical information about the way gentiles related to Jews and to the German occupiers during the war, but most provide vague statements without clear detail. Strikingly, Hilberg[13] notes with regard to these helpers of Jews in need that, "they could not explain their motivations." Joanna Tokarska-Bakir of the Polish Academy of Sciences, refers to the widespread know-nothing attitude of many bystanders as an "open secret," where "one knows enough to know that one does not want to know more."[14] Such inaction with regard to the disaster befalling the Jews was hardly just limited to Tykocin or even all of Poland during the war. It was widespread throughout German-occupied Europe.

Many in German-occupied Europe "saw or knew something of the events," and would "with few exceptions" have described

themselves as bystanders. "They were," Hilberg continues, "not 'involved.'"[15] They did nothing to hurt Jews, while at the same time would not risk being hurt themselves. Jews in America and Britain did not, Hilberg observes, consider themselves as bystanders, but felt powerless to do anything to rescue their European co-religionists, "so much so that they became impotent in fact."[16] Tragically, he notes, "the Allied governments," who did have the power, "were not about to go out of their way for the victims."[17] All of this does not in any way excuse the great harm, direct or indirect, that some Poles caused Jews during the war. All it says is that Poles were not exceptional in their callous indifference. We must also remember that Poland had by far the largest Jewish population in Europe, that Jews and Poles lived side by side, face to face in most rural areas and towns in the country, especially in eastern regions, and that the German killing machine was most widespread, most brutal, and most visible to local people in occupied Poland. Poles found themselves in the vortex of the Jewish disaster in ways and in dimensions not experienced by non-Jewish populations in other parts of Europe.

Antisemitism and Antisemitic Violence

In this context it is important to differentiate between antisemitic violence initiated by individuals and groups in local communities during the 1930s and the actions of the Polish state during those years. The Interior Ministry in Warsaw put out a monthly report on antisemitic activities in the country, innocuously titled *Report on Polish Political Movements and the Sociopolitical Life of National Minorities*. The reports, according to historian Anna Bikont "prove incontrovertibly that the Polish state felt responsible for its Jewish citizens,"[18] and that it did what it could to protect them and bring perpetrators to justice. The Church, on the other hand, did what

it could to shield those accused of antisemitic acts during that period. The reports also indicate that Jews were eager to show their loyalty to the state.[19] Bikont emphasizes that the conflict between Polish rightwing nationalists and the Jews did not necessarily spill over into the entire timeworn localized neighborly relations of Jews and Poles. There were, it should be noted, serious conflicts among the Poles themselves, between those moderates in line with Piłsudski who favored a more multiethnic Poland and the diehard ethnic-nationalists.[20] That divide between the ethnic-nationalists and those who favor an ethnically diverse Poland continues to play out to this day in Polish politics. In 1941, during the "interregnum" between the time the Soviets left the eastern parts of the country and the German occupation, the situation, according to Bikont, rapidly turned from bad to worse for the Jews, with "Jews … humiliated and beaten with the help and applause of locals."[21]

Contempt, disdain, and hatred were, however, not a one-way street running from Poles to Jews. Many Jews characterized Poles and other Christians in contemptuous terms. The Yiddish word *goy* did not simply mean gentile; it carried with it loaded, often disdainful, demeaning connotations. It is important to note, however, that what physical violence or destruction of property there was regarding the two communities, with few exceptions only flowed in one direction–from gentile to Jew, from the majority to the minority, from the powerful to the weak and depended upon, whether the dominant perpetrators in Eastern Europe were Russian, Polish, or Ukrainian.[22]

Poland had the largest Jewish population in prewar Europe and was the site of the most infamous German death camps during the war. German efforts to eliminate the Jews of Europe "naturally" centered in Poland. Though a minority, some Poles were complicit in the murder of the Jews alongside the Germans. Others, again a minority, aided and saved the lives of Jews they knew personally or

even those of strangers whom they encountered–at great potential risk to themselves. Almost all were "unwilling witnesses" to the destruction of their Jewish compatriots. Most probably did nothing but observe the horrors perpetrated around them. This might have taken the form of passivity, indifference, or even *schädenfreude*. Under certain circumstances "doing nothing," staying silent, not betraying Jews in hiding to the Germans, could be the best "help" a Pole could give a Jew, and might have involved serious risk. In the end, whether indifferent or not, complicit or not, some Poles were the material beneficiaries of the disappearance of the Jews from their everyday lives.

Antisemitism was historically rife in Poland, as it was in most European societies. According to Polish-Jewish-British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, Jews were "despised but indispensable" elements of those societies.[23] Bauman provides an important insight into the historicity of antisemitism in Europe. He argues that in the premodern world of Europe the hostility of non-Jews was toward Judaism, the religion. In the modern world the thrust of contempt has been directed at Jewishness, that is, at traditional Jewish ways of life as well as the changing place in society of the Jews in modern society, that is, the integration of Jews into European civil society beginning during the Enlightenment in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

This "oldest hatred," whether it be toward Judaism, Jewishness, or full Jewish participation in modern society, is still with us today in many parts of the Western world with varying degrees of vehemence. Antisemitic violence was to be found at different times and in different places throughout the course of European history.[24] But nowhere did antisemitism follow the genocidal, total "eliminationist" path taken by the Nazis in the twentieth century. After the establishment of the Second Polish Republic in 1918, the balance between rulers and ruled, between

majority and minorities shifted in Polish lands. Before that time, Poles were one among many non-Russian, non-Orthodox minorities in the Russian Empire. After 1918 the Poles were the majority and the Jews the most populous minority in the new determinatively ethnic Polish-Catholic nation-state. To the ancient religious-based antisemitism of the long past was added an ethnic-nationalist or racially based antisemitism–a most pernicious modern amalgam.

Antisemitism was widespread during the interwar period, and not just among uneducated people in remote places. It was also common among intellectuals and prominent cultural figures. It was especially prominent in eastern Poland. That maleficent mixture of religion and ethnic-national sentiments continues to exist in varying degrees in segments of Polish society today.[25] Though there are very few Jews living in Poland today much of the country's population, the vast majority of which today is ethnically Polish, was reported in a 2014 study to share various forms of antisemitic opinions.[26] Given the difficulty of defining antisemitism, the situational nature of the beast, and current changes in Polish society especially culminating with the election of a more liberal government in 2023, one must take such across-the-board statements with a bit more than the proverbial grain of salt.

In his *Living in the Land of Ashes*,[27] Konstanty Gebert, Polish-Jewish intellectual and activist, provides a somewhat different perspective on Poland, focusing on deep-going latent aspects of antisemitism in Poland. He characterizes Poland today not as antisemitic *per se*, but as a society where there is a mass *tolerance* of antisemitism. He is referring to the largely non-discursive undercurrent of anti-Jewish prejudice found among many Polish Christians. In his book, Gebert quotes Father Michał Czajkowski, a person who has contributed much to Christian-Jewish dialogue in the country, on the insidious nature

of antisemitism: "it is that which is least visible that is most dangerous: the deep-seated ill-will toward actual and 'political' Jews among quite large segments of society."[28]

However, as Kopstein and Wittenberg argue in *Intimate Violence*, "The baseline assumption of ubiquitous hatred toward Jews does not capture the truth" about Jewish life in Poland.[29] Jews fled central and western Europe in the early modern period and were welcomed *en masse* in Polish society. They stayed for centuries and became an integral part of that society because their lives were better there than elsewhere. Otherwise, they would have picked up and moved once again. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that both good and bad interrelationships were common, and that violence or nascent violence against Jews by Russians and Poles, by both governmental authorities and ordinary people, were a persistent part of Jewish everyday life in past times.

Polish historian, Szymon Datner, was born in Krakow in 1902. He, his wife, and two daughters lived in Białystok during the 1930s where he worked as a teacher. He remained in Białystok during the war, serving as a member of the resistance. In 1941, as a consequence of the German occupation of eastern Poland, the Jews of Białystok, including Datner and his family, were forced to settle in the city's Jewish ghetto. Datner survived the war; his wife and daughters did not. They were murdered in 1943 during the liquidation of the ghetto. After the war, Datner briefly worked at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, but then was dismissed during the anti-Jewish political crisis of 1968. Then, in 1969, in a reversal, he was brought back and appointed director of the Institute, remaining in that position until 1971.

Datner was a specialist on World War II crimes and the Białystok ghetto in particular. His great personal losses and suffering during the war were compounded when he again "suffered the contradictory and often anti-Jewish developments

in postwar Poland."[30] Given his tragic personal experiences during the war and his valuable Holocaust studies, Datner's surprisingly dispassionate description of the behavior of the Poles toward the Jews during the war is worth quoting directly:

> I must stress that 90 percent of those murderous deeds [against Jews] was the work of Germans. … There was a range of different attitudes among the Polish population. Most Poles were passive as regards the fate of the Jews … Polish] passivity I regard as justified in a situation in which every act required heroism.[31]

A similar perspective is voiced in the preface to *Contested Memories* edited by Joshua D. Zimmerman, a volume dealing with the complex and commonly misunderstood relationship between Poles and Jews during the war and its aftermath: "… the general, Jewish perception of the vast majority of Poles as vicious antisemites who willingly aided the Germans in murdering Jews should be abandoned."[32] Its place should be filled by a deeper understanding of the particular historical contexts within which these two peoples related to each other, in this case taking into consideration both the impact of the increasingly deleterious relationship of Jews and Poles during the interwar period, especially in the 1930s, as well as the extreme conditions faced by both peoples under German occupation. Such a nuanced, empathetic understanding of those who have done one or one's people serious harm does not come easily and, sadly, rarely trumps more easily palatable, perduring, and simplistic stereotypes and prejudices.

Increasing Violence against Jews

Violent antisemitic acts did not just begin in 1939 with the German invasion of western Poland or with the invasion and occupation of Soviet-controlled eastern Poland in 1941. The late 1930s was a time of growing antisemitism, particularly in eastern Poland, as the economic situation of the country declined severely and rabid antisemitic speech and outright racist physical and social discrimination against and harm to Jews became officially legitimated as the norm in some European nations, most prominently in neighboring Germany and countries it came to dominate prior to the outbreak of the actual war. Anti-Jewish violence and looting prior to the German invasion of Poland in 1939 broke out on occasion in eastern parts of the country, including Tykocin, as well as in nearby Jedwabne. There was a major wave of anti-Jewish violence between 1935 and 1937 in the Białystok region. By way of example, "In August 1937, sixty-five violent anti-Jewish incidents were noted in [Interior Ministry reports from] the Białystok region."[33] A report from September of the same year, notes a very slight decrease in the numbers of violent incidents though "one feels a significant deepening of hatred toward Jews…"[34] Though the proximate causes of such antisemitic violence appear to have been competing economic conditions and ethno-national aspirations, those particular causes no doubt rested upon an accumulation of centuries-old local antisemitic sentiments. Most often such sentiments were felt but not heard and were benign in result over the long run of history, though at times, spurred by various contingencies, did lead to anti-Jewish violence.

Encouraged by ultranationalists, boycotts of Jewish shops in Tykocin and other towns exacerbated Jewish poverty in the town. The marches and rallies of the ultranationalist *Stronnictwo Narodowe*, the National Party, often morphed into anti-Jewish violence despite the support the Jewish communities in the country had earlier been receiving from on high in the Piłsudski government. The atmosphere in Tykocin was becoming increasingly toxic for Jews. There were pogroms in the town in

1936 and 1938, in which Poles destroyed synagogue property. The *Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities, Poland* describes the anti-Jewish riots or pogroms of 1936 and 1938.[35]

Jan Zimnoch, a local farmer and witness to the wartime events we recently encountered describes the growing antisemitic atmosphere in Tykocin in the 1930s, particularly as fomented by the National Party, in a book he wrote titled *Mój dawny Tykocin* (My Old Tykocin).[36] Zimnoch writes that "the ultra-nationalists fought [*sic*] so hard against the Jews before the war and guard posts were erected on market days by their members to forcibly prevent people from entering Jewish shops and craftsmen's workshops." He describes "gangs of antisemitic youth [who] stoned the synagogue and Jewish homes, causing damage such as broken windows." "There were," he notes, "several beatings of Jews and [some] stupid mischief against Poles who did not support the boycott." But then, "apart from these minor incidents," he continues, "life in Tykocin was moving along calmly, only talk about war was [getting] louder and louder."[37]

Zimnoch noted that money was in very short supply during those years and cites that as the motivation behind the increasingly antisemitic atmosphere poisoning the town during the late 1930s–an ominous, even toxic environment for the town's Jews, though not the causal prelude to their destruction in 1941.[38] Interestingly, Zimnoch's explanation is in accord with Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg's analysis of economic and political factors as spurring violence. Despite the toxic atmosphere in Tykocin, the underlying cause of the mass destruction of the town's Jews during the war was clearly in the hands of the invading Germans.

Russians and Germans in Tykocin

Tensions escalated on September 2, 1939, at the actual start of the war. A small platoon of German soldiers entered Tykocin for the first time and stayed for about three weeks. During that time the Germans rounded up the adult males in the town, both Polish Christian and Jewish and held them captive in the Holy Trinity Church for three days without food or water while they looted Jewish homes and destroyed property at will. They did not touch Christian homes.

On September 24, the Jewish High Holy holiday of Yom Kippur, the Germans withdrew from the town in accordance with the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that had been agreed upon by Nazi Germany and the USSR less than a month earlier. According to the treaty, the Soviet army would occupy the eastern part of Poland, the Germans the west. As they withdrew, the Germans again raided Jewish shops and departed with the booty they collected. Menachem Turek was an attorney and the son of a Jewish family of doctors and other well-educated professionals whose large family home was in the center of town right next to the Jewish marketplace and close to the synagogue. In "Tykocin in Ruins," an account of the war years he wrote for *Sefer Tiktin* Turek tells us that,

> while the Jewish people were congregating in the synagogue for the Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur] evening prayer of "Kol Nidrei," five trucks appeared in town. The soldiers smashed their way with axes into Jewish shops, loading all the looted goods onto their trucks…[39]

Soon after the Germans left, Russian tanks entered and the Jews breathed more freely, welcoming the Russians in the hope that their presence might provide some respite from the German oppression and pillage and the increasingly antisemitic behavior of local Christian Poles at that time. Turek claims that

a pogrom was being organized then by some locals, prevented only by the entry of the Russians. Before the occupation, Eastern European Christians widely stereotyped Jews as Communists and collaborators with the Soviets. For many Polish Christians, Jewish positive sentiment toward the occupying Soviets reinforced that common stereotype. In *Intimate Violence*, Kopstein and Wittenberg argue determinately against "The common non-Jewish perception that most Jews were sympathetic to Communism and supported the Soviet occupation and that most of the collaborators were Jews … is not borne out by the actual facts."[40] The Soviets, on the other hand, did recognize their ability to increase disharmony between the two communities by protecting Jews, and allowed Jewish communities in eastern Poland to live in relative peace and security during their nearly two-year occupation.[41]

On June 22, 1941, the Germans invaded the eastern borderlands of Poland, the area of the country known as *kresy*, then under Soviet occupation, abrogating the Nazi-Soviet pact. In the wake of the invasion, the Soviets retreated in haste from Tykocin and other parts of eastern Poland that they had been occupying since 1939. Four and a half million German troops participated in this massive march of terror, destruction, and murder under the code name Operation Barbarossa. The Germans at first bypassed Tykocin, and during that brief interregnum between Soviet withdrawal and German occupation, some local Poles decided to harass and steal from the town's Jews then under the administration of Mayor Pivik [Pivich], a local ethnic German known to be an outright antisemite. A description of that grim moment can be found in the *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities in Poland*, vol. IV, *Warsaw and its Region*, a community-by-community record of the Holocaust in Poland:

> When the Wehrmacht invaded Soviet territory on 22 June 1941, the Soviet authorities abandoned Tykocin. … The German Army, in its rapid advance, at first bypassed the town, and the local Poles, most of them of the [the right-wing ultra-nationalist] Andak group, exploited the absence of [any] other authority to set up their own local government [administration]. Jan Pivich, an antisemite who had been mayor before the outbreak of war, was appointed mayor, a Polish police [force] was established. For two days the … locals and people from surrounding villages looted whatever was available to steal. At the end of June 1941, a German military government [contingent] arrived in the town. The Jews were ordered to wear a white armband with a Magen David [Star of David] on it. Many Jews were conscripted [in] to forced labor … draining sewer channels, clearing weeds from … field[s], etc., under the supervision of the local Polish police, who abused them as they pleased. … The Polish police forbade any contact between Jews and Poles, so it was impossible to purchase food. The situation became even more serious in July 1941, when refugees arrived from nearby Jedwabne and Wizna; they told of the murder of hundreds of Jews in these towns at the hands of both Germans and Poles.[42]

The Soviet occupation of eastern Poland in 1939 was viewed as disastrous by the Poles, and they directed their animosity both toward the Soviets and what–we now know–they wrongly believed to be their Jewish collaborators and presumed beneficiaries. The repression, arrests, and mass deportations of some Poles to Siberia under Soviet occupation created great resentment as did the ruinous economic impact of the occupation on the poor agricultural regions of eastern Poland. Jewish positive sentiment toward the occupying Soviets, reinforced the common stereotype of the Jewish Communist and collaborator with the Soviets. Along with economic competition, this so-called alliance provided a context for frequent local anti-Jewish retributive actions Poles carried out once the Soviets had retreated and the German army had taken over in June 1941.

Heiko Haumann describes the competition between Jews and Poles, during the economic transformation of Poland in the

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a cause of the antisemitism experienced in Poland during those years–a time when the Poles were fighting for their "national independence."[43] Polonsky holds that Poles often exaggerated Jewish collaboration with the Soviet administration because encountering *any* Jews in governmental positions was so unprecedented. When the Germans returned in the summer of 1941 the Poles of Eastern Europe welcomed the Wehrmacht as a reprieve from the Soviet forces. Such was the hellish vortex of invasion, occupation, and death en masse wrought by Germans, then by Russians, then once again by Germans, in which Tykocin found itself snared during those fateful years.

The Mass Murder of the Jews

The mass killing of the Jews in Tykocin began on August 25, 1941. *Sefer Tiktin* lists sixty-two people who survived the massacre continued on the 26th. Sixty-two out of perhaps two thousand, which if we include Jews from outlying villages who unsuspectingly came to the town, presumably hoping there would be safety in numbers in the larger settlement, as well as Jewish refugees from nearby towns.

In *Sefer Tiktin.* Eliezer Olsztejn, a survivor, describes the atmosphere in the town just before the slaughter.

> The atmosphere was loaded with dynamite and we sensed a certain atmosphere among the Polish population, and the Polish farmers evoked from me only a feeling of threat when we met in the street. Rumor upon … rumor came to our ears and among them it was told that in the Łupochówo forest three significantly large trenches were being dug and our fears grew. It was clear that the Germans were up to something, but no one knew what and no one thought that it was so near.

Then Olsztejn relates the hours leading up to the morning of August 25, 1941:

> The following morning, Sunday … a town edict was promulgated according to which … all the Jews of Tykocin must … meet in the market square the following morning. "Not a soul must leave his home after eight o'clock this evening. Anyone caught outside after that hour will be shot."[44]

On the 25th all those Jews who could walk were marched from the town square to the Łopuchówo forest, some seven kilometers from Tykocin. The elderly, children, and infirm were loaded onto trucks and driven to the death site. In two days almost the whole population of Tykocin and some of its outlying villages were machine-gunned and thrown into the pits that had earlier been prepared by Polish men under German orders. On the 26th Polish police went from door to door turning over to the Germans those Jews who had been left or stayed behind on the previous day, including children.[45] It is important to note that the mass killing of the town's Jews took place far from the eyes of local Christians, although everyone knew what was happening. Publicly gathering the town's Jews in the square in full sight of their Christian fellow townspeople before herding them off in the direction of the forest was, to be sure, a "spectacle of terror," a violent public ritual meant for all eyes in the town. Another such public ritual would take place in the central town square three years later in May 1944. This time it was all adult Christian residents, other than the elderly whom the Germans assembled in the town square and then deported to concentration camps in revenge for the ambush and murder by Polish partisans of the commander of the German gendarmerie in Tykocin. Though over one hundred of the deportees died in the camps, the intention of the Germans when it came to Tykocin's Christian population was not eliminationist; it was a spectacle of revenge.

Jews in Hiding: A Moral and Mortal Dilemma for Local Poles

The few Tykocin Jews who survived the massacre and were on the run from the German army were desperately seeking shelter. Their oftentimes fraught relationships with the local Christian population, with their neighbors and others, were complex, situational, frequently full of contradictions, and were, above all, essential to their survival. Mortal danger was the ever-present environment both for Jews on the run and for their potential Christian helpers. Whether or not local Poles helped or harmed Jews on the run is one measure of an ever-shifting and highly diverse display of Polish humanity, indifference, empathy, hatred, fear, risk avoidance, and risk taking when confronted with Jews asking for their help. Under the highly unstable circumstances of war, it was not unusual for individual Poles to exhibit fluctuating and sometimes inexplicably contradictory combinations of stances and behaviors toward Jews in need. In *Sefer Tiktin*, Jewish survivors describe their encounters with gentile neighbors, some of whom helped them by providing shelter in barns and basements, and other makeshift hideaways, and others who refused to help, or, worse still, informed on them to the Germans.

In the words of historian and Holocaust survivor Szymon Datner, there were "two active groups" among the Poles, the first "made up of those who denounced, robbed, and murdered Jews, the second of those who hid Jews and helped them." This easy dichotomization is highly problematic and far from registering the complexities of everyday wartime realities at either extreme. Despite these distortions, what is interesting about Datner is his insistence that, "the second group [the majority that assisted Jews] was larger and more representative of the Polish population and the Polish resistance." He accuses half of the Polish population of being betrayers and murderers of Jews and lauds the other half as saviors. Neither extreme was true. Many Jews have chosen to portray Poles as betrayers, and Poles are more likely to describe themselves or their predecessors as brave saviors of Jews in need. It is impossible to know with any degree of precision about such attitudes and behaviors in the past, especially under the extraordinary circumstances of war. Datner's account, as well as those of others who were in Poland during the war about proportions or representativeness of events cannot be verified. However, what is not in doubt, is that despite his personal losses and travails as a Jew during the war, Datner clearly understood the dilemmas that many Poles faced in their encounters with Jews in need. In this regard, he poses a question to himself impossible to answer: "Is it your personal opinion that the Poles did their best [during the war]?" In his carefully measured answer he reformulates the situation with more reasonable criteria: "I wouldn't say that [they did their best], but on the question of whether a people should be judged in terms of those who risk their lives for others or in terms of its informers I have no doubt."[46]

Tykocin Holocaust survivor Sharaga Perko describes how he hid in the barn of a Christian neighbor, then stayed for two months in the home of another neighbor, but eventually was asked to leave because the neighbor "feared for his life." Some of his fellow Jews from Tykocin were not so lucky; he writes of villagers discovering Jews hiding in the forest, betraying them to the occupying SS troops, ensuring their certain death.[47] Other accounts I have examined confirm that Christian Poles behaved toward Jews in hiding in diverse, unpredictable, and often contradictory ways. Some refused to help, some helped at certain times and not at others, sheltering Jews for a period, and then, for a variety of reasons, usually fear of German retribution or of betrayal by neighbors, abandoned the Jews under their care to their fate.

By way of example, in his *Sefer Tiktin* witness account Kopel Percowicz from Tykocin relates how a Christian villager, a woman, gave him shelter.[48]

Eliezer (Lazar) Olsztejn, a Tykocin Jew, describes Poles who assisted Jews and those who did not, giving us a description of a full range of behaviors of non-Jews regarding Jews on the run. The account is worth quoting to provide a better understanding of the fate of those in hiding.[49] After Olsztejn's escape from the Białystok ghetto with the help of fellow Tiktiner, Ahron Feller (Peler), whose help was conditional on his taking along his son Yitzhak with them:

> We set off in the evening for Tykocin, heading to a Pole who lived near the [nearby] village of Zawady, where I had many friends. They hid us for five months, and then one of them told me, "As long as I live, no harm will happen to you," and this man saved our lives.[50]

Olsztejn and Feller stayed there for five months and then, when the situation seemed safe again, returned to the Białystok ghetto. At that time many people were not aware of the deadly German plans for the ghetto residents. Soon after their arrival the Germans began removing Jews from the ghetto and packing them into trains headed for Treblinka and certain death. Olsztejn, his brother, Zisskind and Feller and his son were in one of the cars. They and some others were able to pry open the door of the car they were in and jumped as the train was moving along at high speed. Some of the jumpers died in the fall or were shot by the German and Ukrainian train guards. Olsztejn and a group of eight other Jews fled what they described as the "death train," and though some were injured, they all headed into the nearby forest. The Germans followed and hunted down and killed the escapees they were able to catch. Olsztejn, his brother, Feller and his son survived the fall and evaded the soldiers but were unable to return to Tykocin at that time. Olsztejn continues his account:

> After two nights of walking–we hid in the forest during the day–we arrived tired and hungry at a farm about five kilometers from Tykocin. I later learned that the brothers Moshe and Menachem Turek [also from Tykocin] hid in (*sic*) the same farm or maybe nearby. But the Polish farmer threw us out. His neighbor allowed us to stay in his house, but when he saw I was accompanied by my brother and young Feller, he also told us that we had to leave. Nevertheless, he gave us a hot meal. In the end he agreed that we could hide in his barn and promised to bring us a meal every night. … But then [after two or three nights] the farmer stopped coming.[51]

One night when Olsztejn and the Fellers were out looking for potatoes to stave off their hunger they were discovered by a Pole, and they immediately fled, crossing the Narew River by boat and were once again without a safe hiding place. Over the following six weeks they lived a nomadic life, because "no one allowed us to stay in their home, and only a few gave us food. We had nothing left but to sleep in the fields and the forests and in various barns, not knowing who the owners were."[52]

As fate would have it Olsztejn and the Fellers were discovered once again, then fled and continued their wanderings until they were given shelter on a small island on the river by a farmer who took them to his farm near Knyszyn. They sheltered between the farmer's mounds of hay day and night, and every morning the farmer brought them a meal in exchange for the "little money left to me." They survived the winter by digging a shelter and stayed there until liberation. They then made their way to Białystok and from there back "home" to Tykocin.[53] Yitzhak Feller writes that Polish Christians gave him and a few others with him small amounts of food but "were not eager to have us in their homes." Many of the Jews in hiding came to the realization that, under these dire circumstances, they could not rely on their neighbors to provide shelter. When they approached the vicinity of Tykocin on their wanderings, "the Christians whom we knew well, were loath

to welcome us…" Something happened to them and "they were not as they used to be…" writes Yitzhak Feller.[54]

Christians who helped Jews walked a tightrope between the life-threatening dangers of aiding Jews and the increasing antisemitism that was a common backdrop to daily life. Siblings Yona Taivel and Fishl Silverstein, local Jews, survived the massacre because an old woman whose "sympathy and pity were clearly written on her face" sheltered them. They stayed with her for three weeks. While hiding in her home, they overheard conversations among visitors, local gentiles, in the house where they were staying, conversations in which the visitors "greeted the slaughter of the Jewish people [with pleasure] and spoke of Hitler as a savior [sent] by God to destroy the Jews as killers of Christ." The sympathetic old woman both sheltered the young Jewish brother and sister in her house and at the same time provided a willing or perhaps reluctant ear–we will never know–to the malevolent antisemitic words of the Christian neighbors gathered under her roof.

The Parish Priest

Local parish priests, teachers, and other members of the local elite were in a position to play critical roles in influencing local sentiments, either enflaming or curbing antisemitic violence. It seems that Father Kaczyński, the Tykocin parish priest during the war, played a little-known role in preventing the kind of murderous anti-Jewish violence carried out by Christian townspeople that took place in nearby Jedwabne. During the week between the re-entry of the Germans in Tykocin in mid-August of 1941 and the mass killing on August 25 and 26, a meeting of Jewish community leaders about the increasingly alarming situation was held at the home of local Rabbi Ab'eleh. The

community leaders had contacted Menachem's brother, Avraham Turek, the priest's physician, and asked that he pay a visit to Father Kaczyński, inquiring about whether he knew anything about what might happen to them. Terrible rumors were circulating at the time. Everyone was extremely distressed. Turek did so, and then joined the meeting, explaining that the priest, "burst into tears and expressed his sorrow at what was befalling the Jews and [said] he identified with the suffering of the Jewish people but stated that he knew nothing concerning what was happening, and that if he knew he would tell us."[55]

Sometime after the mass killings, a local Jew, Abraham Yablonovich, overheard Father Kaczyński tell his rescuer, a local, unnamed Polish farmer, that he, the farmer, need not be concerned about Jews wandering around the farms in the area stealing food because, "thefts like that which were committed by people hiding for their lives and stealing only to survive were permitted."[56] This implies that Father Kaczyński was aware of another open secret–that Jews were taking shelter with some of his parishioners. He did not reveal the food thefts to the occupying Germans. In many of the towns in the area and elsewhere, Polish Christians who hid or otherwise aided Jews put their lives and those of their families at risk, and in many cases they faced threats and harsh, sometimes deadly, reprisals from antisemitic Polish neighbors. Even after the war many of those who helped Jews in Poland were afraid to make their humane acts public for fear of retribution from some neighbors.[57]

Four-Hundred and Nineteen Years

There is no rational way of making sense of the disaster that befell the Jews of Tykocin. The slaughter of August 25 and 26, 1941, was a defining moment in the history of Tykocin, like a guillotine

hurtling down and bringing an abrupt end to over four hundred years of Jewish existence in the town. August 1941 not only brought about the demise of the Jewish community of Tykocin after 419 years of existence, but also meant the end of inter-communal life in the town, the sudden cessation of what over the centuries had become an intimate, local, daily encounter between two peoples, Jews and gentiles, whose daily lives were inseparably intertwined with each other yet in so many ways fundamentally separate. The deadly events of August 1941 irrevocably destroyed the Jewish community of Tykocin and in the process left an historically "unnatural" abyss in the lives of the Polish Christian community.

The various ways in which gentiles, both locals and those visiting from other parts of Poland and the many visiting Jews of various religious and lifestyle persuasions and nationalities, today portray the Jewish past in Tykocin cannot be understood without first trying to understand what happened in the years up to and including August 1941. Those ostensibly past events are a current counterpoint to so much of what transpires in today's Tykocin, indeed to the very identity of the town. For most local Poles silence and incuriosity reign; but there are those exceptional individuals who have made a special effort to rediscover the Jewish past for posterity. I was fortunate to befriend one such family and I will introduce them later in the book. Though there is not a single Jew living in Tykocin today, for Jews the present-day identity of the town is intimately bound up with its Jewish past and with the ways in which that past is publicly imagined and presented.

As we have seen, the crimes against the Jews of Tykocin perpetuated by the invading Germans opened the door to a wide range of responses on the part of the local Polish Christian population, from the most honorable to the most despicable. It is impossible to know with any certainty the true nature of

local Polish attitudes and predilections regarding the fate of their Jewish neighbors under German occupation. Their responses and behavior toward Jews were varied, situational, often spur of the moment, and frequently shifted depending upon numerous unpredictable events. As we have seen, in the 1930s there was a strong current of antisemitism in the town, as was true elsewhere in Poland, and indeed in Europe in general. Even presuming that antisemitic attitudes could be measured in some meaningful way, we do not know the extent to which anti-Jewish attitudes of various degrees correlated with the way and the circumstances under which local gentiles *actually related* to their Jewish neighbors during the war years, especially those in dire need. Nor can we know with any certainty the actual extent of Polish participation, direct or indirect, in the German atrocities. And now, eighty or more years after the fact the carriers of virtually all firsthand memories are gone.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, chartered in 1980 by an act of Congress, understood that witness testimony to the Holocaust would die out soon and sought to capture those testimonies in a wide-ranging series of interviews. One interviewee, Polish Christian Wacław Białowarczuk, was an active participant in and witness to events in Tykocin during the war, and was honored as "Righteous Among the Nations" for his and his wife's role in sheltering a Jewish girl in their home toward the end of the war. We shall return to Białowarczuk and the little Jewish girl in some detail in Chapter VI. Białowarczuk was interviewed about his experiences and observations in 1998. The interviewer asked him about how the Polish population in Tykocin reacted to the slaughter of the Jews in 1941. He summarized Białowarczuk's statement as follows:

> The reaction was typical of relations between Jews and Poles. He said it was a difficult question to answer. If one wants to find

> hate, one will find it. If one wants to find love, one will find it. He warns against generalizations. He says that the Poles he knew were shocked and troubled by the murder. But there were Poles who were happy that the Jews were liquidated.[58]

Professor Feliks Tych, former director of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw and author of *The Long Shadow of the Holocaust* (1999), attempted to quantify attitudes and actions of Polish gentile vis-à-vis the Jews during the war. Tych claims, based on his reading of hundreds of wartime diaries, that at least ten percent of the Polish population tried to help Jews in various ways, that a majority regarded the atrocities with indifference, and that twenty to thirty percent were quietly pleased that the Germans were taking care of their "Jewish problem."[59] It is difficult to collaborate such figures when the complex, often contradictory behaviors of the people under concern are so difficult to fit into the simple categories used and assigned frequencies.

In *Contested Memories*, Joshua D. Zimmerman makes reference to historian Teresa Prekerowa's careful research on the highly controversial issue of the extent of Polish aide to Jews during the war.[60] Zimmerman refers to Prekerowa's estimation that perhaps up to "2.5 percent of Poles provided safe haven to Jews fleeing Nazi persecution."[61] Prekerowa's argues that the low percentage was "typical for the whole of Nazi-occupied Europe."[62] Who is right about the numbers of Poles who helped Jews, Tych or Prekerowa? We know that there is a fundamental problem with quantifying such elusive, frequently unwitnessed behaviors. Might we conclude that somewhere between two and ten percent of Christian Poles helped Jews survive during the war?

What is clear is that in Tykocin, a majority of Christian Poles were bystanders in various capacities. Given the highly asymmetrical power differential between a few poorly armed locals, the Wehrmacht, and the *Einsatzkommando*s, locals did not dare raise arms against German forces and help Jews escape the town square en masse, nor did they try to stop the Germans. Such quixotic efforts would have been met with the perpetuators' immediate slaughter. Some, under German orders, dug the trenches in the forest in which the murdered Jews of the town were to be inhumed. As far as we know, the Poles were sent away after the trenches were ready, and the killing was done by the Germans as they wanted no witnesses to their crimes. When townspeople heard the persistent rat-tat-tat of machine-guns firing in the distance, they could not but understand what had befallen their Jewish neighbors.

As bystanders to the Nazi horrors, most Christians in Tykocin and in places like it had committed no crimes per se. Yet, as witnesses to the horrors committed in their town, they were unintentionally burdened with what Michael C. Steinlauf has referred to as a "moral trap," a treacherous location from which they could not, and perhaps even their descendants still cannot, easily escape.[63] They are condemned by many Jews today as indifferent to Jewish suffering if they did not do *something* to aid their Jewish neighbors such as hiding survivors who came to them for help, yet they risked their lives and their "standing" among antisemitic neighbors if they sheltered them. Poland is not the only nation that has suffered from such a moral trap–the events of the Holocaust and the fraught decisions of individuals and nations about whether to come to the aide of Jews fleeing certain death implicated people throughout Europe.

Millions of Poles were victims of the war. They perceive themselves as victims. To this day some Poles feel victimized in a double sense: they feel victimized by the war, but also by the Holocaust which played out in their midst, and in the eyes of the world overshadowed their own great suffering and losses during the war. Given the great non-Jewish Polish losses during the war,

some Polish gentiles even blame the Jews for "upstaging" them in a so-called Polish-Jewish competition in martyrdom.

Many Christian Poles chose not to relate their own stories, even to younger family members when asked about what happened, what they witnessed, during the war. Their stark silence is revealing. Joanna Auron-Górska,[64] one of a handful of Jews living in Białystok today, writes about the disconnect one senses "… when elderly Poles talk about the Shoah" and how "… they speak with a terrifying, eerie detachment." The accounts of the elderly Tykociners interviewed by French-Jewish filmmaker Frédéric Brenner in his documentary about the Tykocin *Purimspiel*, the mock Purim play that we shall discuss, are typically rather distanced, anodyne, and bleached of meaningful detail. Those who witnessed the horrors of 1941 clearly did not want to engage themselves emotionally in what really happened, if indeed they were willing and able to remember the events of those fateful two days when the Jews were murdered as well as the time leading up to the event. Their reticent accounts often contradict what the Jewish survivors relate in agonizing detail. According to Auron-Górska, local "Poles did not want to remember or acknowledge" their role in defacing the monuments of Jewish life once the Jews were gone, such as their ransacking and destruction of the interior of the synagogue and the *besmedresh* next to it.[65]

Looting was commonplace in Tykocin, as we have seen, even to some extent before the Germans arrived in June 1941. There were at least two pogroms in the town during the 1930s. During the war Germans began to sell goods they seized from Jews to Poles, placing them in the hands of a municipal shop run by locals. Wacław Białowarczuk, refers to these events in his 1998 USHMM interview.[66]

The Jews are Gone, their Possessions Survive

When the war was over, Jewish survivor Menachem Turek, coming out of hiding, describes how "Our first destination was Białystok and after a short stay with a number of other Tykocin survivors we returned to the town of our birth." He then had the following to say about the state of Jewish property at that time:

> There was property in every Polish home in Tykocin. Some of the Jewish people had placed their trust in the Poles and deposited their property with them, while the major portion of the property had been stolen after the slaughter. The Poles were worried about us because they recognized that if Polish Jewish survivors–or any anonymous Jewish survivor of the Holocaust–returned to Tykocin then they would have to return all the stolen property to the rightful owners.[67]

Local families acquired Jewish goods and property from the looters themselves, from the local shop, from other townspeople–even though some or many of those who acquired the goods may not have done any looting themselves. Many of their descendants are still living with those goods and in those erstwhile Jewish homes, the property now linguistically domesticated as "*pożydowski*" [post-Jewish].

Frédéric Brenner's film about the Tykocin *Purimspiel*, begins with interviews he conducted with four elderly women in their homes, all of them witnesses to the tragedy of 1941. The interviewees attribute all the evil deeds of the time to the Germans. When asked about their participation in or memory of events their answers are conveyed in the passive voice, in a vague tone, or are related in the third person: "The Jews were gone," when asked about what happened to the Jews when one of the interviewees returned to the town soon after the massacre or "by order of the Germans" when it came to their possible responsibility for actions Poles in retrospect do not wish to have

directly attributed to them, or by blaming the victims with words like "the Jews brought the disaster upon themselves."[68]

Here is the way an elderly Christian woman, who returned with her mother to Tykocin from Russia sometime soon after the slaughter of the Jews in 1941, described her arrival:

> When we arrived from Russia in Tykocin with mom, everything seemed strange. The city was empty. The Jews were gone. Certain houses had been looted *by order of the Germans*. They had told the people with bad houses to take the Jewish houses. Life … changes. *A Jewish woman told my mother before the war about a terrible malediction that had rested on her people.*[69]

We know that many Poles, particularly those coming in from nearby villages after the massacre, took over deserted Jewish homes in Tykocin. By order of the Germans, as they claim? Or with German encouragement and support? The elderly woman seems to see the process as the replacement of "bad" gentile homes with "good" formerly Jewish ones as a kind of gift coming from the Germans. In this way locals were also improving the quality of their lives. "Life changes," says the old lady–two vacuous words brushing away the dire consequences of a face-to-face world that had been shattered, but now significantly improved for Polish survivors. The woman is telling us in her way that it was the Germans who ordered the Poles to loot and occupy Jewish houses, and she implies that the slaughter by the Germans was done in retribution for something stemming from the malediction the Jewish woman had purportedly related to her mother, the consequence of a great offense committed by Jews. Could that offense have been the "killing" of Christ over two thousand years ago? The gist of the matter was that she would like to believe that the Jews had brought the disaster upon themselves and that the Polish beneficiaries of Jewish wealth were, in consequence, getting a boost in life thanks to the Germans.

In the same film, another Polish woman describes "the day after" as she entered Tykocin from a nearby village:

> The next day, I went into town. It was deserted. The people were terrified. How could the Germans have committed this crime? They took so many people and assassinated them. The stores were closed. It was like an empty ruin. So many had disappeared. Fifteen hundred people were no longer there.[70]

Still another elderly woman focuses on the perennial theme of Polish suffering as the Jews of the town were disappearing:

> They [the Germans] took them [the Jews]. The Polish [people] did not really live through all of this well, for they thought that they would soon be next. [That] they would beat [*sic*] the Polish [people] as they did the Jews. Then it was terrible, a desert, as all of Tykocin was dead. Very few survived. That is all I know.[71]

"That is all I know" was an aphorism frequently repeated by many witnesses who proffered few words when asked about what they had seen or done during the war. Was that indeed *all* she knew, all that the many terse witnesses to the tragedy knew? Very likely not. That could be the case whether those "witnesses" were implicated in harmful acts against Jews or were just unwilling witnesses to the antisemitic violence that took place in the town before and during the war or were material beneficiaries of the possessions of murdered Jews, all of them caught in the moral trap of those times.

Stanisława Andruszkiewicz, then a soft-spoken seventy-seven-year-old woman, was very forthright when the USHMM interviewed her in 1988. Born in July 1921, she was twenty years old when the Germans occupied Tykocin in the summer of 1941. She first described an idyllic relationship with her Jewish neighbors who had an abundantly stocked store nearby where customers "could buy anything." The neighbors were friends, and she refers to their good relationships. She emphasized the point by adding that, "It didn't make any difference if one was a Jew or

not," whether that was really true or not, or just a whitewash. Mrs. Andruszkiewicz's Jewish neighbors were shopkeepers. They had three daughters, all a bit older than her; one was married and had moved away. Unexpectedly, she admitted that she was in town when the Germans assembled and marched the Jews to their death. The interviewer explicitly asked if she saw the Germans take the Jews away from the square. "We were afraid to look," she said. "Who would have looked? We were afraid even to take a peek," perhaps as a way of freeing herself of the moral burden of being a reluctant witness. She did say that she heard the music that the Jews were forced to play on their death march, music coming from what she believed was an accordion. She then said that she was just a young girl at the time, was scared, and like most people "didn't go out in the street. Everyone was afraid; even of the way they [the Germans] looked at us."

Then, abruptly, Mrs. Andruszkiewicz changed her account and told the interviewer, "I saw them being led away." The interviewer asked whether she recognized any of the people on the march. "We knew everybody," she replied. When asked, she said that she knew nothing about the killing in the forest ("Nobody knew where they were being taken.") and had never been there since that time. When asked if Jews were killed in the forest, her reply was "probably." She was unsure, she said: "I don't know. People say they [the Germans] killed them." The interviewer does not press the point, and Mrs. Andruszkiewicz does not elaborate.[72] These details about the way many people dealt with or coped with the things they saw or did are very valuable as indicators of the mindset of these Polish witnesses, but so often the actual details of their experience are absent.

In 1941, after the mass murder of the town's Jews, the Germans rounded up Mrs. Andruszkiewicz and a number of other young gentile girls and women from the town. They were deported

to Germany to work as forced laborers. Mrs. Andruszkiewicz worked as a farmhand until the end of the war, returning to Tykocin in 1945, walking much of the way back, as she described her journey home. The interviewer asked her if there were any Jews in the town when she got back. "I don't really know whether there was anybody here," was her evasive response. Then, hesitatingly, with a bit more clarity, she told the interviewer, "I think there was nobody here."[73]

I keep thinking about "the day after" in Tykocin. Whole families walked out of their homes one day and never returned, only their possessions remaining, as if those objects were somehow waiting expectantly for the family to come back and for life to begin once again. The Jewish shops still had some goods in them, but their owners were gone. Soon, they would be devoid of goods as well. There was nothing for sale in the silenced town, and almost no one to sell anything to. All the goods in the shops–the material accumulation of Jewish labor–just sat there for the taking. Even for those who may have been hostile to the Jews and wished them ill, it must have been traumatic to witness their sudden demise, to see half of their town gone in a matter of two days, to know that the familiar faces of so many neighbors would be gone forever, to experience the deathly silence of the Tykocin Jews, with whom, for better or worse, they and their ancestors had been living, sharing the same public space, for over four hundred years. Mourning the death of his two children in 1834, the German poet Friedrich Rückert composed poems giving expressions to his great loss. The poems provided the lyrics for Gustav Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* song cycle (1901-1904), one song of which is titled, "I often think they have only stepped out." It may have been that over one hundred years later in places like Tykocin some locals thought the same of their Jewish neighbors who one day left and just never came back.

A Pole from the town of Ryki near Warsaw, a man known to be sympathetic to the Jews and who helped many of them during the war, had the following to say to a Jew from his town who visited soon after the war and subsequently related the conversation about the aftermath of the massacre–and the man's guilt and regret–in that town's Memorial Book:

> It's so strange, isn't it? To live in such a town where one still feels and sees each day everything these people [the Jews] built with their own hands, and which they had to leave behind, and … not a single one of them is left. … Who could have imagined it? I could have done a great deal more, I could have hidden more Jews. … We were so terrified that we became apathetic, we calmly watched the Jews being tortured, watched them being taken away to be slaughtered.[74]

A lethal mix of terror, apathy, and a kind of moral paralysis reigned in Polish lands. But there is also the avaricious and rapacious side of the disappearance of the Jews. Historians Jan T. Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross describe in their eponymous book what they call a "golden harvest" for locals who plundered Jewish homes and shops. Jewish goods disappeared and then emerged in the possession of gentile families, families who were almost certainly aware of their Jewish provenance. In reference to a town in Ukraine where Jews once lived, a local describes the intense distress many felt when, as quoted in *Golden Harvest*, "one day we wake up in our town and we are dressed in Jewish clothes."[75] The same people sat on Jews' chairs, eating at their tables, and drinking from their glasses, while their children were playing with their former Jewish neighbors' "kids' things." As Gross and Grudzińska-Gross describe it, "The takeover of Jewish property was so widespread in occupied Poland that it called for the emergence of rules determining distribution," as was the case in Tykocin.[76] In the small towns, the shtetls, everyone, even those who may not have benefitted, had to have known about this

unholy plunder that today is remembered in silence. Tykocin was no exception.

Menachem Turek has the following to say about some of his gentile neighbors in Tykocin:

> Sadly, among the mobs [of looters in Tykocin] were many residents of Tykocin and the surroundings that [*sic*] were, or had been for generations, on good terms with the Jewish community not only for business reasons but also on a basis of friendly good-neighborliness.[77]

Eliezer Olsztejn describes the situation after the slaughter of August 1941 in his contribution to *Sefer Tiktin*:

> Whatever was left of value from the Jewish homes was piled in the center of the town … other articles and furniture that still had some value was [*sic*] distributed among the police and local officials or auctioned off at public sales for nominal sums. Wooden homes were dismantled and the timber sold to local farmers for pennies, stone buildings were razed … the pews, tables, the large entrance-doors, the Bema [*sic*] and the Holy Ark [of the synagogue] were all plundered and used as kindling.[78]

We know nothing about the numbers of looters in Tykocin. At a certain point, numbers no longer matter. What difference does it make if there were ten looters, or twenty, or forty, or more out of a gentile population of two thousand? In all cases, what happened at the local level was not a series of *individual* acts. These were collective events, events silently sanctioned by many and from which many benefitted materially and perhaps socially as well. How many participants or silent supporters must there have been for the looting, beatings, and murders to have cast a long shadow over the whole town?

Marzena is in her late twenties and from Białystok. Her mother originally comes from a village near Tykocin. I asked her about local people's attitudes toward what happened in Poland during the war and her answer spoke to the moral dilemma she

and so many others must have experienced. "The older generation is *very* closed about that; they don't want to discuss the past. It makes them feel very small," she opined. She said that one of her grandparents was taken prisoner by the Russians and spent time in a camp. She accuses her grandmother of being "A Big Liar" about what happened during the war. At pains to dissociate herself from her grandmother, and from the common litany of denial, she felt compelled to repeat the accusation to me several times. "Grandma would start to talk about the war, and then when I would ask her something, she'd abort the conversation with, 'That's it, I don't know any more than that.'" Her grandmother's response can be understood within what Émile Durkheim famously called the *conscience collective*, translated into English variously as collective consciousness or collective conscience. As applied to Tykocin's Christian Poles, even though individuals and only individuals may be charged as looters, widespread looting in such an environment must be seen as part and parcel of shared though largely unarticulated norms of local society and is legitimated by them. The social foundation of individual choice plays an inordinate role in sustaining this moral structure.

There was also looting that took place earlier, during the interregnum between the Russian departure on June 22, 1941, in response to the German invasion of eastern Poland and the arrival of the Germans in late June 1941. The fact that the looters in Tykocin were locally known faces must have shocked their Jewish neighbors. Abraham Yablonovich, one of the survivors who left an account of his return, describes the feeling he had at that time: "It was as if the entire population rose up against the Jewish community…"[79] The framing, "as if" speaks to an awareness of the elusive *conscience collective* of Tykocin. Yablonovich describes violence instigated by farmers from surrounding villages as well as some members of "the local intelligentsia," who were

"breaking into homes, pillaging." Yona Taivel and Fishl Silverstein, brother and sister survivors, tell us that few in the town "dared to oppose the rioters." Taivel and Silverstein's home was pillaged by individuals whom they reveal by name in their account. Since everybody knew pretty much everybody else in town, the looters, they tell us, "hid their faces behind masks" and then "stole whatever came to hand."[80]

Ironically, the silence of some Poles in the face of their knowledge of Jews in hiding with other townspeople after the massacre could be interpreted as a life-saving action. In *Sefer Tiktin*, Eliezer Olszteyn describes that "golden" silence protecting him and others on the run, which he contrasts with the behavior of informers: "In fact our very lives were dependent on the silence of the Poles among whom we hid ourselves… We lived in perpetual fear of an informer."[81]

Writing about the antisemitic acts in the towns of the region during the war, Jan T. Gross notes that:

> In each case the experience was intimate, violent, and profitable. It took place at the interface of Polish-Jewish relations, on the lower rungs of society, and it was insular. … Who got what of the "formerly Jewish property" is very well known in each little town and hamlet even today.[82]

Gross writes about the mass murder of the Jews of nearby Jedwabne not by the Germans but by their Polish neighbors in his, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, which, when it first came out in Polish in 2000, shook the society to its roots and was severely criticized by many for its unflinching accusations leveled against Poles. Gross has the following to say about the *ultimate* responsibility for the massacre: "… had Jedwabne not been occupied by the Germans, the Jews of Jedwabne would not have been murdered by their neighbors."[83]

The murder of the Jews of Tykocin is often compared with what took place in the neighboring town of Jedwabne. When I interviewed Father Stefeniak, the parish priest in Tykocin, he wanted to know why it was that so many people, largely Jews he meant, focus on what happened in Jedwabne as seemingly emblematic of what happened to Jews in small towns in Poland during the war, why they focus, that is, on Poles as the murderers. Two towns, more or less the same size, similar in many ways and only forty-five kilometers apart. Many Poles, like the Tykocin priest, are disturbed by the way in which the role of the Poles in Jedwabne in the murder of the Jews is so frequently brought up with little awareness that some few elements of the Christian population in Tykocin (and by extension, other places) may have been complicit with the Nazi crimes in some ways, but, to the best of our knowledge, the townspeople did not participate along with the Germans in the slaughter of the Jewish population. We shall return to this issue in greater detail in Chapter VI.[84]

The Store Manager

Beginning soon after the massacre of the town's Jews in August 1941, Wacław Białowarczuk, a local schoolteacher, began working as a bookkeeper and store manager for the Germans, keeping track of and selling looted Jewish property in German hands. In his USHMM testimony, he indicates that he was able to convince the Germans to allow him to open and operate a store to sell off the Jewish property kept in storage at the church presbytery. In another version of the story, it is the local municipal authority under orders of the Germans who set up the store, which the Germans referred to as a *Stadtgeschäft*, literally an "urban enterprise," and recruited Białowarczuk to run it. The Germans insisted, it seems, it be located in the presbytery. The presbytery

store was, in any case, under the oversight of the local municipal administration. In an interview recorded in 2001 and published in the *Bulletin of the Institute of National Remembrance* in 2006 titled "Jesteś na mojej drodze…" Białowarczuk describes the situation as follows: "After the Holocaust [August 1941] the Germans convened a group of people who brought household goods and clothes from Jewish homes to the warehouses. Later these items were sold and the money obtained was transferred to the *Amtskommisariat* [municipal office]."[85] Apparently, valuables as well as ordinary household goods were taken to the store in exchange for cash. In addition, some of the looters, he said, were uncomfortable with what they believed to be "tainted" money, though apparently not uncomfortable enough not to play their part in the collection and sale of the goods they had looted.

"The store bought agricultural produce from eleven villages . . . The peasants brought the produce, we bought it and took it to a warehouse. Cars came and took it all away–dairy, honey, and wool." He said that he "moved a lot of money," in that way. There was a "Nur für Deutsche" (For Germans Only) section in the store. "A huge enterprise," he said, though we have no way of knowing its actual dimensions. He had a monthly turnover of up to 100,000 marks, at a time when a laborer's monthly wage was only 30-40 marks. "I kept none of it for myself," he felt obliged to claim. In addition, the store sold luxury goods which could not be sold legally on the "market." Such goods were much more profitable than the ordinary loot sold. A younger brother worked a route from Białystok to Warsaw, bringing in goods such as contraband cigarettes for sale. "He brought me 10,000 packs of [cigarettes]. It was a sensation in Tykocin," Białowarczuk claimed. He also sold some of the cigarettes in Białystok and did not hesitate to note that "my situation was very good."[86]

Białowarczuk managed the store until the end of the war. He said that he surreptitiously sent off some of the income to the Polish Home Army (*Armia Krajowa,* the resistance). The presbytery soon became a center of undercover activity. We must remember that that is where, for a time, both Father Kaczyński and Lt. Phillip Schweiger and his wife were living, along with the parish priest, Julian Łosiewski (whose code name was Sybirak), and a second vicar, Czesław Bruliński (under the code name Oskar), all of whom were involved in various underground activities.[87] Lt. Schweiger did not know Polish, and Father Kaczyński often interpreted for him in his dealings with the local public.[88] Schweiger was a Catholic and "daily contact quickly turned us into friends," Kaczyński revealed. Schweiger was eager to follow the news from the front, and he and Father Kaczyński (and perhaps the others) listened to the BBC London together. Following the news, "we [Schweiger and Kaczyński] drank coffee together and engaged in lengthy discussions." Interestingly, their private conversations led Kaczyński to realize that Schweiger was "not a supporter of Hitler," as he put it.[89] After the presbytery was reorganized as a *Stadtgeschäft,* Białowarczuk notes that that was when "my intelligence activities began in earnest." "It was," he continued, "the perfect place to meet and exchange information without any suspicion." Thus, the rectory at the church served as headquarters for the local Polish underground, he claims. Ironically, "it all started with Jewish property." While Father Kaczyński was an active member of the Home Army, Białowarczuk was, he claimed, not *actually* a member. In his beclouded words: "I did not belong; [but] I cooperated with them."[90] Some of the underground activities may have taken place with the knowledge or even the tacit support of the sympathetic German commander Lt. Schweiger.

Białowarczuk explains that there was no formal accounting done at the store selling looted Jewish goods; the inventory was, as he put it, not "known exactly," which certainly opens the door to the possibility of all sorts of unaccountable transactions, such as those he said he undertook with some of the proceeds of the sales. The concern of most buyers, he continues in his USHMM testimony,[91] was to obtain some sort of documentation confirming their "ownership" of the goods they had purchased. It seems that buyers of Jewish goods, so soon after the demise of their owners, were especially concerned to assume some sort of formal ownership of what they knew was not long ago someone else's property. It is not clear how the Jewish property was priced. Plunder had been widespread in the town. The Germans announced that robbing former Jewish homes would be punishable by the death penalty; "but," Białowarczuk noted, "they had the death penalty for everything, so nobody cared about it." In any case, he notes "The Germans themselves did not care much about the looting." Indeed, this way or that, the Germans themselves had a material interest in the loot. Nearly three-quarters of erstwhile Jewish homes were plundered, according to Białowarczuk's testimony, and the shop he ran sold about a quarter of those stolen goods, he claims. It appears that the overwhelming majority of looted goods never passed through the store at all and were disposed of by the looters in other ways. The proportions given here must be taken as rough approximations only.

Early on in his USHMM testimony, Białowarczuk is highly critical of locals who looted Jewish homes. However, he seems not to have been concerned about being in charge of the sale and distribution of abandoned or looted Jewish goods. Perhaps that was because the former owners of the looted goods were all presumed dead, and because, at the same time, Białowarczuk was aiding the Home Army with some of the proceeds of the sale. In

1992, Białowarczuk and his wife were recognized as Righteous Among the Nations by the Israeli government. A complex man he was, living in terrible times in a world shaken to its roots.

Very likely, it was because of Białowarczuk's clandestine relationships with certain sympathetic Germans such as Lt. Schweiger, or with others who could be bought off, that he was able to get away with actions which otherwise would easily have been punishable by death. He had no compunctions about bribing the Germans when necessary. This is what he had to say about "taking care" of a member of the gendarmerie who was snooping in his garden, which he suspected might have had to do with Marysia, the Jewish girl he was looking after: "He was 'in my pocket.' I don't care how much it costs [to keep her safe]." "Where did I get the money?" he asks rhetorically. He had the perfect answer: "I had a nose [for such things]."[92]

Białowarczuk then provided an example of one of the ways he earned money in support of his political activities. The story he tells–and it cannot be corroborated as such–is that one day he was staking out a railway siding in Białystok, hoping to find a profitable opportunity. Examining some uncoupled cars on the tracks he caught sight of a car loaded with a large shipment of yeast, and asked a railway worker who happened to be there if he knew who the owner of the shipment was. He did not know. Białowarczuk immediately jumped at the chance and made the worker a proposition: "Sell me the shipment, you must surely be the owner," he proposed. The worker was taken aback: "But that's stealing!" he said. "And who doesn't steal these days," quipped Białowarczuk. The worker quickly got over his compunctions and asked Białowarczuk how much he would pay him per kilo. The going rate apparently was 2.7 marks per kilo, and Białowarczuk offered five. A deal was made. Białowarczuk told the worker to unload 300 kilos onto the platform, which he then arranged to have shipped to Tykocin, probably by truck, since there is no rail line to the town. He knew there would be a great demand for the yeast, which in those days was used for making contraband liquor. He also knew that homemakers would buy some of the yeast for making dough, probably with a little extra thrown in for a home brew.[93]

When the shipment arrived in Tykocin and was up for sale at his store, "The traffic was tremendous. Everyone rushed to the store, and I had a lot of fun taunting the Germans," who were very likely taken care of. "My job," presumably with the Polish underground was, he said, "to know everything, to gather information–and I don't regret the bribes." He offered another example of his way of dealing with threats. One day he was approached by an officer of the local gendarmerie [there is no name given, but it might have been Lt. Schweiger] who visited the store and wanted to get a nice Christmas gift for his wife. "What can I find here?" the officer asked. "No worry!" was Białowarczuk's accommodating reply. "So I wrapped up a really fine gift–and it didn't cost him a penny!" As a result of that "favor," the German "kept no secrets from me…" "This is," he noted was, "my duty toward the [underground] organization and the Polish state."[94]

Białowarczuk writes that he and his wife were able to escape the 1944 roundup and deportation by bribing two military policemen, one of whom hid him in his home at the time. Here we have a man the Jews of his time would have called a *gonster macher*, a real operator. Here was a man able to appease the German occupiers, make a little money on the side, save himself and his wife, assist the Polish underground, and shelter a little girl with a dangerously problematic identity, while spending his days from 1941 to 1944 selling the possessions of his former Jewish neighbors as well as other contraband goods such as stolen yeast right under the Germans' noses.

After the war, someone asked Białowarczuk how he managed to survive the Russian occupation of Tykocin between 1939 and 1941. "They treated people terribly," he said–very likely referring to the Christians of the town. Overall, Jews had better relations with the Russians, whom, he states, hyperbolically, "greeted them with flowers" when they first entered the town. His reply to the question is exemplary of the instrumental way in which he and others were able to deal with the occupiers, both the Russians and the Germans. "I survived," he said, "because I believed they were stupider than I was. It sounds a bit ugly, but it was *I* who took care of all of these things; it was all because of my cunning, trickery, and intelligence."[95] In his USHMM testimony Białowarczuk claims that the reason he was not turned over to the Germans for keeping what at that time he knew to be a Jewish girl was that he was "highly respected" by his neighbors. He certainly was a man to reckon with. Perhaps his neighbors saw no good reason to betray him and endanger his and his wife's lives and that of Marysia. Perhaps they were a bit wary of him and his many dealings and connections. His maneuvering between the Home Army and the Germans was certainly a notable feat. Elsewhere in his testimony, he implies that the Germans themselves "knew" that the girl he was sheltering was Jewish. Under such circumstances, what shall we think of the Germans who seemed to have looked the other way? Could it also have been because the Germans had more important things to tend to than a little Jewish girl, especially during the dark days of what came to increasingly appear like an impending defeat?

There is no certainty that Białowarczuk's testimony is true. It is very likely that he was presenting himself as he wished to be remembered. But one thing is sure, and that is that there was no clear black and white during those murky days of war and that his self-interested actions, perhaps *in extremis*, were representative of the wartime norm. Not everyone had the unabashed daring of Wacław Białowarczuk, but many did, or were capable of doing most anything to ensure their own and their family's safety, well-being, and survival. Such was the state of wartime morality. Stealing, whether done by Jews in acts of desperation while on the run, or by Christians in theft of Jewish property, or bribery and such, were all excusable means toward the most important goal in the midst of such close-up warfare: staying alive. Is this instrumental, situational morality in any way a measure of who a person really is, or, in the larger sense, of who a people really are? Do we, the bystanders to history looking back from the security of the present, know how we would have acted under such cruel, trying circumstances, circumstances which tested everyone's moral and ethical grounding? It is important to evaluate people's actions during that time not in terms of deeply embedded rigid stereotypes that so many carry about Jews or Poles, but rather attempt to view them within the total psychological and social context in which they operated, recognizing the twists and turns of both intention and action.

Aborted Returns

"To the Germans went the guilt and the crime; to us the keys and the cashbox," were the mordant words of the Polish literary critic Kazimierz Wyka at the end of the war.[96] This quotation describes quite well the experience recounted in the most thorough local account of the attempted return of surviving Tykocin Jews, that of Menachem Turek. His is a familiar tale that confronted almost all returnees to Polish towns. Some of the survivors were met with joy, some with regret, some with hostility, and some even with violence–after all they had been through during the war. Many of the accounts describe the murderous antisemitic

acts of Polish partisans after the war. Only a handful of Jewish survivors returned to Tykocin after the war. As far as we know, their neighbors did not attack them, but still, they would not or could not stay. There was nothing left of Jewish Tykocin, and they understood that they were not wanted there. Mordechai Brener relates his return:

> My first stop after coming out of the bunker [where he had been hiding] was Tykocin. When I arrived at my hometown, I found in it only dust and ashes. We were a group of survivors from the Holocaust every one of whom had left his hiding-place and rushed to Tykocin. For upwards of five months we remained in our hometown where we had spent most of the years of our youth and now we are forced to see its ruins and stand on its grave while the tearful voices of our brethren, our parents and children call out to us from the earth…[97]

Eliezer Choroszucha describes in *Sefer Tiktin* how many young Jews were worried that after the Russian army retreated, locals would "seek revenge for what they saw as the deprivation and discrimination they received at the hands of the Soviets and their Jewish helpers."[98] This was a brutal theme in the eastern regions of Poland the Russians had occupied between 1939 and 1941, and was only exacerbated by first the Sovietization of Polish society after the war. Surviving Jews, if they had a wish to return to Tykocin, were quickly disabused of that desire.

Yitzhak Peler (Feller) had the following to say in *Sefer Tiktin* about his return after liberation:

> We arrived in the vicinity of Tykocin, so well-known to us, but the Christians, whom we knew well, were loath to welcome us; they were not as they used to be and were reluctant to have us enter their homes. The most they would do–and that only rarely–was give us a little food and send us on our way. We hid at the farm of a Pole we knew, near Stemachowo, for eight days. A Christian named Kałnyowski kept us at his farm for three weeks but would not agree to more.[99]

So, there were those who closed their doors to the few returning Jews, and some who provided them with temporary shelter. There was no longer any danger from Germans, but there was the concern that the righteous acts of gentiles might attract the ire of some neighbors. And at the same time, surviving Jews began to consider a new possibility opening to them: emigration to the British Mandate of Palestine.

Abraham Kapica describes his return and the atmosphere in Tykocin after liberation:

> On … 27th July 1944 the town was liberated by the Russians. … Two weeks later we returned to Tykocin, the city of my birth. … Where our house once stood was now an empty lot. What had been my uncle's house was still standing. A Polish family was living there. We evicted them and settled in. Very slowly fourteen survivors of Tykocin returned and settled in… We were there for about six months. … But the levy upon us of suffering and wandering had not yet been fulfilled. The Polish Nationalists, who were opposed to the Russian authority, hid out in the forests and busied themselves mainly with murdering Jews. … [R]umors of pogroms against Jews came to our ears. In Tykocin there was a murder when Bella Białistotsky, a young Jewess from Białystok who had hidden during the war in the Tykocin area, was shot on her doorstep. She was taken to the doctor but died from her wounds. In our hearts the awareness took root that again we needed to continue our wanderings… This time only one destination came into our minds–the Land of Israel.[100]

By leaving Poland and settling in Palestine–or in America, as did some survivors–the provenance of the former homes of Jews began to fade from official records. In the late 1940s, a "Liquidation Committee Bureau," a Polish government body in charge of managing former Jewish property, maintained documents indicating the address, size, and condition of buildings under its jurisdiction. In one such document obtained from the State Archive in Białystok, very few of the former Jewish owners

of the properties are listed. In place of a name in the column indicating "Previous Owner," the most common entries are "Jew is dead" (*Żyd nie żyje*) or "Jewish owner gone" (*Żydowski właściciel wyjechał*). In most cases, the name of the current (Polish) owner is listed.[101] Over the years, the unsettling memories associated with Jews' material goods and property have faded to the point at which it is today impossible to identify the provenance of once looted goods in Tykocin–especially as the generation of witnesses ceases to exist. Firsthand Jewish memories attached to these possessions have disappeared with the demise or departure of their owners.

Once the threshold of a Jewish home, the mezuzah is now missing.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes that in general, such "… *material companions* to a life are valued for their continuity."[102] The objects of Jewish provenance remaining in Tykocin homes are, to the contrary, valued for what they do *not* reveal–for their purported *discontinuity*. For Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, family objects, "material companions" as she calls them, often serve as "talking points" for families. But what if such objects, Jewish objects now in the hands of non-Jews, were points of silence, points repelling thought, unsettling points of forgetting? The Tykocin synagogue was later refurbished in part with various religious and other ceremonial objects collected here and there in an effort to evoke the synagogue's past. It is not clear whether visitors know that the objects in the display cases are replacements and were not originally in the synagogue in Tykocin. The original items have vanished from sight and from the public record. The museum maintains a collection of ordinary household objects, mostly china and cutlery, presumably from former Jewish homes, in its storeroom with no indication of their provenance.

For a Jew visiting Tykocin today, everything in the town is colored by the disaster that befell its Jewish community. The only thing one can do is try and understand what happened and memorialize those now gone. Both Jews and local Christians do so in their own distinctive ways, replete with the lacunae, distortions, evasions, and reconstructions that inevitably emerge as people, bound by present-day interests and mindset, try to construct the past.

III

REMEMBERING POLAND'S JEWS

POLIN

One of the most engaging and informative stops in Poland on my first visit in 2014 was the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, located in Warsaw. I returned to the museum frequently in the years to come. The permanent exhibition and the library there have been important sources for my work and have provided essential guidelines for my peregrinations in Poland. A second key stop was the once "very Jewish" city of Białystok, located only thirty kilometers from Tykocin, a place I visited numerous times over the course of the years I spent working on my Tykocin project.

POLIN was officially opened in 2014 in the old Jewish neighborhood of Muranów, which, in 1940 under the Nazis, became the site of the Warsaw Ghetto. The museum stands on one of the most emblematic sites of the destruction and resistance of Jews during World War II, its doors facing the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. The museum tells a long story, taking the visitor through seven historical periods and showing how Jews lived in Polish lands over the centuries, often in harmony, sometimes in conflict, living in both separate and common worlds with Polish gentiles.[1] Curator, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes the museum as a kind of "theater of history"[2]: "Walking through the exhibition is like walking through the various acts and scenes in a play laid out one after the other."[3] The museum succeeds in foregrounding a portrait of Jews as they *lived* in Polish society, in constant commerce with Polish Christians for a millennium, and it treats the war years largely as an aberration in that common history. The museum navigates the disputatious terrain of Polish-Jewish historical memory, reminding us of the many ways there are of looking at the past. POLIN is neither just a Jewish or Holocaust museum, nor is it a presentation of a narrowly focused Polish nationalist perspective on the issues. A number of Polish intellectuals and others have raised serious critical concerns about the perspective of the museum, particularly with regard to the ways it does or does not deal sufficiently with the nature and extent of antisemitism in Poland over the centuries.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett described the bold project of the POLIN museum to me as a "museum of life," as a venue for describing how Jews lived in Poland as an integral part of Polish society for almost one thousand years, instead of perpetuating the commonly held saturnine trope of "Poland as a Jewish graveyard."[4] POLIN is not a museum of the Holocaust, telling the story of how Jews were murdered during the Second World War. Instead, the museum makes a determined point to reject a presentation of Jewish history in Poland as the story of a millennium of rising antisemitism culminating in the total destruction of a people. She and the other curators have made the greatest effort to put Jews back into the *lived* history of Poland as one among many *active* players in that ever-changing world. As she puts it, "… this is Polish history through the lens of the Jewish *experience*, a view from the margin, a way to recover the historical diversity of Poland–a history of Poland that is not a national history…"[5]

This way of thinking about the Jewish historical experience in Polish society not only focuses on Jews in Poland as an ethnic group, but most emphatically, on the very nature of the Polish society in which Jews were an essential component. Focusing on the Jew in this way is a key to understanding Polish society past and present, symbolically pointing to such Polish virtues of the past (and, for many, hopefully of the future) as multiculturalism and inter-ethnic, interfaith tolerance–a counterpoint to the Catholic ethno-nationalism that had, until the election of 2023, dominated post-Communist, mono-ethnic Poland.[6] For many young philosemitic Poles, being "Jewish" today in this all-engaging, socially reconstructive sense is "in"–in like klezmer music, in like a young singer, a Christian, whom we will encounter in Chapter V singing old Jewish songs in Yiddish at the Tykocin synagogue, songs she has memorized but cannot understand.

The POLIN museum invites the visitor to engage in a "constructive engagement" with Polish-Jewish history, fostering a "critical reflection" on central human issues. Jews are presented in all their ever-changing diversity over the centuries: as pious, rebellious, exploited, exploiter, isolated, integrated, poor, rich, cherished, feared, and as bringing Poland luck, good or bad, or both at the same time. Jews are presented as they are engaged with their Christian neighbors in locales where they and their Christian counterparts were integral components of the same world.[7] The museum queries simplistic, timeworn stereotypes of Jews, placing them in their historical context without foregrounding the overworked lachrymose view of Jewish history. This approach, focusing on the Jews of *Polish society*, seeks to engage the visitor with the now-lost diversity of Poland and invites viewers to connect with an imagined, more multicultural Poland.

Polish Sociologist Geneviève Zubrzycki provides an instructive analysis of the current quest for diversity in Poland that underpins the thrust of the museum's work. She argues in "Problematizing the 'Jewish Turn'" that the interest in Jews and Judaism in Poland today on the part of liberal intellectuals is part and parcel of their wish, somehow, to restore the lost diversity of prewar Poland in today's society.[8] That is, at best, a symbolic gesture. Though the number of Jews or potential Jews in the "new Poland" is very small and unlikely to grow significantly it may, given its once central place in Polish society, have a disproportionate impact on today's and the future society. Whether Poland, in contrast to its European neighbors, will be able to absorb the great numbers of non-Jewish, non-European refugees who wish to make that society their home as an alternative to a Jewish-based diversity remains problematic at best. In any case, today's Muslim or other non-European migrants and refugees are not yesterday's Jews.

Polish History and the Holocaust

Polish-born American Salo Wittmayer Baron, one of the great twentieth-century historians of the Jewish people, argues that the Holocaust should not be viewed as part of the thousand-year Jewish history in Polish lands but as part of the history of the Second World War, the exception rather than the rule. The disaster that befell the Jews in Poland, he maintains, would never have happened if there had not been the war. As for the argument that antisemitic violence in historical Polish lands was a precursor and a prelude to the Holocaust in some teleological sense, Kirshenblatt-Gimblet reminds us of the realities of Jewish life in the past. "Polish Jews became the largest community in the world and a center of the Jewish world," she argues. "This could not have happened had the history of Polish Jews been an unmitigated story of antisemitism."[9]

That said, some Jewish and Polish scholars have strongly objected to a primary focus on the benign ways in which Poles related to Jews throughout their common history. Some of the most virulent criticisms directed at the curators of POLIN came from such individuals, given clear voice at a conference held at Princeton University in 2015 on the subject of the museum on the eve of its official opening. The POLIN curators refer to a so-called "Golden Age" for Jews in Polish lands prior to the nineteenth century, and repeat what critics believe to be a false mantra, "one-thousand years and five years." The critics hold that this narrative of downplaying antisemitism in Polish history, of what they refer to as a whitewashing of Polish-Jewish history, forsaking the truth, and in the end towing the government line, distorts the history of Jews in Polish lands. This downplaying of antisemitism, they argue, "allows us to feel good about ourselves," with "… the posthumous inclusion of Jews in an idyllic picture, painted by a Polish majority,

where Poles and Jews lived together, an idyll that was interrupted by an alien force [the Germans], to everyone's despair."[10]

I do not see the museum as locked into such a rosy portrait of Jewish life in the Polish past. The POLIN museum has been able to raise uncomfortable and often painful issues in the history of Poland in a way that has left much leeway for varying interpretations and stances regarding the ways these two peoples related to each other over the centuries. At the end of my first visit to the museum, I had coffee with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. She asked me what I thought of the way the core exhibition was presented. I told her that I was very impressed because the way it was done allowed visitors with different backgrounds and different agendas to find paths of understanding of their own as they proceed through the exhibitions. The museum provided both summary perspectives on issues and detailed information for those interested in an examination of the issues in more depth. I told Barbara that to my mind the exhibitions were such that they allowed multiple interpretations of the materials presented. It is difficult to satisfy everyone when it comes to the often-contentious issues concerning Jews and Poles throughout history, and especially during the Second World War. It is difficult to take into account the myriad ways in which the shifting political climate in Poland and the larger world color our perspectives on Jews and Christians in Polish lands. I have visited POLIN many times over the years, and each time I come away with new and challenging perspectives on the issues presented. The museum is a living thing and the keeper of a world of multiple and shifting pasts, a keeper that makes diverse often conflictual interpretations of the way things were purported to be possible, a perspective especially worthy of support.

Anna†: Polish *and* Jewish

Anna was working at the POLIN Museum as a librarian, guide, researcher, and gracious greeter of visitors when I first met her there in 2015. She is tall, blue-eyed, and blond–one would not think she was Jewish at first glance. Anna's mother is Jewish and her father Catholic. She identifies as a Jew, but her strikingly "non-Jewish" looks create a disjuncture for many people. Anna† says that some Jews, especially Israelis she has welcomed to the museum, refuse to believe that she is Jewish. One Israeli had the gall, she said, to ask her to prove her Jewishness by speaking a few words of Hebrew. "Does one have to speak Hebrew to be a Jew? I don't observe the holidays either, except for the big ones, but so what?" she protested. Anna told me that on one occasion a group of young Israelis tried to enter the building through the staff entrance. She happened to be there with her staff ID pinned on her and told them that they had to enter via the main entrance. As she explained it to me, one of them became so indignant at being blocked by some looking so unlike a Jew as the "gatekeeper" in a Jewish museum that he spat at her.

When I first met her, Anna was a Ph.D. student in history, working at the inquiries desk in the library and research section. I needed to look something up and asked her about access to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. I also asked if she could help me with some genealogical research. Anna invited me over to a nearby computer and we started the genealogical work. We did not get very far. I had covered most of the relevant records earlier on my own computer, to no avail. Anna checked the Warsaw funeral records for information about my father's mother, who was born in Warsaw. But again, we could find nothing. She suggested that I speak with people at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. I followed her advice and did apply to them later, with some genealogical success. I explained to Anna that my main purpose was not genealogical

in any case, that I was actually interested in learning more about Tykocin, the town where my maternal grandmother was born. My grandmother's own story was, as I saw it, one small part of a bigger picture. Her story would, I hoped, be my *entré*, my link, to the story of Tykocin and how the town's Jews of yore are now presented to visitors.

With the genealogical work at an impasse, Anna and I began to talk about the museum itself. The main point she made–emphatically, at that–and which was an unspoken though common understanding at the museum, is that Poles are people like any other people, some good, some bad, not all incorrigible antisemites. For centuries Poland had been a refuge for Jews fleeing from western and central parts of Europe. As Anna was talking, I could not help but think about whether she was able to maintain such a balanced position because she herself was a person in-between–part Jewish and part Christian Pole.

When I met with Anna a second time on a later visit, she was working as a liaison between the Jewish Historical Institute and POLIN, helping Jewish visitors with family connections to Poland put together their genealogies. I asked her about her work. In describing her role, she kept referring to the untenable position she found herself in having to explain to visiting Jews that there is more to Poland than antisemitism. She described a typical meeting with American Jews who wanted to talk about the country. The first thing they ask is, inevitably, "Tell us about antisemitism in Poland today." "Is that it?" she would wonder. "Nothing else about Poland?" With such a frame of mind it is so difficult to discuss the fact that Poles also died in large numbers during the war, that the Polish people, Polish Christians that is, also suffered greatly. Hard as that may be for non-Poles to comprehend and accept, many Poles feel that the overwhelming attention given to Jewish suffering during the war has robbed them of public recognition of

their enormous suffering. The suffering of Polish Jews and Polish Christians is incomparable. The measure of that suffering is most often expressed in numbers, larger or smaller actual numbers or proportions. For most people the immediacy of their personal or communal experiences with suffering, whether a part of large or small numbers of sufferers or victims, takes emotional and cognitive precedence over abstract, faceless numbers.

Visitors often asked Anna why she would want to live in a place like Poland. "This is my home, my country, where I'm from, that's why!" she would insist. "Could they understand that one could love one's country despite the many bad things some people there had done in the past, or even were still doing. Surely, most people in the world love their country, even when aware of histories of terrible misdeeds committed in its name. Is Poland the only antisemitic place in the world?" She continued: "Why are some Jews so attracted to Berlin and not uncomfortable with Germans now, yet have a hard time in Poland or with Poles, and couldn't even think of living here?" I have come across this way of pushing back against the all-too-common accusations of antisemitism in Poland from many Polish gentiles as well. Father Stefaniak, the Tykocin parish priest, was one of many Christian Poles who wonder why so many people almost reflexively pick Poland as the locus when they think of antisemitism, despite deep-going traditions of antisemitism in many European societies, and when it was, with some exceptions, the Germans not the Poles who annihilated the Jews in that country.

Anna continued, bemoaning her dilemma, "We're caught in-between. It's so stressful. I sometimes think we need therapy or some kind of group sessions to deal with this." While museum visitors demeaned or questioned her for not looking like an "authentic" Jew, she has also suffered from being seen *as* a Jew. "I was in Stockholm with a group of Polish Jews. I was wearing

a sweatshirt with a Star of David on it. A Swedish guy comes over and spits at me. I was shocked. We were all shocked. We didn't know what to do." Stereotyping and assault run in the same direction. Jews, like the Israeli visitors to the museum, are prey to this narrow vision of who a Jew is. Many of those like Anna who identify as Jews in Poland come from mixed heritage, offentimes with the father being Jewish. The Swede's attack pointedly reminded the Polish Jewish group that antisemitism is not just found in Poland and is not just a thing of the past–even in so-called progressive societies like Sweden.[11] Her experience at POLIN revealed the negative undercurrent from which many Jews view Poles. Polish Jews like Anna complicate a popular narrative that places Polish Jewry firmly in the past. Anna complicates both the expectations of some non-Polish Jews as well as gentiles and is living proof that antisemitic assault continues to harm European Jews.[12]

Where are the Dead Jews of Białystok?

The Białystok train station is of late nineteenth-century vintage. My grandmother and great-aunt, and their brothers preceding them, had set off from the very same station in the years before the First World War. The Kurlander children traversed Europe east to west, making their way to Atlantic ports and from there to America along with a flood of emigrants like themselves. Over one hundred years later, I am in Białystok, a city that existed only in distant family memory. Grandmother Ida more frequently said she came from Białystok than from Tiktin, probably because it was a better-known place. Białystok in my childhood mind was the home of the *bialy*, the cousin of the bagel, a city consigned to my grandmother's tales and to my appetizing-fed imagination as I went shopping along with her, hand-in-hand, in the bustling

open-air, old-world market on Bathgate Avenue in the Bronx she frequented with its Eastern European Jewish vendors selling Old World Jewish comestibles. The market had its own very distinctive smells and sounds, with its hawkers crying in Yiddish-inflected English and its boisterous crowds of Jews, most of whom came to New York from faraway places in the Russian-Jewish Pale. I associated that world in my mind with grandmother's Białystok.

When I visited Poland in 1966 on a trip through Eastern Europe on my return from Turkey, where I had been serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer, I hadn't given any thought to seeing Białystok, and certainly not to Tykocin. At that time, I didn't even know the proper Polish name of the town. Why visit Białystok? As far as I was concerned, all of the Jews of Białystok had either moved to America or been killed by the Germans. Much later I learned that there are only a handful of Jews left in Białystok today, and most of those are of mixed descent. At that time, I was of the "Poland-is-a-Jewish-graveyard" persuasion, and the focal point of my trip back into my Jewish past was Auschwitz, then thinking that it was in such death camps that almost all Jewish lives ended, including those in grandmother's Tiktin. Years later, I was to learn from Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands* that that was not the way the Jews from the many small places in Eastern Europe like Tykocin met their fate during the early years of the war. They were mass murdered by machine gun closed to home.

The central square of Białystok was restored by the Polish government after the war: "Partly recreated, partly reimagined buildings of different ages conjure up the atmosphere of an old seat of the Polish aristocracy on the narrow triangular marketplace… The rest of the city, also largely destroyed during the war, is filled with drab, characterless postwar Soviet-style buildings, consistent with the [*sic*] guidelines from the Soviet Union,"[13] an architectural misfortune to be found in all of the former Iron Curtain countries.

With a total population of 62,993 in 1895, Białystok was almost seventy-five percent Jewish. By 1912 the total population of the city had risen to 98,700, 77 percent of which was Jewish. After the Russian invasion and occupation of the city in 1939, the population of the city surged to an astounding 400,000, of which it is estimated that about seventy percent was Jewish, most of the new residents being Jews fleeing from western Poland after the German occupation of that part of the country.[14]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Białystok was a burgeoning industrial center, a textile city, one of the major industrial centers in the newly industrializing western regions of what was then the Russian Empire, absorbing thousands of migrants, largely Jewish, from the countryside. Today the city comes across as a rather low-energy place. Little seems to be happening there. It is hard to imagine its prewar diversity and economic and social dynamism. What a radically different place Białystok would have been today had its Jews, the economic and cultural engine of the city, not fled or been murdered.

Prewar Białystok was a lively cosmopolitan city, the meeting place of a confluence of cultures and peoples: not just Jews and Poles, but also Germans, Lithuanians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Russians, even Tatars, and Armenians. The city was multicultural, but that did not mean that relationships between the various ethnicities were necessarily harmonious. Beginning in the late nineteenth century in particular, antisemitic violence was on the rise in the city, as were various nationalist and social class movements. Perhaps the most striking act of anti-Jewish violence in Białystok was the pogrom of 1906, provoked by the Russian authorities, during which more than eighty Jews were killed. During the interwar period growing ethnic hatred and antisemitism was fomented by far-right politicians in Białystok and other parts of the country. The German invasion of eastern Poland

Remains of the dome of the once Great Białystok Synagogue.

in 1941 radically affected the intensity of antisemitic acts by local Poles. On June 27, 1941, the Germans, having occupied the city, forced hundreds of Jews into the main synagogue of the city and set the building alight. Almost all those inside died. On that day alone upwards of 2,000 Jews lost their lives. In late July, early August 1941, the German SS rounded up approximately 50,000 Jews from Białystok and the surroundings and confined them to a newly established ghetto. The ghetto was liquidated in 1943 and the survivors transported to their death in the Treblinka and Majdanek camps. Today, there is a monument to the destruction of the synagogue on the site. It is built next to the bare steel ribbing of the synagogue dome resting awkwardly on the ground, the only surviving fragment of the synagogue, located just off a main street of the city in the courtyard of a neglected 1970s apartment building, a secluded, unnoticed remembrance of a vanished temple and its vanquished community. Standing in the courtyard, I kept thinking about those families whose balconies overlook the twisted ribbing of the synagogue dome. What do they see? What do they know?

Joanna Auron-Górska, a Jewish Cultural Studies scholar from Białystok, compared the absence of the Jews in Tykocin and Białystok: "Today it is as if Jews had never existed in Białystok; there is virtually nothing visual left with which to remember the city's Jews, let alone to memorialize them." One has to make a special effort to locate the few remnants of Jewish existence in back streets and alleyways. The old cemeteries near the center of the city are now the sites of parks or paved over as parking lots. The only significant Jewish presence in the city is a large nineteenth-century cemetery at the edge of the city, now frequently subject to vandalism. In Tykocin one cannot forget the Jewish presence, with its monumental synagogue right in the center of the town, while many young residents of Białystok do not even know that it was largely a Jewish city before the war. It is not possible *not* to know that in Tykocin. The centrally located Tykocin synagogue is now a museum of remembrance of the Jewish past, though what exactly is "remembered" by whom is open to serious question.

Wanda†, POLIN Staff Member

Wanda was a young staff member at the POLIN museum when I talked with her in 2015. She was writing a Ph.D. dissertation at Warsaw University on what she referred to as the "memoralization" of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in postwar Polish thinking, looking at "turning points" in the ways in which the uprising has been viewed over the years. She and I got together in the education section of the museum where she works. When I first met her, Wanda was working with Polish schoolchildren, bringing them together with the few remaining Holocaust survivors she could locate, or meeting with Israeli students and others. She is deeply committed to what the museum stands for: the reinsertion in Polish memory of the long and complex

Jewish experience in that society, the experience for Jews *and* for Christians she emphasizes.

Wanda attended primary school in the former ghetto neighborhood where the museum is located, but when she was a student there in the late eighties and early nineties, there was, she said, just silence about everything Jewish. "We were in a school in the old ghetto, and we were told nothing," she told me, "Nothing." "My school window looked out onto the *Umschlagplatz* (the place where Jews to be taken off to the Treblinka death camp were assembled), if you can imagine, and we knew nothing of what happened there." She then described some of the important changes in Polish society since 1989: "My [then] eight-year-old nephew knows so much about Jewish history and Jews in Poland. He learns about it in school, and he is curious about things Jewish." She continued, elaborating: "He and his class already came twice to the museum. The museum holds about one thousand workshops a year with students. The other day he asked me what my favorite Jewish holiday was." Before she was able to answer, she said he excitedly exclaimed, "Mine is Hanukkah." "There is now," she told me, "great interest and fascination with this Jewish past and culture among many young people in Poland."

Wanda thinks of the museum as a progressive project in "social engineering." As she described it, "The museum is a reflection of the time in which we live. We are changing what is remembered. Of course, the people who come to the museum are sympathetic to begin with." She told me that she was very uncomfortable with a sign "Welcome to the Museum of Life" displayed at the entrance to the museum at one time. "This is not the *place of life*. We are in the old ghetto after all. Many people died here and then you think, maybe this is really too much, maybe the publicity goes too far." She also was critical of another poster on the street just outside of the museum showing a girl saying

that she wanted to take her boyfriend to the museum because "I wanted to show it to some boy I'm in love with." Exasperated, she concluded by telling me that "This is really too much for me. Sometimes I think we treat Jewish history in too light a way." Her unease with the museum presentation of the Jewish past in Poland echoes many of the critiques put forth at the 2015 Princeton conference on POLIN.

Wanda† told me that Polish society is very fearful, that that fear is very intense, very palpable. "Fear of what?" I asked. "Now of immigrants. People don't want them here. Polish society was afraid after the war, then afraid again after Communism, and now once again afraid after having lived a better life since 1989. They're afraid of losing what they have gained." That, I believe, largely remains true.

The first two decades of the twenty-first century brought with it anxiety about the "purity" of Polish culture. Underlying that anxiety about the impact of the alien cultures of non-European immigrants, mostly refugees, is the historical fragility of the Polish state, besieged since the eighteenth century by Prussians, Russians, Austro-Hungarians, then again by Germans, Soviet Russians, and finally by local communists under Soviet direction, only re-establishing itself as a viable, autonomous state since 1989. Poles often see themselves as a pure, virtuous, self-sacrificing people, now sadly defamed in association with the German invaders of their lands who wished to enslave the Polish people and settle Germans there in their search for *Lebensraum*, in addition to obliterating the country's Jews. Now there is the threat of an invasion by non-European refugees fleeing political and economic disaster. It must be noted, Poland got good marks for its hearty welcoming of refugees of similar Slavic stock from neighboring Ukraine during the early years of the war. That open-door welcoming largely did not open the way for non-European, non-Christian refugees who would have wished to settle in Poland.

About three million Christian Poles were killed during the Second World War, a figure that Poles frequently cite. "Poles see themselves as heroic, loyal and blindly trusting to a fault," anthropologist Jack Kugelmass argues,[15] and as victims of their more powerful neighbors. They are even seen by some as victims of the Jewish victims of the Nazis who have captured worldwide sympathy for their suffering at the expense of what they believe a fair recognition of the immense suffering of Christian Poles.

Lucy, Guardian of Białystok's (Dead) Jews

I first met Lucy Lisowska in Białystok in 2015. I had asked friends if they could connect me with a knowledgeable person from the local Jewish community who might serve as a guide in the Białystok area. Born of a Jewish mother and a Polish Catholic father, Lucy describes herself as a Pole first, a Jew second. She made a point of telling me that her family name on her mother's side was Gold. Lucy is very proud to be a Pole. In many ways, she is a living example of high Polish altruism. I asked her how many Jews there were in Białystok. "Five officially registered," she said. "Not even enough for a minion. No synagogue." "Just five?" I asked. "There are, no doubt, more people who are part Jewish, but if they don't come out and say so and make a claim we can't know."

Lucy has a mission. She was in her mid-sixties when I met her, a cancer survivor, a lone fighter in what she describes as a hostile world. As *the* prominent and only outspoken Jew in Białystok she has, on occasion, been threatened by local antisemites. At one point she was so afraid that for a period of two years she travelled around the city only by car. Then she began to get support from the local police department and from the mayor. Lucy is extraordinarily devoted to her mission. She grins impishly when she repeats her mantra: "I just have to do it. That's all. I'll

finish up. There's so much more to do," she tells me. "When I was very sick, I thought maybe *He* will look kindly on me. *He* doesn't need me, but the dead do."

Lucy has devoted herself, among other things, to restoring the Jewish cemeteries of Białystok, especially the huge nineteenth-century cemetery built on the outskirts of the city at the apogee of Jewish presence in Białystok. Cemetery restoration engenders a torrent of sweat and tears. Most of the hard physical labor is done during the summers by young international volunteers: Israelis, Germans (whom she describes as "especially determined to do something"), French, Americans, and others. Lifting the fallen gravestones, piecing them together, cementing them, gilding the inscriptions and decorative elements is backbreaking work. The Białystok cemetery is vast and much remains to be done. "But I'll finish the job," she assures me (and herself as well in the process).

Lucy thrives on the recognition she gets and the invitations to conferences and meetings the world over she receives. After all, she is *the* representative of the hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of Białystok Jews whose bones are interred there, and, it seems, of the bones of all of the Jews of that part of Poland. While sitting with her at a café in Białystok, Lucy got a phone call from someone in the nearby town of Orla where there once was a significant Jewish community and a beautiful synagogue. Workers had encountered some old bones which they presumed to be Jewish at a construction site, and the local authorities wanted to know if they could have them reinterred in Białystok. "Białystok? Why don't you inter them right there in Orla?" she exclaimed. After a lengthy back-and-forth, the other party seemed finally to give in to her insistent pleading. Continuing after the phone conversation, "Orla is where they should be," Lucy informed me. That was that. Lucy does not just fix cemeteries but is also an indefatigable public speaker and spokesperson for Jewish culture, and an organizer of conferences, meetings, and festivals about Jewish life in Poland. She was the organizer of the annual Białystok Jewish festival for years. I attended a festival along with her one year. The main square in the town was jam-packed with people of all ages. There were speakers, there was food, and there was a klezmer band playing, set up on a platform right in the center of the festivities, old and young dancing to the music, each in their own ways. I asked about the band–they were very good–and was told that all the players were Christian. A well-dressed old man who looked a bit mentally unbalanced was gyrating to the rhythm of the music, doing an odd dance of his very own right up front just below the platform. No one seemed to be paying any attention to him except me.

Officially, Lucy was the representative of the Jewish Community of Warsaw for the Białystok and Podlasie region. But since there are just a handful of living Jews in Białystok she is more a representative and caretaker of the innumerable dead Jews of the city. Given the numbers resting in the soil in Białystok, hers is an enormous task. In addition to restoring broken cemeteries or remembering the dead and organizing the annual festival, she also served as an advocate for their rights in places where cemetery plots have been turned into parks or parking lots or have been buried under modern buildings. Whenever bones are found on a construction site or other location, they call Lucy about what to do with them. And in such cases, she arranges for a proper reburial with a rabbi. A Sisyphean task. The number of desecrated cemeteries in the region is daunting. With the Jews no longer there, during the war the Germans took the opportunity to smash innumerable tombstones, as did local vandals during and after the war. Vandalism still occurs today, as we shall see. At one time after the war, local contractors would often break up tombstones for use in building construction or for roads.

The location of the major Jewish cemetery in Białystok was set by late nineteenth-century Russian imperial regulations stipulating that the dead of all faiths were to be interred outside the city limits. As we entered the cemetery grounds, Lucy told me that she was worried about what kind of desecration she might find that day. "It happens all the time," she lamented. Sure enough, there was paint splattered on a few of the tombstones close to the entrance. Two tombstones that had earlier been reconstructed were now smashed and lying in ruins. There was paint on another, an iron cross on yet another. A never-ending, remorseless battle with antisemitic hatred. In this respect she expressed little faith in the people of the country she said she loves and is so proud of. Too many bones, too much destruction, such a seemingly thankless task. Yet Lucy persists.

Some days later Lucy sent me a newspaper article dating from September 30, 2015, about a Białystok City Council decision to permit the building of a high-rise apartment building in place of a meat production plant that had been constructed during the Communist period on what was once a Jewish cemetery. At the Council meeting one member argued that there were six cemeteries in the center of the city: "If we want to protect them, it would be impossible to build anything [in the city]."[16] Lucy understands the argument for the building but wishes to protect the cemetery, and is torn between being a Pole and being a Jew, between Polish law and Jewish religious precepts: "I respect Polish law because it is my law, but there is still our religious law, which does not allow exhumations, doesn't permit the violation of [the] peace of the dead."

This is more than an issue of law. It is true that there are so many Jews buried in the soil of Białystok that it would be difficult to build in many places in the city if Lucy's criteria were to be applied. The owners of the disputed property in question claim that the cemetery was desacralized in 1964 with the permission of the Jewish community. What were the circumstances of the decision taken in 1964 under Communist rule when there were virtually no Jews left in Białystok to voice their opinion? Was Lucy right in citing Jewish law and tradition in this situation? "We are in Poland, not Israel," one of the council members insisted. "That remark was hurtful," Lucy told me. But she did not escalate the disagreement, and in the end the city council voted to build over the cemetery.

How do Jews Fit in Today?

Since the war, Poland has, for the first time in its history, become a state bereft of its once extensive minorities, a state overwhelmingly just Polish Catholic. The process of ethnic homogenization in Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe actually began in the late nineteenth century as the great multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multilingual empires of Central and Eastern European–the Russian, the German, the Austro-Hungarian, and the Ottoman–began to fragment under the pressure of ethnic nationalism and a push for the establishment of ethnically homogeneous nation-states with claims to ethnic dominance, then bolstered by the invention of histories and ideologies to legitimate such dominance. It was in such a newly defined political environment shattered by the war that the overwhelmingly Catholic and ethnically Polish Republic of Poland emerged in 1918. The place of the Jews in particular in this new political construct was problematic. Were they to be Poles of a non-Catholic faith or retain a separate identity as Jews? Could they, like Lucy, Anna†, and other modern-minded Jews, somehow be both? Within the Jewish community in the past, even in small places like Tykocin, there had been a great diversity of ways of

being Jewish or Jewish-Polish–from the Hassidic rabbi or the strictly Orthodox individual to the secular Zionist or Jewish mayor of the town during the German occupation during World War I.

The public display of ethnic-religious diversity in Poland today is largely confined to domestic ethnic tourism, ethnic festivals, museum visits, theater and musical events, and some Polish government and EU cultural interventions. A longing for the diversity of the past often goes hand in hand with a growing sense of nostalgia among the urban educated classes for the great mix of peoples and cultures that characterized their nation up until World War II. This new virtual ethnicity is powered by an imagination that fires the demand for such events which have become a public *aide-mémoire* for the "Old Poland." That Old Poland has increasingly become an imagined world as the generations which were active in the multicultural prewar Poland have long since departed this world. More than eighty years have passed since the end of the war, and we are now beyond the reach of actual first-person memory. This is a Poland in which national minorities have all but disappeared, and where for many, old ethnicities are reduced to stereotypes of imagined peoples devoid of their complex character, an inter-ethnic world that tends to sit at the extremes of the imagination: on the one hand, an over-idealized world of ethnic diversity, on the other, a demonized world beset with antisemitism, precursor to the Holocaust. With the national minorities, the Jews, ethnic Germans, Belorussians, and Ukrainians gone, the postwar People's Republic of Poland was, as Davies succinctly describes it, "the first truly national state in Polish history." It was, in so many more ways, a truly "new Poland."[17] It was a new Poland, but one, as is true of all ethnically monolithic states, subject to the bane of a narrowly focused ethno-nationalism. In this context, it is not difficult to understand

the symbolic strength, quixotic as it may be, of the yearning for a multiethnic, more tolerant Poland harbored by so many liberal young people today.

IV

TYKOCIN TOURISM

A Major Tourist Attraction

Tykocin is a major tourist attraction for both Jews and gentiles, Polish and foreign, attracting nearly 100,000 persons a year. If the Jews were still living in Tykocin going about their quotidian lives, how many people would come to visit the town? What now draws so many people to that remote Polish town?

For some Jewish visitors to Tykocin, there is a personal family connection and a deep sorrow for what is no more. For others, the absence of Jews has symbolic meaning of major proportions and harbors a profound message about Jewish awareness. Busloads of Israelis, in particular, visit Tykocin on a regular basis as part of either military or civilian tours of important Jewish death sites. For some Christian Poles, largely young liberal urbanites, the visit is about a diffuse sort of nostalgia for a multicultural Poland of the past and the "odd" people who once lived there in their midst. For still others, many Christian Poles in particular, the absence of Jews raises the profoundly unsettling, though largely mute, question of responsibility–personal, familial, national–for what happened and for the cultural identity of their town and their society. So, who were the Jews of Tykocin's recent past? What can we learn about them in today's Tykocin more than eighty years after their demise? How are they publicly presented in today's Tykocin?

Polish tourists in Tykocin.

With that question in mind, in this chapter I look into the ways in which the public focal point of the memorialization of the town's Jews, the state-run Tykocin synagogue-museum, remembers and displays the town's Jewish past and how-"133 Stories," a new private exhibition of everyday objects, photographs, sound recordings, and memorabilia in the town displays the town's Jewish *and* Christian quotidian past. I also examine how various commercial enterprises such as Tykocin's Jewish restaurants and carved wooden figurine sellers present the Jew to the public. In the process, I discuss the ways in which Tykocin has been singled out as the exemplar shtetl in the eyes of many who look to idealize that central focal point of Jewish life, especially those promoting the town as a Jewish tourism destination where the traditional ethnic distinctiveness of Jews of the past is foregrounded. It appears that the more exotic, more folklorized image of the Jew of past times, the beloved *Fiddler on the Roof* Jew, takes first place in the town's displays of remembrance, carrying the historically minded inquirer far from the verisimilitude which one might wish to be the primary goal of remembering.

In 2018, the exterior of the synagogue-museum was renovated and repainted, the color changed quite dramatically from a grimy white marred by decades of sun, rain, and snow to a bright pastel, transformed from a building carrying the wear and tear of age to one owing nothing (and yet in one sense, everything) to time. I question whether the quest for "authenticity" behind the repainting of the synagogue in 2018 has served the stated goal of restoring the exterior of the building to the way it looked during the Baroque period when it was first built. Or, indeed, whether any *one* period in the history of the synagogue carries a greater degree of authenticity than any other. And further, whether

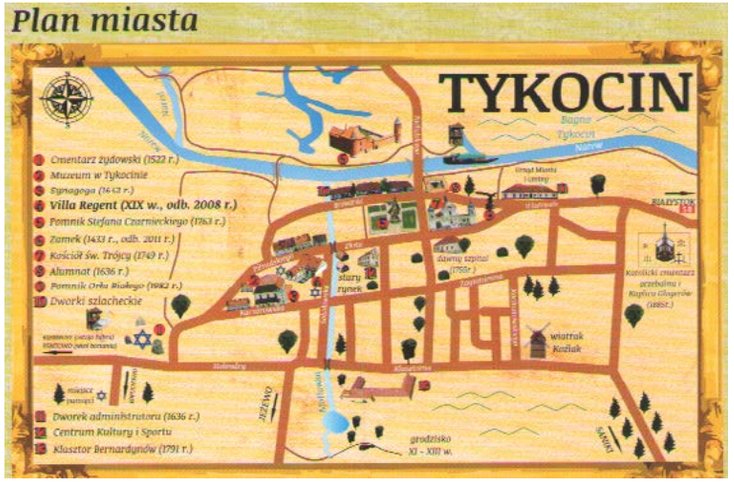
The synagogue before recent restoration and repainting.

the choice of repainting the building in pastels as a presumed "return" to the "original" Baroque face of the synagogue serves as a guise, intentional or not, for transporting the viewing public back to better times, to the time when in some eyes Poland was a "Jewish Paradise," and in the process deflecting visitors' attention away from the painful destruction of the Jewish community in August 1941 and the potentially disturbing implications of that destruction for the non-Jewish half of the town at the time and their descendants today.

Tykocin and the Elusive Spirit of the Shtetl

Following a talk he gave at YIVO, the Institute for Jewish Research in New York on October 22, 2013, Antony Polonsky, the author of the celebrated multi-volume *Jews in Poland and Russia*, was asked if there were any places where one could observe the fabric of old Jewish life, meaning shtetl life, in today's Poland. Polonsky had the following to say: "If you go to Tykocin, which is near Białystok, you have a perfectly preserved, what we would call a shtetl, that is, a Polish noble town, where Jews lived in the center." Polonsky advises us that "you can see exactly what such a town looked like [with a visit to Tykocin]."[1]

Polish-born writer Eva Hoffman, daughter of Holocaust survivors, left Poland with her family in 1959 when she was thirteen. In referring to the old shtetls of Poland in her book *Shtetl* she observes that the "character of these small towns was defined not by their Jewishness, but by their specific Polish mix of peasants and Jews."[2] Both Jews and Poles lived in or near the center of Tykocin, with most Jews in the west part in a district known as Kaczorowo. Poles largely resided in the eastern and southern parts of the town. In a few places the two peoples were interspersed. When the Jews first settled in Tykocin in 1522 the area in which their community would develop was located outside of the main part of the town and had been the site of a Lithuanian castle destroyed several years before they first arrived. Most of the Poles were engaged in agriculture and related professions in those



City map for tourists..

days. Polonsky concluded his answer to the question about where to best to observe the fabric of old Jewish life today with a turn to the proverbially "lachrymose," the doleful, perspective on Jews in Eastern Europe. "You can find a lot of the fabric of Jewish life," he says, "it's just that by and large the Jews are not there."[3]

The traces of the purported "fabric" of Jewish life, other than the synagogue, the old *besmedresh*, the cemetery, and a few other material symbols of the Jewish past can today be found at various Jewish-related events, sites, or artifacts designed for touristic consumption, including the activities of the synagogue, which since the 1970s following renovation has been functioning as a museum of local Jewish history and culture. The museum, the central symbol and focal point of Jewish remembrance, is a Polish state institution and with few exceptions holds no religious services, despite the occasional demands of a number of visiting Jewish groups about which I will have more to say in Chapter VI.

Polish feature filmmakers frequently choose Tykocin as a prime location for films set in the prewar period. How can one shoot a film about a prewar Polish town without having some Jews around? It is the filmmakers who, ironically, "bring back" the town's Jews, all dressed in a caricature of the way they are purported to have looked during the decades before the Holocaust, strikingly similar to the way they are now presented in the form of figurines sold in front of the old synagogue. Jewish life magically "comes to life" as locals dressed as old-time Yids, as timeless folklorized Jewish-like mannequins.

One evening I was fortunate enough to have witnessed such a scene at the synagogue, then transformed into a living film set of unsettling dissonance as the locals stepped in and out of their Jewish costumes in the main hall of the building in preparation for a shooting. "Increasingly," as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett sums up the nature of the cultural dissonance encountered in places such as Tykocin, "we travel to actual destinations to experience virtual places,"[4] in search of the elusive spirit of the shtetl.

On her blog, Maria†, a licensed tour guide in the Podlasie region, describes Tykocin as shtetl fantasy, an almost miraculous resurrection *in situ*, set out of time, a place where despite the extermination of its Jews "the shtetl spirit is still hovering over Tykocin." "Walking along cobbled streets," and animated with the imagination that Tykocin can evoke, she tells us that "we have the impression that in a moment a bunch of kids in *yarmulkes* (skullcaps) will fall out from behind the corner or a collar of a prewar rag collector will roll out."[5]

Film extras dressed as old-time Jews.

Signposts, guide to Tykocin.

In *Shtetl,* Jeffrey Shandler refers to Tykocin as an established site of "shtetl tourism" in Poland: "Tykocin has become a site of layers of memory practices–architectural restoration, museum exhibition, tourism, live performance–which all rely on selective remembrance and forgetting."[6] The question we face in Tykocin is about *what* is remembered and *what* is forgotten, and why and how what appears to remain, fades in and out, with passing time. There is also the question of what of the so-called past has been newly constructed, and in the process distorted or simplified, in meeting the terms and needs of the present.

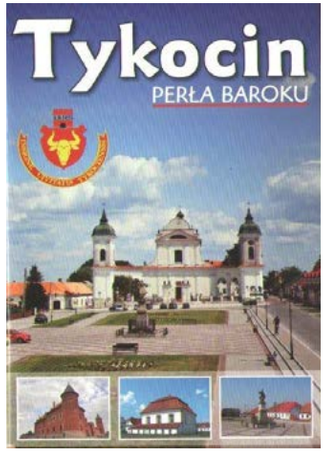
There are many ways to remember Jews of the past, some positive, some negative. Absent a personal relationship or actual memories of Jews, Jewishness is an abstraction open to varying interpretations and depictions. The easiest, least disturbing aspect of Jews to "remember" and portray as the typical "Jew of Past Times" is what one might call the "folklorized shtetl Jew." With those who were old enough to remember Jews before and during the war all now deceased, the collective imagination in Poland has found refuge in the likes of the alluring performances of *Fiddler on the Roof*, safe and distant enough that they can warm everyone's heart, and from which everyone, both Poles and Jews alike, can find something to like. I watched a performance of *Fiddler* in the Tykocin synagogue on one of my visits. The hall was packed with locals and others from nearby Białystok. The success of *Fiddler*, especially as performed in what was once the synagogue of a shtetl where there are no longer any living Jews, is predicated on a mix of fairytale nostalgia and well-tempered cultural dissonance. Polish historian Monika Murzyn-Kupisz refers to a process of minimizing "dissonant" or "distasteful heritage, accompanied by the construction of an anesthetized heritage" in her country.[7] In places like Tykocin, with few exceptions, local level public memorialization is not in the hands of local inhabitants. Jews,

in the role of visitor, only play an occasional part as sometime observers, participants or consumers of the memorialization. Decisions about the state of the premises and about exhibitions at the synagogue-museum are made by non-Jewish administrators or curators who have generally preferred not to dwell on the town's distressing past.

Tykocin, Baroque Pearl

Tykocin is not at all what I had imagined it to be. It has, true to what the New York City café server told me, become a tourist attraction for both Poles and Jews, who come to see its beautiful early sixteenth-century synagogue, the magnificent early eighteenth-century Baroque cathedral, and the reconstructed Lithuanian castle. Younger sporty folks, trekking types, come from Warsaw with bicycles attached to the roofs of their cars or with kayaks for excursions on the Narew River for a weekend of nature and exploration of a past pulling in two directions, both exotic and yet, somehow, their very own. Nature is beautiful along the languorous, winding river, and there are lots of paths here and there for day walks.

One of the town's tourism brochures is titled, "Tykocin, Perła Baroku," or Tykocin, Baroque Pearl, and advertises Tykocin as "a tourist gem": "One of the most beautiful small towns of Poland… full of monuments, surrounded by stunning nature and boasting of its rich history."[8] From an online site, "Shtetl Routes," we learn that "Thanks to the charming atmosphere



Tykocin, Baroque Pearl.

of this small town, its well-preserved urban layout, its beautiful natural surroundings, and the museum located in the former synagogue, Tykocin stands as an important center of cultural tourism."[9] My grandmother, Chaya, could never have imagined what her poor shtetl would turn out to be.

There were several restaurants in the town during the time I was there; two of them were "Jewish." One of the Jewish restaurants is located in the basement of the former *besmedresh* right next to the synagogue. Soon after my first arrival in the town, I had lunch at the restaurant which advertises "Traditional Jewish and Polish Kitchen" and promises a touch of nostalgia: "if you want to continue your journey to the past."[10] Actually, *domowa*, the Polish word used in contrast to "Jewish" in the brochure, means home or home-style: Jewish versus *home* cooking. The restaurant was run by a gentile woman. She turned on klezmer music as soon as I came in but had not thought it necessary to do so for the Polish woman already eating there when I entered. I read this as an authenticating display for tourists. The menu offered some traditional Jewish as well as Polish dishes. There was a life-size male Jewish mannequin, *yarmulke* and all, a few pictures of bearded Orthodox Jews on the wall, and the ever-authenticating menorah set on a side table.

In front of the Villa Regent restaurant.

In front of the restaurant.

After lunch that day I visited the Tykocin synagogue. It is a monumental space with a *bimah* or prayer platform in the center, its walls covered with beautiful large-size Hebrew and Aramaic calligraphy in pastel colors. In the background, incongruously, old Yiddish songs were playing. I recognized some of them from my grandmother's day, songs familiar to me as a child growing up in New York, and I was moved. It is unlikely that a young girl like my grandmother had ever been to the *shul,* the everyday Yiddish word for synagogue. But she most certainly had walked by it on occasion. All the visitors to the synagogue at that time appeared to be elderly Poles, a busload, muted and very reverential in their demeanor as they admired the temple and the ceremonial objects on display. But it was as if they were looking at strange artifacts from a lost civilization: no Jews were there–except me.

Authenticating photograph from Villa Regent Restaurant.

The Ethnographic Eye Turns to the Shtetl

The impulse to at the same time exoticize, indigenize, and appropriate shtetl life by both Jews and gentiles predated the Second World War and the demise of the Jewish population in Poland. During the interwar period the Polish–language press discovered the Jews, somewhat like European travelers and anthropologists working in Africa or in North America during the same period, "discovered" the exotic (and typically pacified) "savages" living in those places. "The exoticism of the subject was the decisive factor. A 'dark continent' had been discovered in Poland,"[11] as sociologist Aleksander Hertz described the Polish journalistic gaze of that period, which focused on the unfamiliar, the strange, and overlooked the important changes then taking place, such as the modernization of even the tiny Jewish communities in their country. Like so many ethnographic descriptions of so-called "primitive" societies, anthropologists of the 1930s were then investigating in occupied or colonized North America, Africa, and Oceania, Jewish life in Poland was set in an unchanging mixture of past and present.[12] In a sense, that now debunked ethnographic time perspective, what came to be known in the discipline as "the ethnographic present," is a common mode of presentation of the Jews of prewar Tykocin even today: *the shtetl* Jew.

A similar story can be told about German-Jewish ethnographic explorations during the prewar period among their "primitive" co-religionists in the east who were depicted as exotic archetypes, basically unknown and held in low regard while at the same time revered as the most authentic members of the "race," much as anthropologists viewed the so-called primitive societies they studied during those years as exemplars of "Man" in his natural state. According to Hertz, Polish reporters' accounts "resembled descriptions of the colonial countries given by various European and American travelers."[13] Initially positive, if patronizing, Polish journalism became increasingly antisemitic during the interwar years. In reality, most journalists knew very little about the Jews in their midst. Despite their efforts, Hertz concludes that journalists were not able to "discover authentic Jewish life in Poland," whatever that may have been. "Until the end of their existence on Polish soil, the life of the Jews was a *terra incognita*," he writes.[14] It's so-called "essence" indeed lay in its diversity.

After the war and the full realization of the almost total destruction of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, the focus of the so-called "popular arts of ethnography" was, very much like the famous team of Columbia University sociologists and anthropologists who turned to a kind of "salvage ethnography" in light of the demise or destruction of numerous tribal or ethnic groups or peoples during and after the Second World War. The focus was on "recreating a *world* that had been destroyed."[15] Perhaps the most famous product of such efforts pertaining to the Jews was the path-breaking popular book *Life is With People* by Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, with an introduction by Margaret Mead.[16] For many, Tykocin has become the embodiment of that imagined Jewish world, with its ancient synagogue as the high altar upon which visitors undertook the elusive ritual of remembrance.

I first stepped through the doors of the new POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, greeted by the pre-opening exhibition of "Jewish Warsaw, Warsaw's Jews" open from March to June 2014. I was taken aback by the sophisticated world of Warsaw's Jews presented in their great diversity–from ultra-Orthodox to atheist, proletariat to capitalist, petty shopkeeper to mendicant. I was not expecting to encounter the rich, sophisticated cultural and intellectual life of that city, reminiscent of pre-war

Berlin. My shtetl-based presuppositions about Jewish life in prewar Poland were shattered, my eyes opened to an Eastern Jewish world I had never known. In the late 1930s, nearly forty percent of Warsaw's population was Jewish. The impact of Warsaw on Jewish lives during the interwar period was not just limited to the city and its environs. It was felt even in remote places like Tykocin, which in their diminutive ways also began to display the diversity of being Jewish that was most prominent in the capital:

> "Warsaw exerted an influence on the lives of 35 million Polish citizens. At the same time Warsaw was also the centre of the cultural, social, political and economic life of Jews in Poland. A vast majority of Jewish press titles were published in the capital. It was there that Jewish associations had their authorities and the most prominent and influential Jewish leaders were active. All of the Jewish labour unions operating in Poland had their headquarters in Warsaw. The capital had its prominent rabbis. It was there that the most important congresses and conferences of Jewish organizations and associations were held. And most importantly, it was the city of Nalewki–a small street with powerful trade and production. It was on that street and in its neighbourhood that the clothing for those 35 million citizens was produced."[17]

My father's mother was from Warsaw and prided herself on her presumed urbanity in comparison with the unsophisticated shtetl Jews in the family. My father and his two sisters carried a degree of urban snobism into their generation. The tension between my parents was my father's disdain for his wife's unrefined family which primarily included my mother who could never meet his "high cultural" standards. My paternal grandmother's brother never emigrated United States, married a gentile woman, and survived the Warsaw Ghetto during the war. In the early 1950s, destitute, he was able to contact family in the United States, and they helped him emigrate to Israel with his wife.

A Weekend in Tykocin: Nature, Sunday Mass, Silent Synagogue

It was Saturday, and I was in Tykocin. The synagogue door was wide open. I was surprised as there is not a single Jew living in Tykocin, let alone ten male Jews, enough for a ***minyan,*** or quorum of adults required for prayer service. But then, I remembered that the old ***shul*** is now a museum. In front of the building sat a disheveled, bearded man, who looked the part of the "Old Yid," carving small figurines of archetypal folk shtetl Jews for sale to tourists. He was not connected to the museum in any official way, I learned, but was clearly taking advantage of the location and the implicit sanction to be there right at the entrance to the building.

I was staying in a rental apartment in an old renovated two-story stone row house across from the synagogue, part of a series of single and double-story buildings that were once the homes of well-off local Jews. When I reserved the apartment online, I had no idea it might be in or near the old Jewish quarter of town and that from my window I could look straight out at the synagogue. Might my grandmother's house have been nearby? After all, her father was the beadle at the synagogue in those days. I walked around the town, taking photos of old houses, trying to capture ones I imagined grandmother's family might have lived in over a hundred years ago, ones that were run-down, as I pictured her shtetl and shtetl home to have been.

I rented a bicycle and rode around the town. My first stop was the old Jewish cemetery in a neglected field of clumpy grass at the edge of the town. The few extant gravestones, strewn here and there, poking through the grass, were damaged–no doubt intentionally by the Germans, as well as by locals during and soon after, the war. The cemetery seemed as if it were finally at rest, perhaps a fitful one. A verdant carpet covered centuries of Jewish bones inured to the permanently ruined world above the grass. The

Cemetery remains.

Hebrew characters on some of the tombstones are clearly legible–names of people who had lived, worked, and died in Tykocin over the centuries. Resting on a tombstone, I felt the pain of the terrible tragedy that had befallen these innocent small-town people, including, I now know, my great-grandmother and her handicapped son, my great uncle, who stayed on in the town after the rest of the family had left for America. Their shattered remains rest in the Łopuchowo forest. There is an odd beauty to this carpeted resting place, a field of flowers in the spring, stopped still in time. The ruined tombstones stand as a stark reminder of the fate of those not fortunate enough to have been interred there during better times and whose bones lie in the nearby forest where they were murdered. Separated by a chasm of pain and a few short kilometers, the two communities of the Jewish dead are one in spirit. At the other end of town is the Catholic cemetery, still welcoming the deceased gentiles of Tykocin.

On Sunday, I attended mass at the church. I wanted to feel the pulse of the congregation and get a sense for the church as a living institution in contrast to the synagogue-museum, which now only looks to the past. The church was packed to capacity with people standing in the back and in the aisles. Outside, cars with Warsaw and Białystok license plates were parked in every possible spot, many sporting bikes or kayaks strapped to the roof for a day excursion. The priests leading the service recited prayers in Polish and the church reverberated with the voices of the congregation. The power of the clergy over its flock was palpable.

I sat for a whole hour transfixed. There I was–Jew, anthropologist, Chaya's grandson–attending mass at the church in her old shtetl. Perhaps she had passed by the church as a child, though I imagine she would never have dared to peek in. I myself felt strange in the presence of the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of her old gentile neighbors. Several glanced at me. I was not genuflecting, kneeling or singing. I took a few photos as surreptitiously as possible. Was I giving offence? Who was I to them? Just a tourist? A Jew?

I was moved by the reverberations of the magnificent eighteenth-century pipe organ as the congregation rose to sing a hymn, the sound of the faithful echoing throughout the towering Baroque hall. There were people of all sorts there: elder locals of modest means, hair neatly combed and dressed in their Sunday best alongside younger men, women, and their restless children in more casual garb, with the occasional chatter of youngsters or the blather of a baby to bring us all a bit closer to this world. Some of the casually dressed were the Sunday cyclists and other big-city visitors up for the day from Warsaw or Białystok. Like partaking of nature, visiting the synagogue and eating some *kugel* or *kreplach* at a purportedly Jewish restaurant, participating in Sunday mass was, it seems, a part of the multifold Tykocin experience– the one a celebration of life, the other an evocation of a past the demise of which was too difficult and too painful to really comprehend, now sanitized as sweet, touristy nostalgia.

Back at my Tykocin apartment, the room felt chilly though it was June. I phoned the owner to see if I could get some heat. She asked me to call her son, who, it turns out, was in London at that time. He said he would get the heat taken care of. Then, unexpectedly, he changed the subject and began to tell me that his family had saved a Jewish girl during the war by hiding her under their bed and that she now is an old lady living in New York. I had

heard a version of that story more than once in Tykocin. It seems the property owner's son must have presumed that I was a Jew (I never told his mother that I was), and that what happened in Tykocin two generations before he was born was on his mind.

I had begun to feel at home in Tykocin. The tourists came and went in large groups, and I remained behind in the town, now with its familiar streets, homes, and even a few familiar faces. I had come to know my way around. One morning, in front of the synagogue, I encountered a middle-aged Jewish couple from New York on a personal Jewish heritage tour in Poland with a local guide. They were amazed that I would spend five days in a row in a little place like Tykocin. I tried to explain to them what I was doing.

Being there, my past had begun to take on a new shape; it assumed a kind of concreteness it never before had. All of a sudden, I felt I *had* a past, a past more than two or three generations deep. I just had to figure out what that past was made up of and where I would stand in relation to what in its down-to-earth details remained a rather alien world to me. I think about how little is locally available upon which to build such a Jewish past. For the gentiles of Tykocin, the past is embodied in their living selves, and their community regularly re-imagines itself at mass week after week, at weddings, funerals, holidays, and family occasions throughout the year. For many people like me, second-generation Jews with family roots in Tykocin, memory requires a leap of imagination across a chasm of sorrow.[18]

What Does a Jew Look Like?

I was hoping to see the figurine carver outside the synagogue once again. I was sorry that I hadn't photographed him, hadn't bought one of his figurines. My first impression was one of antipathy towards such stereotyping kitsch. As a non-practicing Jew, I could not connect with the traditional Jewish types portrayed. I questioned whether these characters were really representative of the way men in past times looked. I knew that lifestyles and dress were quite diverse in the Tykocin Jewish past. Then I began to think that the carved mock Jews the vendor sold to tourists was a phenomenon in itself, worthy of some more distanced anthropological thought. To my delight, looking out my window the next morning, I saw that the carver was beginning to display his wares. I went out and sat on one of the benches facing the temple, absorbing the sun and taking in the bustle of the new day's activity. I strolled over to the *besmedresh* and bought a couple of plastic magnetic refrigerator door-type Jews from the museum shop for two American Jewish anthropologist friends for a laugh. One of the Jews was carrying a moneybag, and the other a smaller purse and a Star of David: seemingly proverbial, timeless Jews, distinctive in their exotic presence.

I walked around the museum exhibition rooms in the *besmedresh*, looking at the photographs on the wall from the museum archive then on exhibition, depictions of blissful scenes of bourgeois families from an idealized past, as it turns out, the families of the German occupiers during World War I. The strangest photo of all was the only one of a Jew among them. A full-length portrait of a bedraggled, seemingly mentally unbalanced man, a true *meshuggener* (madman). This bedraggled yet jocund man was the sole representative of the Jewish "race" in this fine bourgeois setting. "Ubogi Zyd 1916 r," (Poor Jew, 1916) was the caption the museum gave the photo for the exhibition. The photograph was part of a collection taken in 1916 by a member of the then-occupying German army. The Germans had inscribed the following by hand on the back of the photo: "*Nu wie haisst? Bester Herr!*" [So, who have we here? Good man!].[19] Perhaps they took the man's photo because his madness and exoticism bemused them.

Nevertheless, it is hard to understand the choice of this particular photograph for the then current display. Upon closer inspection of the photograph, one sees local children, very likely Jewish children, standing in a doorway sniggering at the madman, and a little girl peering out of a window amused by the same. The children were at the same time facing the German soldier who was photographing all of them. What were they sniggering at? At the merry madman or at the idea that the Germans would take a photo of such a forlorn creature?

I returned to the carver in front of the synagogue and decided to buy a couple of the figurines, one of a Jew reading the Torah and bedecked with *teffilin* (phylacteries), another holding a brimming purse. Later, as I walked to lunch, it occurred to me that three Jews would be better, so I returned and also bought a fiddler. Now, I had three distinctively stereotypical Jews in hand: the moneylender, the Talmudic scholar, and the fiddler.

I compared the figurines I had bought with a small wooden one of a Jew on display in one of the cabinets of the synagogue. The one in the temple does not exhibit the stereotyped visage, the horrid "Jew-face" that the tourist icons have, and seems to be a man seriously engaged in prayer. I think about the photo of the Jewish madman in the museum. Why are such disturbing images being perpetuated even today by presumed well-meaning people at such a site of remembrance of Jews? I came to understand that the portrayal of "the Jew" means something quite different for Polish Christians than it does for Jews. What do these presumably well-intentioned folkloric portrayals tell us about prewar Tykocin and its people? And about the way Jews and gentiles view the Jewish past today?

Erica Lehrer curated an exhibition of figurines in Cracow in July 2013 titled "Souvenir, Talisman, Toy" and wrote a book on the subject, *Lucky Jews: Poland's Jewish Figurines* in Polish and English. For Lehrer, an anthropologist, the figurines were more than mere antisemitic objects. She found that "they embody not only timeworn stereotypes, but also traces of history, traumatic memory, and unspoken nostalgia." Importantly, she tells the reader that "They reveal the presence of the Jewish past in Polish consciousness…"[20]

The figurines are complex, multivalent symbols, bringing together contradictory themes in Polish-Jewish history. "They not only separate, but also connect Poles and Jews in ways not visible to the naked eye."[21] They connect the two peoples and yet perpetuate the image of the Jew as odd, as The Other, as exotic and alien, a strange talisman bringing luck, perhaps wealth to the gentile holder. One frequently encounters paintings or prints of Jewish moneylenders in currency exchange shops or tourist spots–presumably bringing good luck to everyone. There is one hanging on one of the walls of the Villa Regent Hotel in Tykocin. It was, at first, difficult for me to conceive of such a thing as the "lucky Jew" in a world where they had been annihilated. But then I understood that though the Jew had been as unlucky as anyone could be in recent European history, for Poles he was a bearer of good luck for *them*, especially when it came to money matters–except when he came to represent usury and exploitation, the other face of "the Jew" in the traditional Polish imaginary. The imaginary of the Jew in Poland is a complex bundle of shifting meanings, positive and negative, depending upon person, time, place, and intention.

Jewish Food

Sitting on a bench at the entrance, an almost life-sized carved accordion-playing wooden statue of a folkloric male Jew in traditional dress welcomes diners to the Villa Regent Restaurant

near the synagogue. The interior of the restaurant and adjacent hotel lobby are bedecked with Hebrew characters, with s*halom* signs posted here and there, with menorahs, and with the photos of bearded Orthodox Jews on the walls, all "authenticating" the restaurant with their presence. The restaurant, once the home of the Turek family, is much more brash in its presentation of Jewishness as they conceive of it than is the little restaurant below the museum. The Villa Regent offers "Kuchinia Zydowska w Tykocinie," Jewish Food of Tykocin.

Here is a description from the menu of *cholent* or *czulent*, as it is known in Polish–one of the iconic Jewish dishes offered on the menu:

> Cholent is a slowly cooked stew with beans, beef (goose or turkey meat), pearl barley and, sometimes, vegetables. It is a traditional dish for Sabbath dinner, because it can be made before the Sabbath begins and placed on the slow burner until the following day. It has an excellent taste when served with a glass of dry red kosher wine, Shabbat shalom![22]

We get a bit of tradition here and a bit of culinary warmth, largely for Polish gentile visitors seeking a touch of feel-good experience about Jews of olden times in this reimagined shtetl. Very few Jews patronize the Jewish restaurants, or indeed any of the shops in town. The restaurants are, not surprisingly, not kosher. They are not even run by Jews. The only time I ate at the Villa Regent restaurant was with the secular-minded Australian Jews, the descendants of the Tureks, whom I had befriended at the seventy-fifth memorial service. I ate at the restaurant below the old *besmedresh* only once. The "Jewish" food there did not warm my heart. I contrasted it with the excellent Polish food served at the Alumnat Restaurant.

For Polish visitors, stopping at one of the Jewish restaurants was part of their folksy experience with the Jewish world that once was. In conversation with one of the Polish teachers I had joined on the tour of an old Jewish cemetery in the nearby town of Kynyszn, I was asked what I recommend she eat when she visited one of the Tykocin Jewish restaurants later that day. Excitedly, having found a real Jew, she wanted to know what my favorite Jewish dishes were. I was a bit dumbfounded. The only Jews present in the two restaurants in town are the simulated Jewish patrons, either in the form of mannequins dressed as old-time Jews, or as represented by the photos of the Orthodox Jewish men hung on the walls. The Orthodox Jews depicted in the photos couldn't have eaten there. The establishments are not kosher.

The restaurant below the *besmedresh* in Tykocin is named Tejsza. We are told in their brochure that *tejsza,* from the Hebrew, means goat, and that for Jews from the Podlasie region the goat symbolized abundance and happiness. "That's why the Goat's Street was not only a center of culture in the Jewish district of Tykocin … but also the center of hapiness [*sic*]. … We learn that "Now Goat's Street is again dancing, singing, but also it smells of honey, raisins, garlic and joy," as if time had somehow stood still, and Tykocin was suspended in hallowed shtetl bliss. The brochure ends with an ode to "Tykocin – fairytale town," reminding the visitor that the popular Polish poet, writer, and songwriter Agnieszka Osiecka idealizes Tykocin that way: "It's a place that fascinated people [with] an incredible story which is in every stone and every brick…"[23] As it should, life in Tykocin goes on after the atrocities of August 1941–including, no doubt, some dancing and singing. "This is," we are told, to cap off the brochure about Tykocin, "the place where you fall in love."[24] The restaurant brochure reminding people about "the incredible story" of Tykocin where people were "dancing and singing," elides any reference to the immense agony the entire Jewish community of the town experienced on August 25 and 26, 1941, and that the descendants of the few survivors such as myself continue to feel. Can we,

descendants of the Tykocin Jews, move beyond mourning for the dead of Tykocin? Would it not be possible for all of us, Jews and Poles alike, to memorialize the Jewish and Polish lives *lived together* in the past, not just remember the dead, and perhaps even sing and dance together in Tykocin someday?

Later that day, the younger son of the owner of the apartment where I was staying dropped by to pick up the rent money. I told him that his brother in London had informed me by phone that his family had helped a Jewish woman during the Second World War and that she now lives in New York.

"O yes, yes," he said.

"Did you know about that?"

"Yes, my English not good. Speak to my brother."

A Story of Both Christians and Jews

It is not possible to tell the story of Tykocin of the past without telling a tale of Christians *and* Jews, as the lives of these two peoples were closely intertwined as neighbors, sometimes as friends, and as familiar sellers and steady clients in the marketplace. The historical character of Tykocin was built on that complex relationship and the mutual dependency of farmers and traders, Christians and Jews, and on the relationship of noblemen, priests, and rabbis with all of them. Today's lives, both of local Christians and of descendants of the Jews of the town, are incomplete, some would say diminished, without recognition of the profound daily "meeting" of Tykocin Christians and Jews in the taken-for-granted everyday world of the past. In the past, communication between Christians and Jews in places such as Tykocin was often amiable, was sometimes characterized by disdain and contempt, and sometimes outright hostile,[25] yet despite its variations, such communication provided the social foundation of local public life. Today, sadly, there is little communication between visiting Jews and local Christians, and both tend to view the past through the myopia of their own identity-based visions and the exigencies of the postwar realities of Tykocin. Poles wish to avoid a past they would prefer not to remember; many Jews, Israelis in particular, want to remember that past largely as an object lesson for the future of the Jewish people. The rich and varied Polish and Jewish past and its legacy in the present of Tykocin are diminished by the myopia of both peoples in their determined symbolic misuse of the town as a platform for, on the one hand, selective "forgetting", and on the other, for their selective "remembering," in particular the casting of Jews in the past in the familiar shtetl folk mode.

Post-Jewish

Tykocin has become a kind of open-air memorial to the Jews no longer there, the site of an active display of "remembering" in progress. This remembering has, until recently, largely revolved around sentimentalized shtetl life, Jewish life, holidays, and customs in general, and graveyard memories of the dead, with the emphasis varying depending upon the nature of the viewer and the participant. The normal life of the former Jewish inhabitants of the town is just beginning to be pieced together. As with so much of everyday life anywhere in the world, even where lives have not been violently destroyed, there is most often little left to memorialize. Most people could not conceive that the objects in their lives would be of interest to anyone but themselves or their families. Much of what we know about the local Jewish past is from *Sefer Tiktin*, the Tykocin Memorial Book, written by the few survivors after the war. What is remembered in *Sefer Tiktin* is necessarily selective, and the selection is based on the

testimonies of survivors and the things about which they had information and on which they chose to focus. What they wrote can only be evaluated in the light of the larger context of time and place and other, perhaps corroborating, information about those and similar events. Other than that, almost everything is lost. The possessions of the Jews of Tykocin have passed on to other, most often non-Jewish hands, and these objects have taken on new meanings over the years and now tell different stories, stories alien to those which they possessed while in the homes of Jewish families. Magdalena Waligórska and Ina Sorkina discuss the ways in which "Jewishness … [has been] stripped from the identity of … everyday objects," once owned by Jews that have passed into Polish hands, noting linguistic devices that domesticate Jewish property in people's minds such as the Polish term *pożydowski* or "post-Jewish."[26] We may never know very much about how the Jews actually lived in Tykocin in the past, except in the abstract sense in which one often applies the generalities, the composite constructions gathered from here and there that are most often what is written about "the shtetl," and, in this case, rightly or wrongly applied to the particularities of Jewish lives in places like Tykocin.

Tykocin's early seventeenth-century synagogue and eighteenth-century cathedral were both built of bricks, stone, and mortar, constructed to last. Both buildings tower above all others in the town, both literally and figuratively. These sacred structures were once the mainstays of Tykocin's two living religious communities, the Catholics and the Jews. In their grandeur they stood for hundreds of years as markers and focal points of the two religious communities and as God's temples on earth–until 1941. The former synagogue remained a broken-down shell until the 1970s when the Polish government began to restore it and turn it into a site of remembrance, opening it as a museum in 1976, one

of the first synagogues to be restored in eastern Poland. Especially notable is the fact that it was restored under the Communist regime, which tended to focus on a generalized "Polish People" as victims, not on the often quite different fates of Poland's once diverse ethnicities, especially of the Jews as the largest and by far most victimized of all.

According to former Tykocin museum director Marzena Pisarska-Kalisty, the synagogue-museum in Tykocin is devoted to "preserving the memory" of the Jews who once lived in Tykocin. "One of the most important things about our museum," said Ms. Pisarska-Kalisty when I interviewed her in 2016, "is to preserve the memory of the local Jewish community and their history, because Jews lived in this place for centuries and lived with Poles." Jews lived with Poles over the centuries, and mostly lived in peace as they did elsewhere in Polish lands.

"We the Jewish People Came to Tykocin Ages Ago..."

In 2016, in conjunction with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the destruction of the Jewish community, the synagogue-museum mounted an important, comprehensive exhibition focusing on the lives as well as the demise of the Jews of the town. The exhibition displayed the history of the Jews through the lens of larger political and economic realities over the centuries leading up to 1941 and dealt with their economic lives, with education, Zionism, and emigration, bringing the community into clearer focus than had earlier been the case. It included portraits of local Jewish families and described the destruction of the community in the Holocaust. It presented photographs and vignettes of some of the actual people who lived in Tykocin in the past. A catalogue documents the exhibition and is an important step toward building a history of Tykocin woven from the thread of

the two communities, Christian and Jewish. This exhibition and the 2021 dedication of a plaque with the family names of all those murdered are both very meaningful steps in the direction of a fuller remembrance of the Jewish community "in place," and the ways they lived. The title of that major exhibition of the Jews of Tykocin, "We the Jewish People Came to Tykocin Ages Ago," is taken from *Sefer Tiktin.*

The exhibition opened with a short history of the town's Jews and their relationship with the larger community. It then focused on the growing interest in Zionism on the part of young people in the town after World War I, leading to the emigration of some to Palestine. Brief portraits of both distinguished and ordinary Jewish families from the town constituted a central part of the exhibition. The exhibition was enlivened with numerous photographs of the long-gone Jews of the town, many pointing to their important roles in civic life, important not just in the marketplace and in religious life, but also in the local volunteer fire brigade, in running the first bus service between Tykocin, Białystok and Warsaw, in health services and education. There were Jewish members on the town council. We learned that even the mayor of the town during the German occupation of 1915-1918 was a Jew. The exhibition also included a section on education with class photographs from the interwar period. In the 1920s Tykocin was the only town in Poland that had a Jewish public school, founded in 1920. The Holocaust was described with a long quotation taken from *Sefer Tiktin,* from Abram Kapica, one of the few survivors. The exhibition claimed that not 2,000, but approximately 2,500 people were murdered on August 25 and 26, 1941, that 150 survived the killing, but that only 21 of them managed to stay alive until the end of the war. The names of all the known survivors are listed. The number of victims is disputed.

Some of the most difficult, most locally sensitive issues are, not surprisingly, eschewed in the exhibition, particularly those relating to the role of locals during the war, and the fate of the homes and possessions of the Jews during the occupation and after liberation, the widespread expropriation of Jewish possessions, or collaboration by some locals with the German occupiers of the town as discussed in detail in Chapter II. These issues include the thorny, unsettling, and poorly differentiable intentions and actions of so-called perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders, and witnesses extensively debated in the Holocaust literature.[27] Who did what during those dark days is usually known in small places like Tykocin. But at the local level where people intimately interact with each other on a face-to-face basis and inevitably must continue to live with each other, confronting past malfeasance in the public arena can be devastating and is as a result often eschewed. There is also the justifiable need of most locals, of most people, to "move on" out of the plangent past and focus on the present and future.

What Can Be Remembered?

The Tykocin museum is branch of the regional Podlasie Museum located in Białystok. It is a Polish state entity and is not affiliated with or supported by any Jewish organization or the Jewish community in Poland. Eighty-thousand people visit the museum every year–Polish Christians of all ages, including the elderly, as well as schoolchildren brought in on tour buses, and Jews, young and old, from all parts of the world, especially from Israel.[28] Tykocin and its synagogue, its synagogue-museum, or its museum, as you will, means different things to different visitors. Ms. Pisarska-Kalisty, the former director of the museum focused her attention on the museum buildings per se, making a point of

referring to them as the "former synagogue and former *cheder*" [religious school], emphasizing their status as a museum, that is, and not as some Jews would prefer, as a synagogue or a place for Talmudic study. Technically, she was correct. The building no longer functions as a Jewish house of worship or study, but the emotional bonds of many Jews to their sacred past remain strong. There have been several confrontations over the "ownership" and use of the synagogue by disgruntled Jewish visitors who hold that Jews have a special entitlement to the building. A number of Israeli and French Orthodox rabbis carried a Torah donated by a French Jew to the "synagogue" and hoped to place it there. The intention was, they said, to open up the old temple to the occasional prayers of visitors. The museum administration did not let them in on the day they wished to make the donation. We will return to this event in Chapter V.

During her term of office, Pisarska-Kalisty took pride in the restoration of the synagogue as an important historical monument supported by funding from the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The restoration, she said, is based on photographic documentation deposited in the Polish Academy of Science in Warsaw and on archival photographs from the Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv. "This initiative will raise the historical value of the monumental building…" we are told in the museum booklet commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the extermination.[29] As we shall see in Chapter V, returning the synagogue to its presumed pristine state turns out to be a fraught project given the various stakeholders and the diverse meanings they attribute to that monumental structure of brick and mortar.

"133 Stories": A Private Exhibition of Everyday Life in Tykocin in Past Times

Opening in 2018, Maria Markiewicz, together with her son, Józef Markiewicz, transformed part of her family's historic wooden house on the main square of Tykocin into a museum of everyday life in the town in past times, displaying found and collected objects, photographs, films, and sound recordings, all of which speak to us about the many ways in which the denizens of Tykocin, both Christian and Jewish, once lived their lives.

What do these objects tell us about life in Tykocin in the past, both for individuals and families and for the town as a whole? Everyone's home is a kind of museum in a sense, and all the objects found there hold meaning for the residents. Some hold memories known only to the family, while for others the memories may have been lost over the generations, and, for still others, connections with the past are difficult to deal with and such connections as do exist are present in a state of silent disquietude. Some of the objects project larger meaning available to all. The Markiewiczes have opened their home to the public. Visitors, Polish and foreign, and townspeople, variously, find personal and more distanced meaning in the objects and other items on display.

Maria takes a small group of visitors on a tour of the exhibition. I joined them and recorded her descriptions of the objects on display. She begins by explaining that "The exhibition is called '133 Stories' because we have one story for each year of focus." This is a story of the ordinary inhabitants of the town beginning in 1885 with the arrival of Maria's great-grandfather from Germany, focusing on the town's so-called "hidden history," a history only known, she tells us, to some of its inhabitants. Maria then points to a photograph of her great-grandfather and tells the story of how her family became a part of Tykocin. She turns to a corner of the room where she has hung a photograph

In 2018 I described the project in the following way for the exhibition poster:

An oil painting depicting a local windmill destroyed by the Russian army in 1918, a home-sewn Polish flag celebrating the newly emerging Second Republic dating from 1918, a Russian passport used by a Jewish girl from Tykocin for her emigration to America in 1907, a photo relating to the emigration of a Christian family to the U.S. in 1889, a postcard sent from Paris in 1922, an address book from the same year, the program of a Constitution Day celebration with Jews and Christians arm in arm, photographs of two Christian school girls separated by war who never again met, a very old broken rafter's pipe found at the bottom of the Narew River, photographs of Jewish traders of timber from the interwar period, an old radio, a photograph of the fire brigade dating from 1937, a photo of the old Tykocin Hetman cinema, audio recordings relating to the mass murder of the Jews of Tykocin in 1941, a notarial document for the sale of a windmill, an official register from the Liquidation Committee from the 1940s listing "abandoned" Jewish properties with the names of the new owners recorded in place of the former owners, a document used for the purchase of a Jewish home in 1946, family letters, documents relating to the status of the town in the 1950s, cobblers' tools, an old Passover seder plate, a photograph of the desk clock of the Jewish town doctor, documents relating to the reconstruction of the town in the 1950s, photographs of the town in the 1960s and 70s, the beginnings of tourism in Tykocin: photos of Polish students visiting Tykocin as a tourists in the 1970s, a 100-year-old child's shoe discovered in the attic of a house undergoing renovation, an old hammer, and an ordinary milk jug. These are just some of the quotidian objects and images or what might be called "aide-mémoires" to be found now on exhibit at 10 Czarnieckiego Square. Perhaps one of the most telling objects is a Catholic prayer book with bookmarks cut from family letters, from a 1944 German passport, and from a fragment of a Jewish newspaper. What do all these things tell us about life in Tykocin in the past, both individually, as a group and perhaps even in sum? What do they share in common?

of my great-grandmother, Lebe, and my grandmother, Chaya, as well as Chaya's old Russian identity papers, what is referred to as her passport, and tells the story of how she and her siblings left Tykocin for America during the years prior to the First World War. What is important to note is the juxtaposition of a Christian and a Jewish family. As it turns out members of Maria's family emigrated to New York at more or less the same time as did members of mine. But her ancestors returned to Tykocin in 1916; mine left for good. Her family is still flourishing in Tykocin; those of mine, the ones who did not leave, were murdered along with the rest of the members of the local Jewish community. Maria's story continues in the town up to the present; mine was aborted in 1941. Maria and Józef are very aware of these dissonant lives and were delighted to "bring back" and memorialize my Tykocin Jewish family. I felt honored.

Maria then tells us the story of Phillip Schweiger, the young commandant of the German gendarmerie in the town and his wife who rented a room in their house for a short time during World War II. We will return to Phillip Schweiger, who he was and what his impact on the town was in Chapter VI, as his life and death are of great moment for Tykocin. "Let's move on now," Maria tells the visitors, and points to a display of photographs of prewar Tykocin, among them one of the firefighters' band headed by a local doctor, a Jew. This is notable, because some Jews were active in town administration and local civil society events during the interwar years.

Turning, Maria shares with us a recording of the reading of excerpts from a diary written by the town's Jewish doctor's son about his hiding after the German occupation of the town. He and others with him in hiding are discovered by Polish neighbors, with whom, he says, he bargained for his life. This is what he said to them: "We won't make you rich, but we escaped the ghetto with coins which are worth about two hundred marks. They are yours if you let us stay here. We need shelter until mid-summer, and we will pay you twenty marks for each week." We don't know what the total cost was, but the young man who related the story survived the war.

Maria then pointed to some photographs of the old Jewish quarter taken just after the war, telling us that "the neighborhood was in a horrible, tragic state." She continues, "The synagogue was in fact [about to be] demolished, and it would have been if it hadn't been for the intervention of the heritage conservation officer at the time, Włodzimierz Paszkowski, who put a stop to the demolition." Continuing with the immediate post-war years she told us that she had discovered the local *Rejestr Mienia Porzuconego* [Register of Abandoned Properties], used after the war, in which, under the heading of the space for the name and surname of the owner, we read "Jew deceased" or "Jew left." "Some Jews returned to Tykocin after the war," she says, "and they wanted to rebuild their lives but, unfortunately, the inhabitants of Tykocin were not necessarily favorable to that, and they were forced to leave." Next, we come to a partitioned ceramic plate with Hebrew writing on it used for the Passover ritual service. Maria tells us that this "interesting object" was found by chance by her mother who was walking along the street and saw her neighbor feeding her chickens from it. Maria tells us that, "Many interesting objects, so far untouched, are beginning to see the light of day." Perhaps there is hope that we may learn more about the people

From the "133 Stories" exhibition.

of this town, especially in their diversity. All of these things, she says, "… must be talked about. This must be continued. We must become immersed in it and must seize these final moments while the witnesses are still alive, and we must talk to them as much as possible. All of this will be stored in an archive we are creating," she concludes.

Portraying Jews

An exhibition at the Tykocin museum in 2016 of drawings of Jewish visages and as well as others depicting scenes from the town during the late 1930s and the war attracted my attention as well as the attention of other Jewish and Christian viewers. Though not, to my knowledge, expressed explicitly, I learned that the portraits were another point of contention between Jewish and Christian viewers. The drawings were done in retrospect after the war by Józef Charyton, gentile and keen observer from a town very much like Tykocin. The drawings were viewed as a collection of sympathetic portraits of Jews in their home setting

by Christian visitors with whom I spoke but regarded as very offensive by some of the Jews of Tykocin descent with whom I talked at the seventy-fifth anniversary memorial service. Leah†, the Israeli woman who drove me to Tykocin the morning of the ceremony told me that many of her compatriots saw the portrayals as derogatory caricatures, perpetuating negative bodily images, most prominently the proverbially "hooked" nose of "the Jew." In contrast, my first impression was, with some qualifications, largely positive. I viewed the drawings as an attempt to record the everyday life of ordinary Jews in the past, reminiscent of many prewar photographs depicting people looking very much like those portrayed on the synagogue walls. No doubt, the figures in the drawings resembled the stereotyped figurines sold outside the museum. Drawing from memory, it would not be surprising if the artist portrayed the "very Jewish" Jews he had in his mind, Jews as commonly conceived by ordinary people, and then ignored the many ethnically "uninteresting," more typically Slavic-looking or assimilated Jews of the time.

A new permanent historical exhibition of the Jews of Tykocin opened on April 29, 2022. The history of Tykocin from the Middle Ages to the postwar period is presented in four thematic rooms. Dr. Janusz, the head of the museum in Tykocin, describes the Tykocin museum as follows,

> We have a permanent exhibition about the history of Tykocin; we have an exhibition in the synagogue itself concerning the culture of Polish Jews and Jews from Tykocin. In addition, in the women's gallery of the synagogue we have space for temporary exhibitions where we organize exhibition of artists whose work is associated with Tykocin itself. In this way, a new museum complex of the Museum of Tykocin has been created.

Dr. Janusz continues:

> The preparation of the exhibition lasted almost a year. First, however, the interior of the Talmudic House was modernized so that an appropriate space could be created. And it assumed a chronological order. And so, in the four rooms available we find references to the various historical periods from the fifteenth [century], through the time of the nobility, to Poland of the partitions, and then to the drama of World War II and the post-war period of one of the oldest towns in the Podlasie region of the country. The exhibition consists of about 400 items, most from the Podlasie Museum, as well as the National Museum in Warsaw, the National Maritime Museum, and the Polish Military Museum. The curator is Dr. Bogusław Kosel formerly of the Tykocin museum.

The Color of Authenticity

Changes made to the color of the façade of Tykocin's synagogue in 2018 harken back to a past, to a more pristine time. That was the Baroque period. The changes to the building are purported to present Tykocin's most authentic face, Tykocin as a so-called "Baroque pearl," free of all the blemishes that twentieth-century history has brought to bear on the town's Jewish community. One might characterize the repair and repainting in radically different colors of the synagogue building as a kind of symbolic restoration. Was the repainting in pastels evocative of a presumed "return" to the synagogue's prelapsarian past as those in charge argue? Could it be seen as a quest for authenticity in the guise of the so-called "original" Baroque face of the synagogue, deflecting visitors' attention from the painful destruction of the Jewish community while aggrandizing the focus of attention for Polish eyes both on the "original" past and the acceptable present.

The few surviving prewar photographs or paintings of the synagogue depict a monochrome building painted an undistinguished white or beige. There is no way of reckoning how many times the building was repainted over the centuries up to 1941. The renovators of the 1970s chose an unassuming color

similar to the one used during the prewar period. That is how the temple remained, accumulating decades of dirt and grime, until the summer of 2018. I arrived on one of my many trips to Tykocin that September to be faced with a Jewish house of worship painted avocado green and peach pastel–a "candy synagogue," as I then described it to friends. The museum director at the time held that the colors were the same as those used when the synagogue was first built in the seventeenth century, authentic that is. Perhaps authentic in a historical sense, I thought, but not the synagogue that had weathered all those centuries, now bereft of its congregation. Indeed, to my mind, the colors selected do not convey the aura of solemnity I would have expected for a house of worship, especially one with such an incredibly tragic history. But that was clearly not the way those who decided on the coloration thought about the repainting.

Let us presume that the colors selected were indeed authentic, as the museum administration in Białystok and Tykocin hold, that is, that they were the colors that had been used at *some time* during the past, perhaps in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, a time when the Jewish community was prosperous and felt secure enough about its place in the town to display in bold colors their house of worship in all its glory. Perhaps other buildings in Tykocin were also similarly colored then. One thing we know for certain, though, is that the painters of the past painted their synagogue when it was a functioning, active house of worship, an important religious center not just for Tykocin but for the whole Podlasie region. By the post-World War I period, perhaps earlier, the palette had become an unassumingly modest off-white. By the late nineteenth century, with the rise of Białystok, the centrality of the Tykocin synagogue in the regional Jewish world had become significantly diminished.[30]

What are we looking for when we make a decision regarding restoration of an historical object or building because we value authenticity and believe that authenticity means being faithful to that which existed in the past, and when we wish to respect those who made the decisions about color at those times? The obvious question that arises under such circumstances is *which past*? Who are we respecting, and on what basis? What are our criteria? The administrators of the Białystok and Tykocin museums and the conservator involved made a sincere attempt to legitimate the decision about the color selection by grounding it in serious research into what they argue "was done in the past." "Everything indicates that this [pastel] color was original in the seventeenth century. The second color, green-blue, [was found in] the eighteenth century," the regional museum director, Lechowski, points out in an interview published in the online version of the popular newspaper *Wyborzca*.[31] In the interview he argues that, "the color scheme was established on the basis of thorough tests of plaster and layers of paint."[32] The synagogue is painted in two colors, which Lechowski describes as originating from two different centuries. There is no proof offered indicating that in the past the colors were ever combined as they are now.

When it comes to painting the *besmedresh* next to the synagogue, we learn that different criteria and a different past were selected. I was not able to interview Director Lechowski. But in the article in *Wyborcza*, he writes that, "We should respect conservation thought [*sic*] from the 1960s and 1970s. Conservators were then guided by certain premises. Therefore, we agreed with the provincial conservator that we should keep the colors of the seventies [for the *besmedresh*], which that generation recognized as the only and right [ones], when the building was handed over to the museum."[33]

As we have seen, the color selected during the first restoration in the 1970s was white or off-white. The decision about color involves a choice that does not come from the past; it is based in and on the present. It is guided by present-day values and understandings. It is doubtful that the many re-paintings and renovations that took place in the more distant past were governed by the quest for an authenticity based in some past time, an approach we so value today.

Old Jewish Cemeteries Have Many Voices

Many old Jewish cemeteries in Poland, like the one in Tykocin, are in a state of dereliction and disrepair dating from the war and the immediate postwar years. Both Jews and Christian Poles visit these cemeteries, though they come for quite different purposes. Some Jews visit for family reasons, some to pay homage to the dead, some out of pure curiosity, others as part of Jewish heritage tours. Christian Poles also visit these public markers of the former Jewish population out of curiosity. Some young Christian and Jewish Poles, diaspora Jews, Israelis, and foreign Christians–many Germans–come to the cemeteries to give a helping hand in restoring them to their rightful place in the Polish landscape.

On one occasion, Józef invited me to join a group of schoolteachers from Tykocin and its environs, one of whom was his relative, on a trip he was leading to the nearby town of Knyzyn, where there is an odd, beautiful Jewish cemetery now set in a dense wooded copse. There were about twenty teachers in the group, mostly women in their thirties and forties. I was the only living Jew around, and Józef, rather spontaneously it seemed, transformed me into an active focal point of the event, as a kind of revenant-cum-ethnographer. Once we arrived at the cemetery, standing amidst the gravestones, Józef introduced me to the group as a descendant of a Tykocin Jewish family. All eyes were upon me, "the living specimen," as I was gazing at them, wondering if I fit their image of "the Jew." I then greeted them and said a few words. Having given some thought to our encounter, I later told Józef, somewhat disingenuously, that as far as I was concerned, I was with them not in the role of a Jew but just as an interested person, shall I say, an ethnographer and participant-observer. "That's okay, but they still see you in the category of Jew," he quickly responded. I began to wonder what that "category", as he put it, meant to them. Someone who looks like them but deep down is very different? Someone just like them who happens to be Jewish? The latter would, no doubt, have been my preference.

As we were walking amidst the gravestones, one of the teachers told me that she was planning to visit one of the Jewish restaurants in Tykocin on the return and wanted to know what she should eat. Which Jewish foods did I like most? She was, I guess, searching for some sort of generic Jewish food or an "authentic" Jewish experience, like one might wish for when entering an unfamiliar ethnic restaurant. I think I disappointed her when I told her that the food that I ate at home as a child was basically American, with a few Jewish dishes thrown in on the holidays.

As we walked through the cemetery, I asked another of the teachers what subject she taught. "History," she said. Apropos of the moment, I asked her if she taught anything about Jews in Poland. "Yes, I tell them about how many Jewish people were in business and crafts, but there were also doctors and lawyers." I asked her if she herself had ever met or gotten to know any Jews. "Oh, sure," she offered, "in England." As we continued talking, I came to understand that I was the only Jew she had ever met in Poland. Sadly, she told me that when she and other people describe Polish Jews, it is as if they are talking about ghosts. The cemetery was very spooky, she said. I asked another teacher if there were

any Jews in her town, although I knew the chances were slim. She pointed to the graves: "not like here," she said. I presume the old Jewish cemetery in her town had been destroyed.

What these teachers teach about Jews at school is, not surprisingly, distant and removed from their everyday worlds. There is almost nothing in the textbooks that they can use to describe the lives local Jews once lived, and there are no Jews in their everyday lives. Eighty years ago, Jews were everywhere in Poland, in most small towns and cities. Teachers today present "the big issues" in history to their students but say nothing about how Jews of various sorts lived their varied everyday lives, and provide little up-close detail about what happened to the Jews in Tykocin in 1941 and who did what to whom.[34] After all, the Jews were their parents' and grandparents' neighbors prior to the war. In any case, my local companions made it clear that few people talk about such things in their towns and in their homes. When Poles were in school during the Communist period, little was taught about Jews, several of the teachers explained. The curriculum became more open to issues about the war and the Holocaust after the fall of Communism in 1989.

There are no Jews in the lives of most of these small-town people, except in tourist spots like Tykocin, where thousands of Jewish visitors come and go each year, seemingly oblivious to the bewilderment of the local people who are relegated to the backdrop as distanced observers of the Jews' comings and goings. For the residents of Tykocin, Jewish tourists are common, though mostly observed from a distance. Many of the Jews themselves carry with them their own muted resentment of the locals, who are now living where their own families, or families like their own, once lived.

What is Remembered of the Jewish Past in Tykocin?

What, then, is "remembered" of the Jewish past in Tykocin? Of course, almost nothing is any longer actually *remembered*, since there is virtually no one alive to do the remembering. And even if there were, their "remembering" would have been a construction continually tempered by the present. This kind of effort has also been referred to as a "memory project," an attempt to mold a past to suit present-day political and/or cultural needs or to stake out territorial claims. Monuments play a significant role in such efforts, serving as focal points for interpreting and reinterpreting the past and staking claims to the ever-changing present order of things. Historical or archeological findings purportedly connected to the origins of one's own people are frequently used to support such claims. Obliterating or removing old monuments–churches, synagogues, ruins of earlier civilizations, cemeteries, statues, and the like–that point to peoples no longer wanted can be seen as a negative sort of memory project, a common way of "forgetting" the past for the benefit of the present. Such forgetting has been a common, though often controversial, practice in many parts of the world. The febrile reaction against so-called woke culture in the United States in recent years is one particularly strident example of the politics of forgetting.

For those who intentionally attempt to memorialize the Jewish past in Tykocin, the question we must ask of them is, what of all the possible things from the past that could be memorialized have they chosen to present publicly and in what context? This holds true for the museum and its buildings, its exhibitions, and its various activities, for the "133 Stories" exhibition, and for public spaces such as restaurants and shops.

We do not know what the ordinary residents of Tykocin think when and if they think about the destruction of the Jews in their town and what their forbearers did or saw in relation to that

destruction. Locals are reticent to discuss the ways members of their families helped abate the killing of local Jews by the Germans and, in some cases, rescue and hide them. There is the plunder of Jewish homes that Jewish survivors describe as having taken place prior to and during the German occupation of the town. How widespread was such looting, and to what degree was it sanctioned by the public at large? This was looting at a scale which Jan Gross and Grudzińska Gross describe as a "golden harvest."[35] These little and big crimes are actions that, after the fact, make people feel bad, feel guilty, feel small. It is not surprising that there is so much silence about what happened in Tykocin during the war. They choose silence, like the elderly women interviewed in Brenner's film about Tykocin or like Marzena's grandmother discussed in Chapter II.

At another level there is the synagogue-museum, which was an active house of worship prior to August 1941, and is now a Polish regional state museum. The museum has presented many important exhibitions about Jewish life in general and about the Jews of Tykocin. It plays a very important role in the remembrance of Jews, in general, and local. However, the local community does not participate in setting the agenda for or deciding upon exhibition subjects and scheduling for the museum other than those working there. My sense is that locals are largely oblivious to the museum. That is not surprising given the synagogue's central physical locus in their lives and, at the same time, the symbolic location of so many potentially disturbing reminders of the past.

V

WHOSE MEMORIAL?

"As long as we remember them, they are here . . ."

From the Tykocin 75th year memorial name tag.

The People of Tykocin

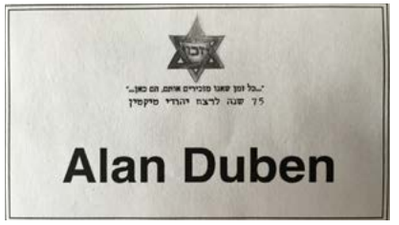
I learned at the last minute from a Jewish friend in Białystok that there was to be a memorial service in Tykocin for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the mass murder of the Jews of the town, and that descendants of Tykocin Jews from as far away as Australia and the United States and as close as Israel would be coming. The dates were September 4 and 5, 2016. I was planning to be in Poland during the second half of September. Could I manage another trip there in the same month? I wrote to the director of the Tykocin museum whom, I was told, had detailed information about the event. She directed me to the organizer, who was an Israeli woman. I wrote and asked her to send me a program, and once it arrived—in Hebrew and English—I decided I *had* to be there, both for the memorial service and for the opportunity to meet so many other children and grandchildren of Jews from Tykocin, "Tiktiners," as Józef Markiewicz cleverly referred to them in English, based on the word Tiktin, the Yiddish name for the town, consequently highlighting their distinctiveness as the living embodiments of the now deceased residents. As we shall see, the Israeli military made use of those living embodiments of Tiktin Jews at the memorial service they organized in the forest where the Jews were murdered. I never gave any thought to Christian locals attending the memorial services. There was no indication of their participation on the Israeli-sponsored invitation, and it was only after the memorial service that I saw the invitation that had been sent to locals in the Polish language.

I was looking forward to meeting my fellow Tiktiners, hoping to feel a sense of affinity, perhaps community, with them. I did indeed quickly develop a mutual bond with the quite secular Anglophone Jews who came largely from the United States and Australia. We all shared a common Anglo-Jewish culture, whereas,

with the Israelis there was more distance, partly due to language, partly to their political culture.

My initial email communication with the Israeli organizer included an invitation to join a WhatsApp chat group. I had no idea then that the memorial ceremony and all of the communications and activities related to it would both deepen my connection with and understanding of the two worlds of the "people of Tykocin," both Jewish and Christian Polish, while at the same time raise many disquieting questions. I was to be a full-fledged participant-observer in all the ceremonies, both civilian and military, all dominated by Israelis. I was there both as an engaged insider and, to the extent that I could, as an objective outsider. I came to see the service as a multifold display of Israeli and diaspora Jewish survivalist symbolism, of Jewish mourning, of Jewish solidarity, and of inveterate Polish-Jewish misunderstandings. In lieu of a workable common understanding and successful organization and joint participation, sadly, the ceremonies also came to symbolize the unresolved issue of "ownership." To whom did the memorials belong: to all Jews, to Israeli Jews in particular, to Polish Jews, to local Christian townspeople, to Polish state institutions and museums, or to some undefined combination of all of those diverse stakeholders?

About sixty of the children and grandchildren of the few survivors of 1941, as well as the descendants of earlier Jewish emigrants, attended the ceremonies. The families of survivors of 1941 were in the overwhelming majority. I belonged to both groups. The ceremony was organized by an Israeli woman from a military



75th Holocaust memorial name tag.

Israeli military at the 75th Holocaust memorial in the Łupochowo forest

family, and more than two-hundred Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) officers were in attendance at the forest death site ceremony. The Israeli presence was overwhelming, and the event turned into a major Israeli *tour de force*. Interviews with the parish priest and other local Christians I conducted after the event provided a Polish Christian and nationalist perspective on the event and on the meaning for them of the frequent presence of visiting Jews in the town. Not surprisingly, the ceremony and the presentation of the Jews of the past in Tykocin carries multiple and often contradictory meanings for the various participants.

I conclude this chapter with a discussion of another symbolically dense event in present-day Polish-Jewish history, a storybook tale about life, not death, a performance of *Fiddler on the Roof* at the town synagogue-museum. The event was well-attended by Poles from the area, most of whom love Fiddler, as do most people in Poland. The only other Jew present other than myself was the actor in the role of the rabbi.

Who Owns the Memorial?

Over the years since the renovation of the synagogue in the 1970s, Tykocin and the Łopuchowo forest killing site have been transformed into dense, multivocal symbols, symbols conjoining the fears, tears, and hopes of visiting Jews, as well as, perhaps, instilling a greater understanding of Jewish life in the past for Christian Poles who visit the town and are able to get a sense for what multicultural Tykocin was once like. The Holocaust is the central trope in Israeli state-sponsored Jewish heritage tourism. It is a powerful *raison d'être* for the founding of the State of Israel after the Jewish tragedy of World War II, and serves as a poignant reminder of what, in the eyes of many, Jews must do to survive as a people. It has become a call for Jewish vigilance, strength and awareness in the aftermath of massive violent harm done and potential future Jewish vulnerability. Tykocin has, for Jewish visitors, become both a symbol of Jewish life destroyed and, as a result of Israeli on-site symbolic shows of strength, of an unbending, manifest determination never again to be subject to harm as a people.

At the same time, for many Poles, especially for local people, large group Jewish visits to Tykocin and similar places have become ceaseless rituals of a kind of reenactment and implicit blame and defamation for crimes of the Germans in which the vast majority of Poles did not participate. Anthropologist Erica Lehrer discusses defamation in the context of her study of Jewish tourism in Poland, arguing that Poland (and the Polish people, I would add) "has [have] been treated by the Jewish establishment as ritually desecrated: it has become a symbol of condensed evil that overrides meanings or history other than the 'Holocaust.'"[1]

There is a *sub rosa* accusatory voice, a sense of disdain for Poles veiled in the silence of the Jewish visitors who pass through Tykocin without uttering a word to the locals, walking around the

town without any intercourse with local people, as if they did not exist. Many Poles feel that despite the enormous crimes Germans committed, the world has forgiven them but still holds the Poles responsible, perhaps not for what they did or did not do, but for who they are.

The timing of the ceremony and the nature of the participants at the 2016 memorial were unusual. Typically, the annual memorial is held on August 25 and 26, the actual days on which in 1941 the town's Jews were murdered. The annual ceremony is usually poorly attended. A handful of local Christians–the parish priest, the director of the local museum and a scattering of other locals, as well as a representative from the Israeli embassy, perhaps a few Jews–typically participate in the memorial service.

The 2016 event, other than the concert to be held in the synagogue on September 4, was organized by Israelis, though the parish priest, who regularly attends the annual memorials, told me that locally prepared invitations coming from the mayor of the town also went out in Polish and included notice of a concert organized by the museum. Typically, the memorial is a purely locally run event. In 2016, the great majority of the participants were from Israel; many were members of the same extended family. There was another rather large family group from Australia. The organizer was the Israeli granddaughter of one of the few survivors of the 1941 massacre. Her father was a retired Israeli air force pilot. We were each given nametags with an aphorism in Hebrew, which, in English, translated as, "As long as we remember them, they are here." Inverting the wording to "As long as we remember them, *we* are here," would be closer to my vision of a Tykocin with which we have an active "living" connection. There is not much we can do for the dead, but a lot that can be done for ourselves by keeping alive our connections not just with our

ancestors as individuals but with their place of birth, with the world in which they lived, and the place where many of them died, most of them passing away peacefully over the centuries. The last Jews of Tykocin were brutally murdered. I came to realize that after a few generations, individuals usually lose the immediate connection with their ancestors that would motivate them to memorialize them actively, but when the remembering is a part of a larger nation-building project such as is the case with Israel, the remembering may perdure for generations or longer.

On September 4, the first day of the 2016 memorial, all those staying at the hotel in Białystok selected by the organizers spent the morning gathered in the lobby getting to know each other. That was followed by a lecture on the Jews of Białystok and a tour of the scant prewar Jewish remains left in that city, then over sixty percent Jewish. Late that afternoon, we all headed to Tykocin for a lecture that I was to give in the synagogue on my research on the Jews of Tykocin.

The Ceremony at the Market Square

On the morning of September 5, the Tiktiners set off in a fleet of rented cars for Tykocin. Leah†, an Israeli woman in her late fifties, offered me a ride from Białystok to Tykocin for the memorial. It was just the two of us in her car. The ride provided an opportunity to learn more about her motivations for the journey to Tykocin. As she related the experiences of her mother, who had left Tykocin in the late 1920s at a time of growing antisemitism in Poland, the level of discomfort she felt being in Poland was palpable. I asked her about it. Her mother had told her never to trust Poles, and said Poles were "antisemitic by nature." Leah† carried the frame of mind with which her mother had fled to Palestine some ninety years prior to 2016, despite her own quite different life experience

in Israel. She said that she now sees that she has come to resemble her mother more and more as she ages, carrying forward the old scars of family trauma. She also echoes commonly held Israeli sentiments toward Poles.

I shared my more accommodating perspective on Poland and Poles with her, but despite her intellectual acceptance of what I was saying, I was not able to pierce the shell of her deep-seated antipathies. I was to encounter similar feelings among many of the Tiktiners I met. Most of those at the memorial were descendants of people who either had been survivors of the mass murder of 1941 or who had left during the particularly anti-Semitic interwar years. They referred to that heritage as the basis of their uncomfortableness with Poles. I did not share that anti-Polish heritage.

The ceremony began at the old Jewish marketplace at the edge of what once was the Jewish quarter. Leah and I arrived at 9:20 a.m. The Israeli organizer, Sarah, and other Israelis were stringing up Israeli flags on lines stretched around the periphery of the square, marking out the space in the center of Tykocin as belonging to the Israelis, or was it to the Jews? I was immediately struck by the brash, in-your-face nationalist display. I found myself in the midst of a narrowly focused Israeli nationalist performance rather than an all-encompassing, inclusive Jewish event. I was dismayed to see the two conflated. Subsuming all Jews under the Israeli flag was a political choice on the part of the Israelis rather than an invitation to all Jews. Additionally, I did not see any Poles from town joining in. But then, the Polish invitation provided no information about the old marketplace meeting.

Creating a space that conflates all Jews with Israel can welcome as readily as it can alienate diaspora Jews. I, for one, am a Jew but not an Israeli. I have an antipathy to all forms of nationalism because of nationalism's inherent tendencies toward

Ceremony at the old Jewish marketplace.

extremist and exclusionary politics. I see the diaspora as the site of modern Jewish fluorescence and creativity as well, indubitably, of the great tragedy of modern Jewish history. I did not come to the Tykocin memorial for an Israeli or any other national display. The concern for the safety and well-being of Jews must not be reduced to nationalist terms. An approach resting on ethno-nationalist sentiments harbors the inevitable deep-seated perversions of such nationalism.

Eva Hoffman believes that "the Shoah has been quite willfully recruited in the service of Zionism and conservative Israeli nationalism. . ."[2] I agree. Benyamin, one of the mourners and an Israeli critical of his government's politics in general, later told me that when he walked into the square that morning, the scene felt like an alien invasion. He told me that he wondered what the local people were thinking about that blaze of Israeli–or, perhaps in their minds, "Jewish"–flags.

The old marketplace square was cordoned off. A loudspeaker system and a podium had been set up for the ceremony at the near end of the square leading into Piłsudski Street, the town's main thoroughfare. The square started to fill up with people.

Many of the Israelis had flags draped over their shoulders like capes. I later learned that this public display of Israeli presence was something often done at Jewish memorial sites in Poland. In some cases, this display carries an implicitly militaristic message. An Israeli army captain describes a military-sponsored visit to Poland's Jewish sites in an IDF film: "We walked proudly on Polish soil with an Israeli flag and with a sense of victory […]: 'We are here,'"[3] was the way he gave meaning to the display of Israeli presence in Poland.

The ceremony began a bit later than planned. Sarah and her father, draped in Israeli flags, spoke to the crowd about the tragedy of 1941. She could not restrain her tears. There were several other emotion-laden speeches, all by Israelis, all in Hebrew. A young woman, a Polish Christian convert to Judaism, who served as interpreter, aided the Anglophones. There were prayers recited by an impeccably dressed young man wearing a *yarmulke*, who, I later learned, is an assistant to the Chief Rabbi in Warsaw and himself a latter-day Jew, a man who, like other Poles, had

Poles gazing at the ceremony.

discovered he had some Jewish ancestors and converted. Music was playing in the background, Israeli songs. Everyone sang the Hatikvah, the Israeli national anthem. I had learned it as a boy at Hebrew school, never quite sure then whether it was the Israeli national anthem or some kind of Jewish anthem. Many of the participants were overcome with emotion, both men and women wiping their tearful eyes. At one edge of the square were two elderly Poles with their bicycles and a dog in one of the bicycle baskets who had stopped to watch. They were gazing at the participants and their Israeli flags commandeering the center of their town with expressions of dismay on their faces clearly visible in the photo I took of them. The feeling I got was, in a strange reversal of roles, that it was they who were the strangers looking in with bewilderment at the odd doings of the natives with their flags as capes speaking an incomprehensible language.

There were no representatives of the local authorities or the museum or the church at the market square memorial ceremony. How could there have been? The invitation in Polish made no reference to such an event. There were no townspeople present, including Father Stefaniak who said he would have participated "with pleasure" had he been invited. The Israeli organizers claim that he and other important local officials had indeed been invited. It is difficult to assay which version of the invitation is true, yet it does seem to be truly symptomatic of the equivocal, largely inscrutable intentions of the organizers on both sides. Though not articulated as such, it became clear to me that the memorial was to be a Jewish-only event. The service was hardly even inviting to the Anglophone diaspora Jews who had come from the four corners of the world to attend. All the speeches were entirely in Hebrew, which very few of the Anglophones, let alone the local townspeople, could understand. No effort was made to translate the speeches into Polish. Father Stefaniak did not attend

the memorial in town, but he had expected to join up with the Jewish participants at the forest later that morning for a common ceremony. But that meeting of faiths failed miserably. This was the fourth time Father Stefaniak had participated in an annual memorial, he told me, though always at the killing site in the forest on August 25 and 26. Reflecting back on the divided memorial in the forest, he told me, unassumingly, that, "I don't see enough work being done to find a common ground, to create a dialogue. My experience is that we are too separate." He continued with his lament: "Seeing these people from other parts of the world, you have the feeling you would like to greet them. I can only gaze at them. … I don't have any possibility of getting to know them."

I was told that these sorts of Israeli displays are common in the town. Most people would hardly be paying much attention. I wondered whether the locals even knew what the gathering was all about. It was as if the Tiktiners, revenants of their long dead ancestors, circulated in an entirely separate local space, passing through Tykocin, talking only among themselves, not being heard or understood, and not understanding the complexities of today's Polish society, much like the situation of the local Poles when encountering visiting Jews. The Jews are seen, they are on display, but they are not approached.

A Meeting at the Synagogue and a Misconceived Concert of Yiddish Songs

On the evening of the 24th we all attended a concert of what was advertised as "prewar Jewish music" in the Hebrew and English announcements and "Yiddish love songs" in the Polish one. The interior walls of the old synagogue were lit up with sprays of multi-colored lighting, and the ambience was more like that of a nightclub than a house of prayer. I should have realized at the start that the concert would be fraught. A blond unmistakably Polish gentile, a *shiksa* as she would be referred to in vernacular Yiddish, was singing love songs in the Yiddish language. The singer explained the meaning of each of the songs in faultless English before beginning. The arrangements were brash, the performance too loud, and there was no "Jewish feeling," to the pieces. The Jews in attendance were expecting old Yiddish songs appropriate to the occasion. The disjuncture was thick in the air.

I was sitting in the front row with a number of the Tiktiners on the side of the semi-circle of seats where most of the Jews were located. There were quite a number of Polish townspeople present sitting across from us. About halfway through the performance the Jews next to and behind me, started quietly slipping out one by one–in full view of the Polish attendees. It was an oddly disturbing experience. The music also came across as offensive to me, appropriate neither to the Jewish tragedy we were commemorating nor to the integrity of old Yiddish culture. After all the other Jews walked out, I was all alone in the front row, embarrassed, glancing left and right, trying to fill the abandoned seats with my eyes. The museum director, whom we as a group encountered for the first time during the memorial events and who had introduced the musicians, was sitting right across from me observing in bewilderment the departure of the other Jews. I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable as the disturbing sounds continued to blare out at us. My dislike of the performance trumped my personal sense of obligation to be there and my ethnographer's code of neutrality, and I too got up and slipped out in full view of everyone.

I waited in the lobby until the concert was over, hoping to find out more about the singer and the concert. Finally, she stepped out into the lobby, and I introduced myself, curious about how she came to sing in Yiddish. She said she had been an English

literature student at the university, but then became fascinated with Jewish culture and music, with the Jewish world in general. What does the Jewish world mean to you, I asked? "Jewish culture is very 'in,' these days," she informed me. She explained that she had begun singing with a Jewish music group while still at the university. I asked how she had learned Yiddish. Somewhat embarrassed, she told me that she had just memorized the Yiddish lyrics but did not actually speak the language. I believe she thought she was doing something of value, and it was very clear to me that she was doing so out of respect for Jews and Jewish culture, yet at the same time she was so unattuned to the sensibilities of Jewish culture and the Jewish mourners.

When I interviewed Father Stefaniak on a return trip later that month, he bemoaned the lack of communication between visiting Jews and local Christians and the deficit of remembrance of the townspeople. He frequently referred to shared suffering as a potential factor in creating better mutual understanding between the two peoples. Michael Schudrich, the rabbi of Warsaw and Łódź at the time, had the following to say about the lack of Jewish empathy for the suffering of Poles, an important factor, I believe, in the persistent mutual misunderstanding of the two peoples: "… if we want the Poles to feel and understand our pain, then we must understand and feel the pain of the Poles."[4] Despite the good intentions of their spiritual leaders, such mutual understanding and empathy, sadly, do not typically characterize their flocks. The invitation sent out to local people in Polish invited them to assemble at the synagogue at 9:45 and depart by bus to the Łopuchowo forest for the memorial ceremony. There is no indication on the invitation of a ceremony in the old market square. Father Stefaniak shared a copy of it with me. In translation the relevant parts read as follows:

> The mayor of Tykocin invites you to a ceremony on September 4-5, 2016, devoted to the memory of the Jews of Tykocin on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Holocaust with the participation of foreign guests–the families of victims murdered by the Germans in 1941.
>
> 05.09.2016
>
> 9.45 – Assembling at the Great Synagogue and bus transfer to the site of the massacre.
>
> 11.00 – Ceremony at the burial sites in the Łopuchowo forest. [bold in the original]
>
> The ceremony will feature a concert by Ola Bilińska singing "Libelid," a series of Yiddish love songs, in the Great Synagogue, on 04.09.2016 at 20.00.[5]

As is clear, the invitation Father Stefaniak shared with me does not include mention of a ceremony at the old market square on September 5th, just the ceremony at burial sight and the concert. At the interview, he explained: "You must understand the character of this place. For the commemoration of the May 1944 deportation of Polish people, by which everyone understands he means the town's Christians, there were also not a lot of people [by which he means gentiles] present." He continued: "If we [Christians and Jews] were to have done this [the seventy-fifth year memorial] together, I could have announced it in church." Clearly something was missing. What was missing was proper communication and coordination between the Israeli organizers


Memorial Service Program:
September 4, 2016

10:00 - Gather in the lobby of Hotel Golebiewski, Bialystok.
10:30 - 13:00 - Session on the relationship between the jews of Tykochin and the Bialystok district, followed by a walking tour of the historic
13:00 - 16:00 - lunch break
16:00 - 19:30 Gathering at the Synagogue in Tykochin. Lecture and walking tour around Tykochin
19:30 - 20:00 - Break
20:00 - 21:30 - Concert in the synagouge. Playing an old pre war jewish music.

Memorial Service Program:
September 5, 2016

9:30 - Gather at the Tykochin Synagogue.
10:00 - Memorial Ceremony at the Market Square.
11:15 - 12:30 - Lupochova Forest. Lead by "Edim be Madim".
13:00 - Lunch
15:00 - Conclusion talk.

Please note there might be changes in theschedule.

For information and registration contact:
Dovrat Lubovsky 972-52-5250173
lubovski1@gmail.com.

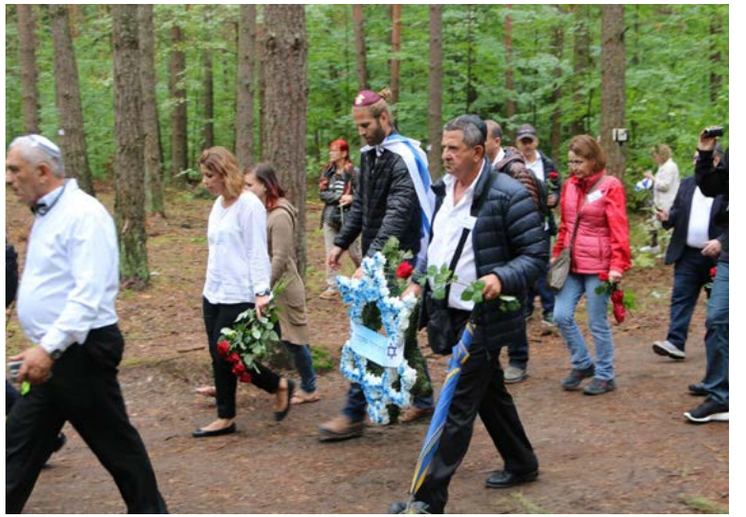
English version of the Israeli invitation.

and the locals. The local invitation written only in Polish was circulated to townspeople by the mayor, the Jewish one in Hebrew and English, by the Israelis. They are quite different. Notice the "filmstrip" featuring touristy Tykocin scenes running down the right side of the Israeli invitation.

In the end, there was no *co*-memoration. The Jews and the locals never came together, except at the fraught concert in the synagogue on the previous evening, which both invitations included. The two peoples also "came together" in a newscast on Białystok TV on the night of the fifth, in which the separate Jewish and local services held later that day in the forest were spliced together by the broadcasters so as to give the appearance of a single service–bolstering the much-desired positive image of Jews and Poles harmoniously "united" in remembrance of the Jews of this town renowned far and wide.

The Killing Site

Following the morning ceremony in town on the fifth the Jewish contingent drove to the killing site in the Łupochowo forest. I didn't see a bus waiting for local participants who wished to join those going to the forest. I didn't see any townspeople at the forest ceremony. It was a purely Jewish affair. The Jews traveled from the town to the forest in their rented cars. Sarah†'s Orthodox cousin and the Polish interpreter Zofia joined us in the car. Zofia was acting strangely, continually biting her lower lip and looking bewildered. At the square she had been faltering in her translations for the English speakers. At one point she broke down in tears. At the time I didn't understand what was happening. I later learned that she had been tippling vodka throughout the morning. She later explaining that she had been overwhelmed with emotion by the whole experience. As the ceremony was entirely in Hebrew,



Walking to the forest burial site.

and with Zofia faltering, we, the Anglophones, were almost completely cut off from the flow.

When we arrived at the forest, Father Stefaniak, whom at that time I had not yet met, was standing in the muddy clearing where the road leading into the killing site begins, his back turned to the forest as if waiting for something or someone. I thought he was going to join us at the forest memorial ceremony, but as it turns out he was leaving, as we were late, having waited quite a long time for the Israeli military contingent to arrive. He had already paid his respects at a small local ceremony I was told. Józef, who was with the Tiktiners, introduced him to me and I said I would very much like to meet with him when I came back to Tykocin later that month. I was pleased that he said he would be happy to do so. I refer to the interview in the following pages.

From there, the memorial was an entirely scripted Israeli military performance: flags flying, flags draped over shoulders as capes, military uniforms, a military march into the unsettling

depths of the forest, and a trumpeter standing amongst the dark stands of pine alongside the forest road playing mournful dirges. The Israelis clearly "owned" the event. Driving to Tykocin from Białystok, Leah† was telling me about how Israelis in general feel *they* "own" the Holocaust. She explained that to many of her compatriots, as well as to diaspora Jews, what happened in Poland during the war is what could happen again if there were not a strong, militarized, and determined Israel.

As we were standing in the clearing at the entrance to the road leading into the forest, several imposing, tour buses briskly pulled in and screeched to a halt. An Israeli officer, hanging with one arm from the open front door of the bus, jumped out, running alongside as it came to a full stop, and signaled that he wanted the first row of cars parked there to be moved back immediately to make room for the buses. The drivers were located, and the cars quickly moved out and the buses in, and tens of military officers of various ranks and from all the services, mostly men but also some women, started pouring out. Most of the soldiers were young to middle-aged. Most looked like Middle Eastern Mizrahi Jews. A few of the officers greeted and then started chatting with some of the Tiktiners whom they apparently knew. I remembered that Sarah†'s father was a retired air force pilot.

I asked how the organizers had arranged for nearly two hundred soldiers to be present for the memorial and was told that they were part of a recurrent program of Israeli military visits to Poland to heighten awareness of the everlasting threat to Jews. The soldiers are expected to return to their units in Israel with a deepened sense of purpose and determination after this experience. Later, I perused the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) website where an officer had the following to say about the meaning of his experience in Poland: "Being in Poland is really a good reminder of … where we stand in the chain of history and not just thinking about today but thinking about memory and our past and why we still need to defend Israel."[6]

Sarah† had coordinated our memorial with the military visit, convincing some IDF commanders to fit this trip into their 2016 *Edim be Madim*, "Witnesses in Uniform" program in which every Israeli officer and many ordinary soldiers participate. The military contingents visit Jewish death sites and Nazi extermination camps, places where Jews once lived and derelict or renovated synagogues and cemeteries in various states of ruin. They were off to Treblinka after the Tykocin ceremony. Scenes of Israeli officers congregated near the synagogue in Tykocin, and then marching into the nearby forest where Tykocin's Jews were murdered are featured on a number of IDF films about the Witnesses in Uniform program. In 2022 the IDF ended the program in Poland, moving IDF delegations to Lithuania instead.

The IDF officers lined up in formation in front of us at the edge of the forest with two flagbearers at the head of the column: one flag was Israeli, the other military. We were told to line up in threes, just threes, and one of the officers marched

The IDF encircling the Tiktiners at the burial site.

up and down alongside us and made sure we were in order. Earlier, Sarah had sent us messages saying that we would be divided into four groups when we arrived at the actual killing site, but we were never told why. I was, naturally, assigned to the English-speaking group. We walked slowly in file down the forest road to the sound of the lone trumpeter. Everyone was silent and reflective as we proceeded amidst the dark spires of evergreens hooding our march to the killing site, overwhelmed in anticipation of our arrival at the site where almost all of Tykocin's Jews were machine-gunned to death. Once there, my group was told to proceed to a fenced-in burial site on the left where we were asked to step into the center of a large circle ringed by soldiers. I had no idea what this was all about. It soon became clear that we, the civilian descendants of Tykocin survivors were placed in the center of the circle of soldiers as living embodiments of the defenseless Jews of the town who were murdered eighty years earlier. The soldiers encircling us were there to protect us–symbolically. Our unsolicited role as Jewish victims presumably did not call for our understanding what was being said. We were just a group of "extras" in what Feldman has referred to as a "ritual reenactment of survival."[7] A man in his fifties was continuously shuffling an untidy pile of papers he was holding as he began rapidly orating loudly in Hebrew to our group of English speakers. I later learned that he was a guide from Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Israel. Zofia began to translate for us, but soon after she began, *sotto voce*, the speaker suddenly ordered her to stop, making it very clear that he did not want to be distracted or interrupted. The result was that we, the English speakers, stood there locked in listening to a thirty-minute impassioned lecture in Hebrew about the Holocaust which most of us could not understand.

When the incomprehensible speech about the Holocaust was over, we all walked to the central space in the memorial clearing and joined the larger group where preparations were being made for the combined memorial ceremony. And thus began speech after speech, again only in Hebrew. At one point I asked Leah, who was standing next to me, what they were saying, and an Israeli woman standing nearby shushed her. There were prayers, then the Hatikvah, lots of standing at attention and then at ease. Not understanding anything, I focused on the faces of the soldiers standing at attention across from me. Most were not of European origin, it seemed. I remember reading that the upper echelons of the Israeli officer corps were largely European Ashkenazi, the lower ranks predominantly Middle Eastern Mizrahi. The entire event was being filmed by the military. When it was over, people gathered in groups for photos at the memorial headstones. We had each been given a rose as we set off through the forest, and we dutifully laid our flowers on the memorials. A soldier was distributing small candles, which we lit and also placed there. More photos were taken. Then we walked silently out of the dark forest back to our cars.

I kept wondering what this focus on the Holocaust and the visits to death sites in Poland might mean for the Israeli soldiers from non-European countries. I asked an officer, perhaps forty years of age, who looked very Middle Eastern and whom I soon learned was of Egyptian-Iraqi parentage. "There was no Holocaust in the part of the world where you grew up," I said to him. "How do you relate to all of this?" "This [meaning the Holocaust] is part of our upbringing," he responded, "a central part of our culture," and, in that respect the trips to Poland make eminent sense. "Of course, those who are Holocaust survivors or their families have personal stories to tell," he said, but "we also hear some of them."

The memorial service was followed by a lunch the Tiktiners had arranged at the restaurant in the old Lithuanian castle on the north side of the Narew River. I sat at a table with the Turek family and others from Australia. We talked about Jewish food and holidays and, though living at opposite ends of the world, easily bonded in recognition of our common East European Jewish past. We talked at length about the meaning of the event. Everyone at the table seemed to agree that it was not the somber, mournful ceremony they had been expecting. The woman sitting next to me said that she felt overwhelming sadness and anger, but the others, myself included, were more affirmative, though not as a result of the ceremony. I told them I saw our coming together, our bonding in Tykocin, not just at the actual ceremony, as a ritual about life, not death. We are alive and are thankful for that and for sharing a common past and the joys of being together, of schmoozing. We are thankful that we are alive and able to remember those who were not given a chance to live out their natural lives. There was a promise made to meet the following year, but that never happened. For many, like me, the importance of the event was the connections with people, getting to know people who might have been my neighbors had the world of my grandmother and other grandparents been a different place.

Separate Worlds, Separate Ceremonies

In the end, there were two separate ceremonies to commemorate the Jews at the killing site in the Łupochowo Forest, though the ostensible plan had been to have one ceremony, with both Jews and gentiles present. First there was a small service with the parish priest, the director of the museum, and a few others, all gentiles except for Lucy, the Jewish community representative from Białystok. Then, following that service, there was a better-attended ceremony with all the Tiktiners, and the Israeli Defense Forces contingent. "I can say that I feel very sad about that. I wish we could have met some of the Jewish people," rued Father Stefaniak, who seemed genuinely committed to reconciliation between Poles and Jews. I asked him about the military presence at the forest ceremony, and he could only tell me rather punctiliously that "In our protocol, this is normal." Later, it became clear that he attributes other, more political motives to the Israeli military presence at the ceremony. Pisarska-Kalisty, the director of the synagogue-museum at the time, was also perturbed about the memorial service when I spoke with her at the end of the month. In her words,

> For more than two decades people from Tykocin and the museum have gone to the forest to commemorate the murdering of the Jewish community. It was always the 25th of August, and the Embassy of Israel always took part. But this year it was different because the museum learned that Israeli members of the Jewish community of Tykocin origin were organizing the memorial on the 4th of September. This was done entirely "unofficially." We agreed to the changes but wanted to do the service together with the Jews coming from afar. But then they arrived at the forest very late. We waited for some time but then had to proceed on our own. It was an unfortunate misunderstanding.

The Polish invitation called for the ceremony in the forest to begin at 11 a.m., the one with the Tiktiners, at 11:15. Poor coordination? In addition, the Israeli contingent was late in arriving. Seemingly an "unfortunate misunderstanding," though one that appears to be "over-determined," governed, that is, by a discomforting sort of inevitability in the way Polish-Jewish relations tend to be in Poland. The gentile participants and Lucy arrived at 11:00. They waited at the forest edge for the civilian Jewish participants and the contingent of Israeli Defence Forces to arrive but became impatient as the minutes went by. According

to one local participant, "Waiting in the parking area next to the forest, the officials there were feeling that they [the Jews] don't respect us. They're making us wait too long." Having to wait became a matter of injured dignity.

According to Sarah, the Israeli organizer, the date of the seventy-fifth year memorial was set to accommodate the Israeli Defense Force contingent and their Yad Vashem guide on one of their scheduled visits to Poland. The planning and arrangements took over six months she explained and entailed mobilizing personal connections and contacting people from all over the world, and required some tough convincing, she explained to me. She said that the local mayor, museum director, and others from Tykocin had indeed been invited "but they chose not to participate and did not answer any of the personal invitations sent to them in Polish."

I have not seen any of those invitations, though it was the museum director who informed me about the ceremony. She did not know why she had not received any follow up from the Israeli organizers. She said that she had hoped that this important memorial would bring all the mourners, Jewish and gentile, together, and was disappointed with the results of all her efforts. I wondered whether she was saying that for my consumption. I harbored doubts about the goodwill of both the Poles and the Jews. Though it was not openly stated–so much remained unvoiced–my understanding is that the Israelis were intent on doing the memorial as a Jewish, or more to the point, Israeli ceremony. Though no one uttered these words to me, I believe that in Israeli eyes, perhaps also those of some of the diaspora Jews present, Polish participation was not an essential part of the plan, perhaps not even desired. The same holds true for local gentiles, I believe. Local participation had always been very low at previous annual memorials, as Father Stefaniak had explained

to me. The only time locals eagerly and in significant numbers participated in a memorial event during those two days was at the fraught concert of "Yiddish love songs" which the Poles had expected or, alternatively, the "prewar Jewish music," which the Jews were expecting.

What Are Good Neighbors For?

In Father Stefaniak's way of thinking, sharing the tragedy of war should be an occasion for recognizing a common suffering and lead to a coming together in remembrance. If only, he said, the Jews who visit Tykocin, such as the young people who come with the "March of the Living" (MOTL), could somehow meet local people, a measure of the suffering almost *everyone* feels, he emphasized, might be shared. "This is very important because–about my sadness–I could then share it directly, rather than just with some officials; but I haven't been able to do that." He turned to me: "I'm happy that someone wants to understand me as a Pole, as a Pole who might have a Jewish neighbor," he offered. He emphasized the fact that he wished to be understood as a "Pole who has a Jewish *neighbor*," that is, as a person who recognizes the code of good neighborliness, who reaches out to the suffering of his Jewish neighbors, but in return asks for a sincere expression of Jewish empathy for Christian suffering, for Polish suffering, for an awareness of what, he believes, Polish Christians and Jews share**.** It is only when mind, word, and deed come together that serious progress in reconciliation between these two demeaned peoples can be made. It seems that the precarious progress of Polish-Jewish relations in Tykocin has been making in recent years must now go beyond the good word, and embrace the good deed. The eightieth anniversary ceremony and plaque are very positive steps in that direction. This theme is developed in Chapter VII.

Listening to the recording after the interview with Father Stefaniak, I could not but think of the highly controversial, deeply painful sense in which the word "neighbor" has come to be understood in Poland since the original Polish language publication in 2000 of Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, a book describing the crimes against their Jewish neighbors committed by the gentiles in the nearby town of Jedwabne in the summer of 1941.[8] Father Stefaniak grew up in a village near Jedwabne. I did not make any connection between "neighbor" as used by Gross and the way Father Stefaniak used it during the interview, so I do not know if his reliance on that word was a coincidence or not. I discussed his use of the word with Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pedich, a Polish friend and professor of literature at a Warsaw university. As a person very sensitive to cultural meanings and nuances of words, she suggested that "we must take into account the fact that Gross is a native speaker of Polish and when he used the word "neighbor" in the title of his book he was referring to the wide spectrum of meanings that this word evokes [in Polish society]. What he added with his title [represented] the ironic, or the bitter [shall we say sardonic side of being a neighbor]. "There is," she continued, "a set phrase in the Polish language, *stosunki dobrosąsiedzkie,* which means good neighborly relations, but of course in the context of Jedwabne the [meaning of] that concept was reversed." Lucyna spoke about the deep cultural roots of *stosunki dobrosąsiedzkie: "*I don't know how much of this communal memory has worked itself into your priest's way of thinking," she said, "So I would trace the trope to pre-Holocaust communal memory rather than to Gross."

In small communities worldwide there are quite similar expectations of close, face-to-face, multifold relationships with neighbors as compared with the more distanced social

relationships typically found in big cities. This does not mean that villagers or small-town people always have close "neighborly" relationships. There is much room for conflict at the face-to-face level, sometimes more than with more distanced urban relationships. But in classical sociological discourse, social relationships in small places are so often characterized by what the nineteenth, early twentieth century German sociologist Ferdinand Töennies, in his classic *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), referred to as *gemeinschaft,* a kind of close face-to-face community spirit, in contrast to the distanced, more anonymous *gesellschaft*-type of relations of the big city. While this time-worn dichotomy, widely used in twentieth-century sociology, is now commonly viewed as rather simplistic and masks the social complexities and conflicts even in small communities, this way of thinking about relationships still influences our common everyday discourse.

Understanding what Father Stefaniak means by being good neighbors requires recognition of the deep historical, indeed biblical, suffering of the Polish people, a profound experience of which he partakes as a Catholic, as a clergyman, and as a member of the Polish nation. That suffering has united Christian Poles as a people, the "Christ of Nations," through centuries of partition, occupation, and adversity. The importance of Jews understanding and really emoting the suffering of Poles, as well as of Poles understanding Jewish suffering, is what Rabbi Schudrich of Warsaw also emphasized in his interview with the Catholic Information Agency on March 4, 2001, which I earlier quoted. Both men, priest and rabbi, called for mutual understanding. Sadly, such good intentions so often flounder in the constraints of everyday life and the baneful realities of modern ethnic-nationalist public political performance.

Who Suffered the Most?

Apropos of the interlocking nature of Polish nationalism and Catholicism, Waldemar Chrostowski, Professor of Theology at the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw, a well-known expert on Jewish theology, and a founding member of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews, holds that Polish suffering is the price paid for patriotism and "is seen as a sign of 'chosenness' and [what is more] the specific mission of the Poles."[9] Conjoining Polishness and Christianity, Chrostowski holds that suffering or sacrifices made in the name of the Polish nation are the worldly manifestations of being the Chosen People in God's eyes. The conflation of Church and Nation he describes is totalistic. There is an analogy writ large with Max Weber's famous claim that worldly success was viewed as a sign of salvation in early modern Calvinist thought. In these terms, Chrostowski challenges Judaism's foundational scriptural claim to being *the* people chosen by God. Indeed, he asserts that "Poland is *sui generis* the chosen nation. When the Polish nation is threatened, God and God's cause are threatened," he holds.[10] The enormity of the suffering of the Polish nation, the purported "Christ of Nations," its unqualified participation in the suffering and Passion of Christ, rivals, and in the minds of some Poles even trumps, the suffering of their Jewish "neighbors" in existential meaning and, from their perspective, also in fact.[11] In a disarming inversion, Chrostowski writes, "The time of occupation [during the war] was perceived as similar to the Passion of Christ also because of the mass persecution of the Jews." Yet, he believes that "'there was [in Poland] little awareness of the common blood of Christ and the Jews." Professor Chrostowski here makes an oblique reference to the possible redemption of the Jews in emphasizing the common blood of Jews and Christians and, at one point, the Church as the "new Israel."[12] The reference to redemption, to this divinely ordained mission, is, according to Martin Goodman in his *History of Judaism*, built upon the way "Paul the Jew regarded faith in Christ as the fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel."[13]

Alongside the ancient belief in Jewish responsibility for the killing of Christ, one of the most striking claims Professor Chrostowski makes is often heard in Poland. This is the unfounded belief that the Jews are themselves to blame for today's Polish anti-Jewish sentiments since it is they who were responsible for the imposition of communism on the Polish people. The enduring equation of Jewish suffering with their ancient role in the Passion of Christ has symbolically been given a new life with the claim that the Jews are to blame for the blight of Godless communism in Poland, just as they were erroneously blamed for collaborating with the Soviets after the Russian invasion of 1939.

The differing meanings attributed to Jewish and Polish suffering, as experienced and conceptualized by these two peoples throughout their common history in Polish lands, sadly remains a major barrier to mutual understanding and empathy. The persecution, deprivations, and suffering of both Jews and Poles throughout their long history is a mutual tragedy of extraordinary proportions, though, sadly, their particular histories of suffering have not become a source of *shared* suffering. Perhaps that is because, according to Michlic and Polonsky, ". . . in Polish Catholicism, national ideals have become intertwined with Christian values and national identity has often taken precedence over universal principles."[14] Polish-Jewish solidarity in opposing Russian tyranny in 1830-31 and 1861-64 did not endure through the travails of rising nationalisms, social class, ethnically based politics and conflicts, and the increasing Russian tyranny of the late nineteenth century. Similarly, in memorializing the Holocaust in Jewish heritage tourism in Poland, the Israeli national agenda has trumped the universalist message that binds all Jews, Israeli and diaspora, and indeed all of humanity.

Antisemitism

When I told Father Stefaniak that a number of people I had met in Poland believe that antisemitism is particularly rife in the northeastern part of the country, where Tykocin and Białystok are located, I could see he was discomfited: "I'm very sad that people are talking about this region like *that*, and that a place like Auschwitz was in Poland. I am connected with the sorrow of the cemetery." He continued, "Maybe you'll see some antisemitism in the football clubs," he offered, deflecting the broader-based charge while echoing commonly recited attributions concerning football teams and their ruffian supporters. Cardinal Glemp, Poland's long-serving Primate from 1983 to 2009, dismissed the common belief that Jews were basically disliked or worse, based on "matters of religion," because of their presumed role in the Crucifixion of Christ. He held that "before the war, matters of religion did not play any significant role as far as dislike for [*sic*] Jews was concerned." It was Jewish culture and traditions. "Jews were disliked," he continued, "because of their odd 'folk customs.'"[15] Glemp accepts that Jews were disliked in Poland. The issue is why: whether it was because of their religion or their way of life. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman holds quite the opposite view, that is, that in the past Jews were disliked for religious reasons.

Antisemitism may mean many things, ranging from dislike to hatred of Jews, to the intention to harm or actually physically harming them as individuals or a people, grounded in such hatred. It is possible for one to express antisemitic sentiments against Jews in the abstract while not being negative about actual Jews one encounters in everyday life, nor causing them harm in any way. The researchers in a Jagiellonian (Krakow) University antisemitism study of 2013 concluded that though there are very few Jews in Poland, "much of the country … is reported to share anti-Semitic opinions,"[16] and that "it is mostly imagined and always

stereotypical rather than real Jews who are the object of modern anti-Semitism … so widely spread in Poland."[17] That is hardly surprising, given that there are so few Jews in Poland today and very few opportunities for most people to meet and engage with them.

What is surprising is that antisemites may construct imaginary Jews, fictive Jews, based on common stereotypes, characteristics which they may attribute to various individuals or groups, who, for the most part, are not even Jewish.[18] The researchers interviewed a woman who said that, "I have nothing against the ordinary Jew," and yet at the same time, she defames as "Jews" those Poles whose patriotism she questions–based merely on hearsay: "You hear these opinions, that they [the so-called poor patriots] are all Jews."[19] This sort of antisemitic slander can be writ large such that all of Poland becomes cast as "Jewish." In another interview, this time conducted in a group setting, the interviewee "Judaizes" the entire society, with the help of a chorus in the background: "Poland was Jewish before the war. In Poland before the war there were, I don't know, how many million [Jews], but an awful lot in the background: Yes, Yes." The interviewee then continues: "And if they hadn't just perished at Auschwitz or somewhere in those other annihilation camps, we'd still be a Jewish state. They'd 'overjew' (*zażydzić*) us [meaning being overrun by Jews]."[20] The good news is that levels of antisemitism were on the decline in 2010, at the time of the study, and that what we might call anti-antisemitism has increased in the country.[21]

Today, some Polish Christians may fear or despise Jews in the abstract, and yet, as we have seen, have nothing against individual Jews. In such a world even well-intentioned efforts on the part of non-Jewish individuals and public institutions to understand and accurately portray Polish Jews of the past in Tykocin and elsewhere may easily be interpreted by some Jews as offensive

misunderstandings or even as antisemitic acts. The intentions of both the non-Jews and the Jews are often unclear even to the person or persons in question themselves, let alone to others, and are, as a result, easily misinterpreted. While in places like Tykocin that attract large numbers of Jewish tourists, locals get to "*see*" lots of Jews as they pass through their towns and villages, communication and mutual understanding are, as we have noted, lacking. Locals observe the Jewish visitors and are limited in their understanding of them (as are visiting Jews of *them*) to what they can observe publicly, without the availability of the all-important larger social and cultural context.

Given the purportedly high level of antisemitism that many studies reveal about Tykocin and the northeastern region of the country, one may wonder how it is that in such a place as Tykocin, there exists a beautifully restored synagogue, now a museum, actively presenting aspects of Jewish life in the past and the present, a private exhibition of everyday objects from the past relating to Jews and gentiles located at the main town square, and throngs of annual visitors to the synagogue, both Polish and foreign, numbering approximately 100,000 persons per year.

I spoke with Tadeusz†, a well-educated Tykocin resident in his forties, about antisemitism in Poland, and he was, like many others, rather dismissive about the issue. One day, he and I were walking past a large crowd of Israeli students on a tour of the town. "I really like these dark-haired Mediterranean-type girls," he turned to me and said, pointing to the young Israeli women in the crowd. "You see," he assured me, "I'm a Christian and *I'm* not antisemitic," hoping to ingratiate himself with me. I have had many conversations with him over a period of years, and I believe that he is genuinely not antisemitic, that he would not disfavor Jews or harm them, and yet he, like so many others, unthinkingly uses antisemitic–and misogynistic–tropes even when trying to

demonstrate his philosemitism. The "measure" of an antisemite is not easy to pin down and may be quite idiosyncratic, as is the case with Tadeusz†.

Returning to the war years, we know that Poles did not initiate the policy of extermination of the Jews, they did not set up the extermination camps, and the Polish state did not collaborate with the Nazi conquerors. Indeed, Poland was home to the largest resistance movement in Nazi-dominated Europe, though there were openly antisemitic components in the resistance. There were Polish Nazi sympathizers, collaborators, and those who might be accused of "willful neglect" of their Jewish neighbors, and untold numbers of material beneficiaries of the demise of the Jews. But total annihilation of the Jews was German policy and was, largely carried out by the Germans. With the largest prewar Jewish population in Europe, ordinary Polish people were present "there" as involuntary witnesses to the genocide of the Jews in a way no other Europeans were.

Udawana Pamięć / In the Guise of Memory

At the time of our interview in late September 2016, I had not known that one year prior to our meeting, Father Stefaniak had publicly expressed concern about poor Jewish participation in past memorial events in Tykocin. I was told about a Facebook conversation he initiated following a radio broadcast about the seventy-fourth annual memorial ceremony of the murder of the Jews in 2015. The title of the conversation, "Udawana Pamięć," can be rendered in English as "In the Guise of Memory." Like so many things said or written, Father Stefaniak's words and those of the commenters who followed his conversation can be interpreted in various ways, depending upon one's starting assumptions about intentions. His words during the interview I conducted

with him are a plea for balance and reconciliation. Perhaps he was "adjusting" his remarks for my ears. His written statements in Polish on Facebook in 2015 were quite different in tone, consisting of a rather harsh retort to common Jewish accusations of indifference and other defamations directed at Poles. I was dismayed and unsure about how to evaluate the two different responses. Here are his words about Jewish participation in the memorials taken from the Facebook conversation:

> Our small group of "those who remember" [the murder of the Jews of Tykocin] had gathered in the Łopuchowo forest [in August 2015 for the 74th annual memorial ceremony]. Can you answer the question as to why a crowd of tens of thousands of Jews pass through our city throughout the year, but on the anniversary of the tragedy there are hardly any representatives of the Jewish people present? Can you imagine a funeral attended by distant neighbors but not family members? Since the situation is what it is, is it an exaggeration to claim that Tykocin and the Łopuchowo forest are only useful as tools of Israeli propaganda?[22]

Father Stefaniak is a person keenly aware of human suffering, both as it is articulated in theological discourse and in the context of Polish national history. He makes a plea for the rightful recognition of Polish suffering, yet at the same time, he claims that,

> the service of truth demands courage . . . because the subject in question has been "covered-up" here with sad, sentimental memories, and the written [newspaper] account [of the memorial of 2015] says that perhaps the representatives of the local community were missing, when it is the Jewish community which was largely absent at the event–well maybe two people were there . . . photographs do not lie.[23]

Where Father Stefaniak goes wrong is reading the use of Tykocin and the forest *only* as useful tools of Israeli propaganda. They are much more complex symbolic devices, bringing together Jewish survival, Israeli national purpose, and genuinely and deeply felt communal emotions.

The "subject in question" is the way he believes that the Israeli state has engineered the memorials as symbolic nationalist props serving Israeli and larger Jewish needs, accompanied by the poor attendance of Jews. Ironically, the written account to which he refers is one that appeared in the Polish press. The "sad, sentimental memories" to which he refers in an acidulous voice are those of visiting Jews. "Can the words cynicism, pretense, Pharisaism define the issue in question?" he asks rhetorically. "I do not know, but I encourage you to seek an answer. I will do so," he tells the followers of the Facebook discussion he calls "Sentimental Memories." His reference is very denigratory with regard to the Jewish response to the mass murder of the Jewish population of Tykocin.[24]

Tykocin and Jedwabne

Father Stefaniak, like many others, brings up the comparison with the nearby town of Jedwabne, a place close to where he was born and raised, and asks why so many Jews remember that town where Poles were complicit in the deadly crimes against their Jewish neighbors, and not Tykocin, where the local people were, with some exceptions, not the murderers. "I have," he continues, "only stated the facts, and it's no use denying them or blaming the innocent. It is easily seen that the Jews prefer to 'remember' Jedwabne rather than Tykocin…"[25] In his mind, Jews have made a choice in focusing on the murderous actions of the Polish population in Jedwabne rather than the relatively benign behavior of locals in a place like Tykocin as representative of the way Poles treated Jews during the war.

To the contrary, the facts as we know them reveal that Tykocin was more typical of Polish towns in the region than is Jedwabne.[26] So, why the persistent negative attributions and the

age-old anti-Polish prejudices? Father Stefaniak also charges today's Jewish visitors to Tykocin with indifference toward the fate of all the Christians in Tykocin who were deported en masse to concentration camps in May of 1944, close to the end of the war, "by the [very] same German perpetrators" who killed the Jews. In the end, it seems he is berating both Jews and Poles for their indifference to the memory of their own dead and the dead of those of the other faith. As the years have passed since the horrific events of the war, fewer and fewer people will have been personally familiar with and soon even remember those who were murdered by the Germans.

Well-known Polish historian and literary critic Jan Błoński, in his call for Poles to come to terms with their role vis-à-vis the Jews during the war, recognized how much hatred of Jews there was in prewar Poland. He writes in his now-famous eye-opening article, "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto," originally published in Polish in 1987, that "one can only be surprised that [antisemitic] words were not followed by deeds. But they were not (or very rarely [were])."[27] On the other side, Samuel Kassow writes in the *The Forward* (formerly *The Jewish Daily Forward*) that "Indifference rather than murder best characterized Polish attitudes…"[28] I think it is important to reiterate Błoński's insightful statement about antisemitism in Poland during the war: "one can only be surprised that [antisemitic] words were not followed by deeds. But they were not (or very rarely)." The complex and often questionable connections between thoughts, words, and deeds do indeed need to be highlighted in seriously considering antisemitism in Poland, as well as elsewhere.

What Is Wrong with Israeli Youth?

On April 2, 2019, an article written by Maciej Gholodowski with the provocative title "New Police Station in Tykocin Will Make Sure Tourists from Israel 'Don't Traipse Around Like Holy Cows [*święta krowa*]'" appeared in the popular newspaper *Wyborcza*.[29] The article begins with a quote from Janusz Sękowski, the director of the Tykocin museum at the time: "I don't know what to do with these tourists. Half the group will walk on the lawn, the other half along the pavement; they won't step aside for the elderly," he complained. Later in the article, he is quoted as saying, "The way these groups walk is really terrible. It's not only in Tykocin, but also in other places in Poland–wherever they go. . . This is probably the result of their upbringing. We can almost call it a lack of proper upbringing. . . I try and discipline them [when they are] on the museum grounds."[30]

The Gholodowski article focuses on a town council meeting in which the "problem" of young Israeli tourists was taken up. In 2019, prior to the COVID epidemic, the museum welcomed nearly 100,000 visitors, local and international, per year. There are also some visitors to the town who do not stop at the museum. Buses often pile up in the open space behind the synagogue-museum. In the newspaper article, the mayor of the town rightfully expresses particular concern about the parking issue given the increasing number of tourist buses coming into town.

The solution to the "problem," as the article presented it, was to reopen the local police station that had been shuttered in 2015. I had been told, however, that the police station was to have been reopened in any case, independently of the issue of Israeli tourists. Nevertheless, the head of the police station in the nearby town of Łapy, who had been appointed as supervisor of the Tykocin station as well, had this to say about the character and upbringing of the young Israeli visitors, once again pointing to their "deficient"

manners and customs: "We know they have no discipline and we try to educate them … but when someone lacks the appropriate *foundation* it is difficult for them to understand…"[31] The reference to an inappropriate Jewish "foundation" and "deficient Jewish customs" grounds the "disrespectful" behavior of Israeli youth in an undefined mix of purportedly inherent Jewish traits and upbringing. He continues: "That is why we are here, to make sure the tourists from Israel are as little trouble to you as possible, that they respect the law, our local law, which maybe they do not know."[32] Regardless of whether the behavior of the Israeli youth is "good" or "bad," the excoriation of that behavior plays into familiar antisemitic tropes that characterize Israelis (read Jews) as a people with an alien way of life, and with "odd 'folk customs,'" as Cardinal Glemp[33] characterized them.

The newspaper article also gives voice to various perspectives critical of the negative characterizations I presented above. Andrzej Lechowski, the director of the Podlasie regional museum in Białystok at the time, had this to say about the matter, "The discussion in the city council session in Tykocin creates unnecessary problems, [and such words as have been uttered] should not be used in reference to any tourist group, regardless of their nationality." Then he turns to the most incendiary issue underlying the council discussions: "Here, however, we have a discussion about Jewish groups, which … inflames emotions–again, unnecessarily." He states emphatically that "It is totally unjustifiable to treat all Jewish groups as necessarily [disruptive], yet that is the conclusion that can be reached when one listens to the words of the speakers [at the council meeting]." He concludes with an observation about the offensiveness of the criticism: "… I cannot imagine tourists being walked 'in line,'" he says. "As for the museum, the word 'discipline' is perhaps inappropriate because the associations are [so] restrictive." He then notes that they often have to deal with the inappropriate behavior of Polish youth groups, and apologetically, refers to the disturbing ramifications and the patent absurdity of the situation in Tykocin: "I am sorry that the discussion about reopening the police station in Tykocin went in that direction. It sounds as if the police were [coming] to protect us from the tourists."[34]

In the same article Lewsław Piszewski, the chair of the Board of the Union of Jewish Religious Groups in Poland attempted to place the discussion on a more universalistic platform and notes that, "A sledgehammer was used to crack a nut. … such large groups are difficult to manage no matter where they come from. This is the nature of young people and Polish tourists also behave that way." Lucy Lisowska, the Jewish Director of the Poland-Israel Center for Civic Education, who has accompanied many visiting Israeli groups in Poland, asserted that, "Young Israelis behave like all other young people. A little bit of understanding is needed on all sides." She reminded the readers of the psychological state of mind of the young Israelis: "Young people from Israel visit places which are tragic for our people… For these young people this is a huge trauma. After all, it is in the forest near Tykocin where almost the entire Jewish community of the town was murdered."[35] Ultimately, the police station reopened in 2019 on the old Jewish market square near the synagogue. Lucy was correct in calling attention to both the fact that we are dealing with young people who are often unruly, as well as to their frame of mind on such trips to Poland.

It is important to understand how these youngsters are prepared for the trip to Poland by March of the Living, which, even with the best of intentions to foster a feeling of empathy for Polish suffering, must be seen in the context of the widely shared, often unvoiced, negative Jewish expectations regarding Poland and the Polish people which have been internalized over their lifetimes.

This is the attitude I personally witnessed in my encounters with MOTL participants. At the same time, we must also understand something about the mindset of the city councilors and other officials who are so critical of the Israeli students. "Surprisingly," the authors of the overall youth study note in the conclusion that, "direct contact with Jews does not thaw the animosity [felt]–perhaps because there are no opportunities for young people to befriend the Jews visiting their towns…"[36] That is not surprising, if for no other reason than because of the language barrier. Efforts to bring young Jewish visitors and local Polish youth together for a much-needed dialogue as a component of the youth tours to Tykocin, would be an important step in building mutual understanding. Beginning such efforts among young people, who are generally more amenable to change than their elders, is especially important. The efficacy of that approach is reinforced by indications that young people in Poland are less inclined to be antisemitic than their elders.

The "March of the Living"

The young Israelis and diaspora Jews participating in the March of the Living and the Israeli military personnel visiting Holocaust memorial sites with the Witnesses in Uniform program are in Poland *to see,* but also *to be seen*. Their major reference point is the Land of Israel to which they will return. Their physical presence in Poland is an important part of their experience as well as of the experience of those in the places they visit and who observe them. "The ultimate purpose of these MOTL trips organized by the Israeli Ministry of Education," according to anthropologist Jackie Feldman, author of *Above the Death Pits, Beneath the Flag: Youth Voyages to Poland and the Performance of Israeli National Identity*,[37] "is to root the sanctity of the State in the experience

of the Shoah." The official MOTL Study Guide given to student participants describes the trip to Poland and back to Israel as "a journey from darkness to light."[38] And, as a result, the guide tells the students, "You will see Israel as you have never seen it before, through the prism of your Polish experience." Feldman claims, in anthropological terms, that the "youth trips to Poland can best be understood as a *ritual reenactment of survival.*"[39] According to anthropologist Paul Connerton (1989), this kind of ritual is "commemorative . . . maintaining the identity of a society through time."[40] The question is what the costs are to Israeli society of a national foundational investment resting so deeply in the Holocaust.[41]

The MOTL *Study Guide* given to students prior to the trip does indeed attempt to "demystify the myths about Poland and its people," and in a sense, ventures to counter the more pervasive view that students come to the program envisaging Poles as inborn antisemites. The Guide attempts to foster a sense of empathy with Polish suffering. Here are some of the instructions for the students outlined in the Guide:

- This chapter is fact.
- Read it and learn about how the Polish people lived during the Shoah.
- Read it and learn about the terrible fate facing millions of Polish non-Jews.
- Read it and learn about the Jews living in Poland today, some of whom you will meet on our trip there…[42]

The students are informed in considerable detail about the great losses suffered by Polish Christians during the war, because, "We need to know the full story of how Polish people were treated, not just the horrible fate of Polish Jews."[43] They are then told that

"Documentation remains fragmentary, but today's scholars of independent Poland believe that 1.8 to 1.9 million civilians (non-Jews) were victims of German occupation policies and the war."[44] Other sources claim there were three million Christian Polish victims, perhaps to give some parity to the number of Polish versus Jewish victims. Students are also informed "about Polish people who helped Jews, at great risk to their lives and their families."[45] Despite the balanced information about Polish and Jewish suffering and actions during the war presented in the Guide, the trips, according to Feldman, are "orchestrated so as to minimize contact with modern Poland and install a negative sense of place" and "The death camps serve as condensation symbols for the entire Jewish past."[46]

Tykocin is considered to be one of the "most sacred and most intense parts of the voyage;" and according to Feldman, "will always be among the three low points of Majdanek, Treblinka and Tykocin, and Auschwitz-Birkenau."[47] Here Feldman pairs Tykocin, a little town, a shtetl, with Treblinka, an industrial mass killing site, perhaps because of their physical propinquity, and also perhaps because they represent two radically different methods of mass murder used by the Nazis: the one, the up-close, eye-to-eye kind of mass murder that has been carried out throughout history; the other, machine-made murder, alienated from the face-to-face encounter of murderer and murdered. The two types of mass murder are carried out sequentially over a period of time, the machine-made implementation an "improvement" over close-up eye-to-eye murder.

In the MOTL Study Guide, participants are told, echoing Polonsky's words (and the words of so many others) about former shtetls, that "You will see with your own eyes, the small villages, many of which appear today almost exactly as they did during the Holocaust, except … without Jews."[48] Tykocin, the exemplar shtetl, Tykocin, the shtetl no more. Tykocin, where Jews were shot one by one by hand at the edge of the death pits; Treblinka where Jews were poisoned en masse and cremated in a scene of industrial-age horror.

Tykocin has come to stand for the kinds of places in which Jews once lived, and where many of them died, places seemingly resembling the imagined life-worlds of Jews in the prelapsarian past in ways that the death camps cannot. In today's Tykocin, visiting students and others can "see" the absence of the Jews, of the "other half" where once they were, and "see" the many Poles who have symbolically "replaced" them. With the population of today's Tykocin less than half of what it was before the war when Jews were living there, there is no replacement in the corporeal sense. Indeed, Tykocin has been diminished in so many ways. With this intense emotional load presented to them, it is easy for the young Israelis to feel great animus toward the Poles presently living in Tykocin. They are, in a sense, transferring the more generalized anger they have accumulated toward Poles over the years to the current inhabitants of the town without really knowing who they are and what the parents and grandparents of today's residents might have done, good or bad, during the war. The participants travel through Poland by bus as if in what Feldman calls a "Holocaust space capsule." "Few guides explain about modern Polish life in towns and villages en route, nor do they mention place names along the way. For the students this area becomes a kind of no-man's land."[49] From the official position presented to the students, Israel represents the Jewish present and future, advisably the only place where Jews can presumably be safe from harm. Given that Germans are not visibly present during the trips to Poland, Feldman argues that today's "Poles can become a stand-in for the bystanders and even the executioners."[50] Perhaps that is what explains the young Jewish visitors' bad behavior in Tykocin.

Israeli Abraham Kapica, one of the few survivors of the Tykocin mass murder, has accompanied numerous youth groups to Tykocin. He characterizes the gentiles of his childhood as murderous antisemites who participated in wiping out their Jewish neighbors.[51] His is a MOTL-selected "witness account," and it naturally carries great "I-was-there" sort of credulity for the students. As described by Feldman, "The presence of the witness in the flesh, supported by the look of the town today, provides a multi-sensory authenticity to the narrative,"[52] though not a balanced account.

After visiting Tykocin, the MOTL group then travels to the Łupochowo forest, to the killing site, to pay homage to those murdered there. These young people return to Israel at the end of this trip, having survived the grueling "Polish" experience which becomes for them, as symbolic survivors, a return from past to present, from death to life. "Experience is at the heart of the trip," writes Feldman.[53] Yet, throughout, "No effort is made to provide a meaningful encounter with members of the local community"[54] despite the words in the MOTL guide urging compassion and understanding of Polish suffering.

I had the opportunity to observe and speak with a number of the members of youth and military groups visiting Tykocin. I observed one group in Tykocin from the March of the Living as they descended from their bus and visited the synagogue where, according to some of the students with whom I later spoke, they had a rather intense session on the Holocaust. When I asked them what they thought of the local people in the town, they gave me the standard hardline answer: "The local Christians assisted the Germans in murdering the Jews of the town during the war years." The group then walked around town, very visible as outsiders. The locals, on their part, observed the Jewish youth with a distanced silence. On another day, I encountered a tour sponsored

by a top private Israeli school gathered at the main town square and initiated a conversation with their teacher and guide. The guide asked me to say a few words to the group. I related my own family history in Tykocin, my personal experience as a visitor to the town, and, in particular, my perspective on Polish-Jewish relations in Tykocin during the war. I emphasized the complexity and frequent contradictions in the relationship between Poles and Jews then and now. They listened intently, and a few of them asked pertinent questions. I was impressed by those students' openness to alternative ways of thinking about the issues.

Israeli anthropologist Idan Yaron, author of the Hebrew-language, *Youth Trips to Death Sites in Poland*, reviewed by cultural critic Or Kashti, is a study of Israeli youth as visitors to Jewish sites in Poland. In the review, Kashti profiles individuals such as a school principal who describes one of the fundamental purposes of the trip as being a show of Israeli strength and resolve: "Poland for me is waving the [Israeli] flag and proving that the people of Israel live," the educator said.[55] Kashti observes that on such trips "Everyone insists on holding the flag up … *so people* [meaning Poles] *will see*." The italics are mine. This description parallels the use of the Israeli flag as a display of strength that I observed at the Tykocin 75th memorial ceremony at the market square. In his February 3, 2020 review in the English-language edition of the liberal Israeli newspaper *Haaretz,* Kashti was critical of the heavy Israeli emphasis on victimhood. He felt that it played into students' nationalist inclinations on these trips rather than focusing on reflection and engaging in serious thought about the people—the Poles—whose lives continue to be lived at these so-called "death sites." Kashti describes "an itinerary that exhausts all participants… This is the route of the vicious cycle in which [their own Israeli] teachers accuse the participants of disciplinary violations and disrespect,"[56] echoing the complaints expressed

about young Israeli visitors at the Tykocin town council meeting. Many of the students are, he writes, emotionally exhausted and at near collapse by the end of the week-long trip. The whole experience becomes too much for them.

To Whom Does the Tykocin Synagogue Really Belong?

One of the Israeli Tiktiners present at the seventy-fifth memorial service described to a group of participants the deep resentment that he and other descendants of those murdered in 1941 felt toward the current owners and occupiers of what was once Jewish property, pointing out this or that house, and ruefully noting to which Jewish family it once belonged. The same was true of the synagogue, where we met for a continuation of the memorial and where I was asked to say a few words about my research on the Jews of Tykocin.

Many of the Jewish participants could not easily accept that the synagogue was now a museum under Polish government administration. I was told by one of the participants that after the morning memorial ceremony in town a group of the Israeli Tiktiners visited the synagogue. Some of them could not contain their rage, spontaneously chanting "This synagogue is ours," "the synagogue is ours" in Hebrew in the main hall of the building. As to what Jewish ownership would mean in a town where there are no Jews, they seemingly gave little thought.

This was not the first time that visiting Jews and Poles had come into conflict over the question of to whom the Tykocin synagogue belonged. In 2012 a group of French and Israeli rabbis travelled to Tykocin to place a Torah donated by a French Jewish philanthropist in the ark of the synagogue despite its secular museum status. It was a Sunday, and the group was not allowed into the building. They were told that there was a technical problem, something to do with water or electricity. Later they were told something else, that the problem was that the donors had not obtained the proper permission from the Polish authorities to place the Torah in the synagogue. The real issue of concern for the Polish administrators of the synagogue, however, was the barely concealed attempt of the rabbis to reopen the synagogue to worship. As Michel Emsalem, the donator of the Torah, said about his donation, "It would be a good reason for Jews from all over the world to come to Tykocin and have the opportunity to pray beside the Torah."[57] The rabbis prayed at the entrance, marched around the building and left Poland "with bitterness in [their] hearts." Should this behavior of the museum authorities be interpreted as yet another case of Polish antisemitism or was there a fundamental disagreement about the rightful ownership and function of the building, house of prayer or secular museum? The Białystok TV report about the incident concluded with these words, "Regardless of whether the reason for non-admission of the Rabbis to the synagogue in Tykocin was a trivial technical failure or something more serious, what happened will definitely worsen the image not only of the Podlasie region, but also Poland in terms of its relations with the Jews–the image [of] which is not the best."[58] I note the primary concern in the TV report with the already poor image, with the reputation of the region and the country with regard to Jews, while avoiding any mention of the actual issue of the rightful use of that centuries-old building.

There is another, though hardly articulated but more inclusive way of approaching the question of the use-rights of the synagogue and control of the extant Jewish spaces in the town. On a different occasion, when discussing the possibility of repairing and reconstituting the old Jewish cemetery, Józef posed a rhetorical question that at first took me aback: "Why do we think of the Jewish cemetery in town as something that just belongs to

the Jews? The Jews buried there were residents of this town. This is *our* cemetery, a cemetery that belongs in a profound sense to the whole town, just like the Catholic cemetery does."

Fiddler at the Synagogue

I had heard that there was to be a performance at the synagogue on the night before I was to leave Tykocin on one of my visits in 2016: *Fiddler on the Roof*, by the well-known Warsaw Jewish Theatre. I wasn't sure what to think. Was this to be a display of Jewish kitsch? Again, the association of Jews of old with the misty, stereotyped shtetl world, the wooden figurines coming to life in a sanitized, imagined Anatevka. "Tykocin: fairytale town," as the restaurant brochure proffered. And yet there I was, sitting in grandmother's *shul* listening to the wonderful performers from Warsaw in costumes of old, rendering the songs I knew so well–in Polish, nonetheless. My eyes misted over; I felt discomfited. The music made me feel sad for all that was lost, all the lives lost, all those that would never be realized. I was surely the only one in the audience with a Jewish ancestor from Tykocin. They were a sophisticated, well-dressed crowd, some of whom, I presume, had driven down from Białystok and would naturally have been touched by this sentimental, nostalgic, feel-good musical about a world far-removed from the realities of their lives and those of the last Jews of the town. The local audience easily slips into the nostalgia which the heartwarming musical engenders and everyone, Jews and gentiles alike, love and which unwittingly masks the enormous tragedy buried in the nearby forest.

VI

THEATER OF MEMORY

A Theater Prop[1]

American anthropologist Jack Kugelmass described Poland as "a theater prop in a Jewish pageant about national catastrophe and redemption."[2] Polish social and cultural historian Joanna Michlic analyzed the "ritual reenactment of pre-war stereotypes of Jews as strangers in our midst" in commemorative performances in Poland. By way of example, she referred to research and analysis by Polish sociologist Marta Duch-Dyngosz, who describes how Poles involved in the commemoration of murdered Jews in the town of Bobowa in the southeast of the country are "evaluated in negative terms," even regarded by locals and among ethno-nationalistic conservative Catholic circles and their sympathizers in the country as "traitor[s] to 'the true Polish nation.'" Duch-Dyngosz refers to the commemorative project as "an abuse of memory."[3] In this heavily loaded moral context, let us try and further understand how the Jews of Tykocin are publicly remembered, and who does the remembering.

Though there are no longer any Jews living in Tykocin, a Jewish play about an attempted genocide of the Jews of ancient Persia as described in the Book of Esther from the Torah was performed annually from 1991 until 2007 by gentiles from the town dressed in stereotypical "Jewish" costumes presumably of some timeless yesteryear, though actually of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Eastern European origin. In its original local version, the parish priest, and the director of the Tykocin museum at the time were among the performers. The play, in celebration of the Jewish holiday of Purim, has been widely performed by Jews throughout the Ashkenazi world for a thousand years and is known in Yiddish as the *Purimspiel*. There have been two quite different versions of the play performed in Tykocin to date. The initial performance of the Purim play was live, set in the center of town, outdoors in front of the synagogue. The performance

attracted significant attention both in Poland and internationally. After a hiatus of eleven years, when there was no Purimspiel performed in the town, a different production of the play was produced in Tykocin in 2018 in video format under the direction of Bogusław Kosel, a historian and staff member at the museum at the time, and Dariusz Szada-Borzyszkowski, a Jewish professional actor who has played numerous roles in Tykocin performances. Together, they wrote and directed the newly designed play. The Purimspiel, a Jewish play performed, with one exception, by non-Jews in a Polish town, once half Jewish, that has not had any Jewish residents since 1941, calls for some attention.

Every August, there is a service held in memory of the mass murder of the Jews of the town in 1941, and every May, there is a commemoration of the deportation and death of a large number of local Christian residents in 1944 at the hands of the Germans. The streets, the main square, the old marketplaces, the synagogue and the church, the forest location where the Jews were murdered, all of these public spaces, are transformed into open-air theater-like sets for the memorialization of the town's civilians murdered during the war, both Jews and gentiles. In season, multitudes of foreign tourists, mostly Jewish, wander around and observe this well-preserved town while simultaneously being observed by locals, most of whom do not personally know a single Jew. I think of this walk around the town by Jewish visitors as a kind of living theater. The Tykocin synagogue itself has been used as a stage, offering nostalgia-filled, feel-good performances such as *Fiddler on the Roof* by the Warsaw Jewish Theater for eager Polish audiences in the greater Białystok area.

Tykocin is a favored location for Polish feature films set in prewar small-town Poland. Since almost all towns in the eastern parts of the country had large Jewish populations prior to the Holocaust, no film of the period can be complete without

some local Jews visible. Scenes set in the past are invariably authenticated with local extras hired and dressed in so-called old Jewish garb. Brigitte Sion, former professor at New York University and specialist on memorial museums, and memorial and material heritage practices, in her critique of the Tykocin Purimspiel, argues that such sartorial display is "not a representation of Jews, but a representation of what local residents [and, I should add, many others in Poland] think Jews looked like."[4] We know from photographs of Tykocin Jews taken during the interwar period from the Tykocin *Sefer Tiktin*, that Tykocin's Jews were diverse in life-style and in appearance, much more so than the costumes selected for the performances reveal.

The Tykocin Purimspiel: Life-Giving Theater?

I first came across a copy of *Sefer Tiktin* at the New York Public Library during the early stages of my research on Tykocin. While there, I discovered a reference to an article by Brigitte Sion on the Tykocin Purimspiel.[5] The article led me to a book-length photographic study and a documentary film titled *Diaspora*, about "absent" or "clandestine" Jews in different parts of the world. Both the book and the film are the work of French Jewish filmmaker Frédéric Brenner. The film, I was surprised to learn, included a section on the Tykocin Purimspiel.[6] The book, in addition to Brenner's photographs, included critical commentary on the Purimspiel by a number of French Jewish writers.[7] To my delight, my grandmother's shtetl was beginning to offer me much more to think about than I had expected.

Carnavalesque Purim is an annual celebration of the rescue of Jews from a plot to exterminate them led by Haman, the evil Vizier under King Ahasuerus of ancient Persia. The Jews of Persia were saved from extinction by Mordechai, a Jew and the hero of the story, and his cousin Esther, Queen of Persia, Jewish wife of King Ahasuerus. Purim is a joyous, often raucous festivity of survival, complete with feasting, dancing, and masquerades, and the performance of a variety of versions of a play built around the story of the event, the actual historicity of which is open to debate.

The initiator of the local celebration in Tykocin was the director of the local museum from 1990 to 2007, Ewa Wroczyńska, a devout Catholic. Wroczyńska speaks fluent Hebrew and is very knowledgeable about Jewish history and culture. In an interview with her in 2003, Sion tells us that "Ewa Wroczyńska sincerely claims to 'bear witness to the Jewish community from Tykocin and to honor their memory.'"[8] The *Purimspiel* was not performed under her successor, Marzena Pisarska-Kalisty (2007-2018). It has not been performed since, though a new video version has been produced though not shown.

This ludic interlude in a deeply pained setting, bringing together in proxy the demise and the survival of the Jewish world, was first played out in front of the old Tykocin synagogue, home to numerous exhibitions about Jews and Jewish life in the recent past. In an interview conducted by Sion, curator Ewa Wroczyńska described her goal in producing a local rendition of the play. Wroczyńska was emphatic that "Exhibits were not enough. We had to fill this place with *life* again."[9] Wroczyńska originally came to Tykocin from Warsaw in the late 1980s, and when she set foot in the town she was taken aback by "the emptiness of a town that had been [so] lively in the past, but that suddenly ceased to exist."[10] In the interview, Wroczyńska does not say what made the town so lively in the past and why it suddenly "ceased to exist," though everyone knows that she was referring to the 1941 massacre of the town's Jews. In this and other unsettling ways, Tykocin's Jews were "back," now as avatars of the real Jews of the past in a reconceptualization of the Jewish past–with the

salvation that was, for them, not to be. We have seen a parallel reconceptualization of the past in Chapter V, with proxies of local Jews, myself included, symbolically protected from harm by the Israeli Defense Forces encircling them.

In an effort to fill in the vacuum that the massacre of 1941 left in Tykocin, Wroczyńska produced what she called a "life-giving" event–an idiosyncratic performance played out by Poles as proxies for Jews set at the edge of annihilation. In Brenner's documentary film of the Purimspiel, the local priest takes the role of Mordechai, the purported hero of the story. The costuming is amateurish and noticeably shabby. The priest's collar shows beneath his Jewish prayer shawl; he is a parody of a Jew, sporting obviously fake sidelocks. Anyone can see through the costume. The diminutive Wroczyńska, in the role of the narrator, bounding around the characters as they performed, banging on primitive cymbals made of pot covers and shouting in heavily accented Yiddish, the language the Jews of the town once spoke, but which no one there today understands: "Today is Purim. It ends tomorrow. Give me some money and chase me away!"[11] The rest of the celebration is in Polish as the audience is composed entirely of local townspeople. With the play, Wroczyńska seeks to "bear witness to the Jewish community from Tykocin and to honor their memory."[12]

This celebration of the escape from annihilation that the Jews of Tykocin were not fortunate enough to experience as did their Babylonian co-religionists, has nothing to do with the town's newfound tourism. In contrast to the negative interpretations of Brenner, Sion, and others, I believe the play as acted out in Tykocin under the direction of Wroczyńska was an odd though well-intentioned indigenous post-Holocaust plea for the well-being of the Jews in their enduring struggle for survival. There were no foreign tourists present at the performance. In Sion's

words, it is "a performance by Poles for Poles about Jews,"[13] a purely local affair–with local Christian actors and localized meaning, an attempt to try to fill a painful void with life, to produce a counterfactual feel-good Jewish reality in Tykocin for the edification and perhaps expiation of local Christian Poles. Hanna Krall, Polish-Jewish writer who survived the Holocaust with the help of Christian Poles refers to the Tykocin Purimspiel as a "theatre of happy times" in one of her short stories, a trope that points to a post-Holocaust attempt to symbolically avert the Shoah, publicly concluding the war years with an ending in which all Jews are saved from death.[14]

The three alternative approaches to the Purimspiel of the three museum directors, Wroczyńska, Pisarska-Kalisty, and Sękowski, reflect three different ways of coming to grips with the Jewish past in Poland. I have been told that "Wroczyńska's [Purimspiel] … was tightly bound with the character of Ewa Wroczyńska and her … philosemitism…"[15] By contrast, in her words, Pisarska-Kalisty gave special attention to the 1944 deportation of local Christians, perhaps as a Polish nationalist counterbalance to the overwhelming attention Jewish memorials have attracted locally and nationally. She chose not to produce the Purim play. Bogusław Kopel, historian and former Tykocin Museum staff member, describes the Purimspiel he and actor Szada-Borzyszkowski created: "In my opinion, our Purimspiel … is an academic-theatrical approach that aims to open people's eyes to the diversity of a place's heritage."[16] Here we have in sequence three different meanings attached to the Purimspiel by three directors of the Tykocin museum: Purimspiel as a redemptive act, the philosemitic mode; the Purimspiel bypassed, with attention given to ethnic Polish suffering, and the Purimspiel as a reminder of Jewish traditions and the diversity of the local community (and of Poland) in the past, the pluralist-diversity mode.

I was fortunate to be in Tykocin when there was a special exhibition at the Tykocin museum about Jewish theater in prewar Gdansk, then German Danzig. A number of films shown on tiny old TV-like video screens were set up along the outer corridor, the women's section, of the synagogue. One of them was of an especially ludic Purimspiel dating from the 1930s. There was an intentional, self-conscious, "theatrical," madness about the Gdansk enactment. Wroczyńska's performance, in particular her antic bounding around the other actors wearing an inverted crown as a mask, with her tinny-sounding pot cover cymbals crashing, though bizarre, was more staid than the 1930s Gdansk Purim plays I viewed at the synagogue exhibition.

The Purimspiel is a play about good and evil and the fragile, often permeable, or nonexistent boundary between the two. In previous chapters I have examined some of the ways in which seemingly incompatible actions, good and bad, may become two or more shifting aspects of a person, especially under the weight of extreme fear and the stress of the unknown during a time of war. Sion, in her article claims, "that this [Tykocin] Purimspiel performance fulfills three conflicting functions: it commemorates pre-war Jewish heritage in Poland; it uses theatrical entertainment to mask Holocaust history, and it serves as a journey to self-discovery and identity formation for third-generation Poles."[17] Sion is very critical of the Purimspiel as an artful subterfuge, observing that it "screams absence, precisely in the set of miscast actors, in the costumes that combine a *tallit* [prayer shawl] and a priestly collar, in the strap of the fake beard that is too loose, in the Yiddish poem recited with a Polish accent, in the dumplings filled with pork . . ." all concealing Holocaust history, she believes.[18] Absence there is, but it cannot be masked. The absence of "real Jews" is there for all to see, and for those who can, to acknowledge.

I see the performance as, among other things, a symbolic effort to give tacit recognition to erstwhile Jewish space and in the process "reinstate" the Jews of the town. The play took place in open air right in front of the synagogue. There is no doubt that the players are in post-Jewish Tykocin. That is not the case for the newer video version, which does not display the disjunction between nineteenth-century Eastern European Jewish garb and a story set in ancient times. These actors are wearing costumes which evoke ancient Mesopotamia. In Wroczyńska's version, the actors' masks have fallen from the start; they cannot be mistaken for Jews. Brenner's film of the same, takes us backstage to watch the actors donning their costumes for the performance, costumes haphazardly worn over their everyday clothing. Though not alluded to in the play, the tragedy that befell the town in 1941 looms persistently in the background of the performance. It cannot be masked; the tragedy cannot be undone.

The disjuncture created by recognizable local townspeople dressed up as Jews, as critics point out with a vengeance, is to my mind the result of slapdash costuming and direction, not of an intentional attempt to obscure the tragedy that befell the town's Jews, as the commentators in the Brenner film as well as Sion hold. The disjuncture is no surprise, as the performance was indeed played by amateurs except for the role of Mordechai. But this does not make the contemporary play offensive–such amateur theater was common in interwar Tykocin, both among Jews and gentiles. While Sion recognizes the play "as a form of homage," she also concludes that it "can be interpreted as hijacking."[19] To my mind, that is an unjustified conclusion, as I see no malign intent in the performance. I see it as an attempt at expiation for whatever sins, large or small, that local Christians may have committed during the war.

Both the original version of the Purimspiel directed by Wroczyńska and the recent video version appearing during the museum directorship of Sękowski bring together the past and the present, though in different ways. The older version of the play features the old parodistic costumes of the stereotyped prewar Eastern European "Jew," ignoring the diversity of Jewish lives. The new video version, making use of more "authentic" costumes evocative of ancient times, constructs a primordial Jewish past which does not easily evoke the plight of Eastern European Jews per se. Both versions portray a skittish world somewhere between then and now. The newer Purimspiel version is split into two sequential parts, with the actors wearing costumes of the ancient world in the first part and modern dress during the second. Bogusław Kopel, one of the creators of the new Purimspiel, described the performance to me as a kind of soap opera, which he believes carries popular appeal and could attract a wider audience. Unfortunately it has not been publicly shown. The shooting for the video was done indoors, and the setting for the first part is an imaginary Persia. In the second part of the film, set in today's world, the very same actors are sitting around a table drinking coffee and chatting. In this version, the connection between past and present is more attenuated than in the previous one. Kopel told me that their approach "aims to open people's eyes to the diversity of a place's heritage," a goal of many progressives in the country, like themselves. The hiatus in the performance of the Purimspiel under Pisarska-Kalisty carries its own tacit message, no less a message though unvoiced, a message downplaying the purported singularity of Jewish suffering during the war.

Sion refers to the play as a "screen to cover up difficult memories," and explicitly accuses local residents of not being innocent bystanders but of "bearing some responsibility in [*sic*] the persecutions against [*sic*] Jews during and after the war."[20] Her accusation is not borne out by the facts. Some locals did bear responsibility of varying degrees for deadly and material crimes, most commonly crimes such as looting during the war years, perhaps even prior to or subsequent to the war. The Purim play may serve to deflect people from horrible, shameful memories of the war. But that does not necessarily mean that those memories are of murders committed in collaboration with the Germans. Even indulging in silent thanks to the Germans for eliminating the Jews, though morally corrupt, does not mean that those who harbor such iniquitous thoughts would have necessarily collaborated in the murder of the Jews as Brenner implies, and the happy ending of the Purimspiel may also warm their hearts. Brenner sardonically describes what he believes to be a fundamentally duplicitous performance: "In this parody of Purim, the villagers of Tykocin are so sincere and so well disguised, how could they be the children of the collaborators of the butchers … ?"[21]

The witness accounts of the survivors of the massacre found in *Sefer Tiktin* provide us with a number of revealing testimonies concerning local gentiles of all moral persuasions and practices. Naturally, many of the few surviving Jews, most of whom had lost everything–their families, their possessions, the place where they and their ancestors grew up and lived–were motivated to relate their great losses and the cruelty they suffered in some detail for posterity in *Sefer Tiktin*. The few Jewish Tykocin survivors have spoken. They are no longer with us. The thousands murdered in 1941 have left no message for us about the horrors they experienced. For the Christians, what was observed or known has vanished with the death of those who were present during the war years and old enough to remember anything about Tykocin from those days. In any case, few chose to talk about what they had seen or did during those dark days. The numbing silence of

the living has given way to the permanent silence of the dead. This baleful silence is not just that of those whose acts harmed Jews directly or indirectly. It is also the silence of the Righteous and of the many who did nothing to harm their Jewish neighbors, and of those who may have in largely unrecognized and now forgotten ways, helped them.

Sion tells us that these sorts of allegations leveled against Tykocin Christians "echo events in [nearby] Jedwabne," where the townspeople actively engaged in the murder of their Jewish neighbors en masse, though she presents no evidence to support that meritless comparison, which I have discussed at some length in Chapter II.[22] The witness accounts available in *Sefer Tiktin*, as well as many other accounts referenced in this book, challenge the claim that Polish Catholics in Tykocin were guilty of systematic complicity. Accounts written by the surviving Jewish witnesses *do* describe many terrible, criminal acts: looting of Jewish homes by gentiles and cases of betrayals and subsequent murders by the Germans. But they also describe Christians who rescued and saved their lives and those of other Jews. The writers in Brenner's book, Benny Levy, whose career took him from French Maoism to ultra-Orthodox Judaism, Daniel Dayan, French sociologist and media specialist, and Brenner himself, display an array of familiar anti-Polish sentiments in their accusations leveled against the Tykocin Purimspiel, and along with the other authors, assert that the Poles of Tykocin helped the genocide come to pass.

Levy describes, with disdain, the "pitiful, pathetic Polish masquerade of Purim,"[23] a carnival about "forgetting." By contrast, Ewa Wroczyńska, the local organizer and museum director at the time, describes her sincere effort as being about *remembering* and about *life*. Brenner takes it upon himself to excoriate the Tykocin actors: "How do you celebrate Purim when you know … that your own parents and grandparents took a hand in their slaughter [of the Jews] or turned their eyes away?"[24]

Underlying the deprecating critique of the Purimspiel by the writers in Brenner's book is the charge that the *collectivity* of local Christians was either directly or indirectly guilty of the massacre of their Jewish neighbors, if not of cold indifference, and that their descendants *as a collectivity* are bound to bear those sins to this day. Jeffrey Shandler sums up the often-conflicting memory constructs on display in relation to the first Tykocin Purimspiel, examining the lurking "discomfort" of memory and local people's diverse responses. "In this town [Tykocin]," he holds, "estranged populations' diverging agendas for conjuring the shtetl intersect uneasily, but the discomfort their memory practices engender reveals what the various participants seek in this fraught cultural project of making claims on a vanquished local past."[25] Joanna Michlic describes the "elasticity and multiplicity of the representations of the Jews and the Holocaust"[26] in discussing memory issues in Poland. In that vein, I have consistently pointed to the diversity and complexity of lives lived and of actions taken in the past, as well as those of the historical representations of both the Jews and Christians of Tykocin.

In the end, how much of the great void of understanding and responsibility can this play, and these players fill? Sion accuses the players of replacing "the deficit of Jewish memory with a surplus of contemporary Polish identity,"[27] referring to the widely accepted public position in Poland which presents Polish Christians as they wish to be seen–as victims, not as collaborators, as rescuers, not as betrayers, and, in Michlic's words, "as a nation incapable of wrongdoing."[28] The stereotypical representations of the characters, supposedly of ancient Persian times costumed in old East European Jewish garb that Sion criticizes, heighten the

tension between the biblical and the recent pasts, between an ancient hatred and modern genocide and the persistent aftermath today, just as the stereotyped figurines that are sold in front of the synagogue where the performance takes place are themselves simultaneously complex repositories of disturbing as well as positive attributes. In the end, they are a troubling amalgam of irreconcilable notions of "The Jew" of old. In the newer video version of the Purimspiel the disturbing mix of then and now is experienced as sequential parts of the play, with the result that the overall level of tension is diminished.

Presenting the Jews of the Past

When I was Warsaw in 2016, I asked pseudonymous Wanda, who then worked in the education department at the POLIN Museum, what she thought about the presentation of Jews and their past in Tykocin: the wooden figurines, the Purimspiel, and the so-called Jewish restaurants. Wanda† referred cautiously to a paradox and puzzlement with regard to these performative events–what she called the "antisemitic mindset of those with good intentions." It is possible, in this way of thinking, to be antisemitic in thought, living in a culture where antisemitism is a commonly held sentiment, and yet not be antisemitic in everyday life.

Continuing, Wanda† told me she thought that "People with good intentions [the carvers and sellers, that is] are doing these things, yet they are perpetuating something disturbing nevertheless." From a somewhat myopic "big city" perspective, she viewed the representation of Jews in the Tykocin Purimspiel as having "roots in a common, rude village antisemitism," seemingly eliding the antisemitism of the more sophisticated Polish towns and cities where most of the Jews in the past lived. To her, the Purimspiel performance is an example of a widespread use of

common typecast Jewish figurines as complex symbolic devices, the users seemingly oblivious to the pain the symbolic reduction of "the Jew" to a caricature imposes on many Jews. Wanda† also thought that the play with its "Jew-ish" characters out there in public in the very center of Tykocin was at the same time recognizing and legitimizing Jews long gone, as oddly as they were dressed, as exotic as they looked, and as incomprehensively as they behaved, as a fundamental part of the small town where they once lived. Then, at the end of the interview, in a backstep from her earlier words about "village antisemitism," Wanda† softened her tone, and concluded that, "The people who did the Purimspiel in Tykocin are not antisemitic, but what they do is both moving and very strange."

It is hard to imagine antisemites wanting to take part in a play celebrating Jewish survival unless it was, somehow, an act of symbolic redemption for them, or was, as Sion argues, a cynical cover-up. The Purimspiel echoes the Herod plays common in the old medieval Polish Catholic tradition, plays performed by Poles in which Jews were typically presented as lame and hunchbacked and the brunt of jokes, and at the same time as wisemen who had magical, esoteric powers–people to be both respected and feared. Once again, the figurines come to mind. I am reminded of the photograph of the *meshuggener,* the mad Jew, exhibited in the old besmedresh. The Jew *in extremis*–the odd, disconcertingly peculiar creature living among the gentiles: someone to be mocked, to be scorned, perhaps someone to be feared. Then there is the figurine Jew as especially clever, as a bearer of good luck with money–perhaps in the end too clever for his own good.

The "Good German" Lieutenant and the Little Jewish Girl

Tykocin's Poles and others in Poland tell and retell the complex and heart-rending story of a young German officer and a little Jewish girl in Tykocin during the last months of the German occupation, a story that to this day plays out in the lives of people in the town. With that in mind, let us go back to wartime and focus in particular on the events of May 1944, a time when the war in eastern Poland was drawing to a close.

September 1939. War had just broken out. The Germans had invaded Poland from the west, the Soviets from the east. Poland was once again to be partitioned by its more powerful neighbors. Bella Kaufman, a young communist laborer, and her communist husband Isak Rozenstajn, both Jews, were then living in Warsaw. Fearing for their safety as both Jews and communist activists in Nazi-occupied Warsaw, they fled to Białystok, which, under the terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, was in the part of Poland then occupied by the Soviets. Bella had spent three years in prison for her communist activities during the 1930s. She believed she would be safer there under the Soviets. On June 19, 1941, she gave birth to a girl in Białystok. The baby was named Maria, though she soon came to be called by the diminutive Marysia. On June 22, 1941, Hitler abrogated the agreement with the USSR, declared war on the Soviet Union, and began to occupy eastern Poland under the massive Operation Barbarossa. In an interview in September 2019 in a Washington D.C. suburb, Maria, the little Jewish girl in Tykocin, then an emeritus professor of physics at George Mason University in the United States, described the desperate situation in Białystok as the Germans approached the city as later related to her by her mother: "People were running from the city, getting on the top of trains. But my mother couldn't run. I was only three days old. And my father didn't want to leave, so we stayed." Mother Bella was fair-haired and could easily pass for a Christian Pole. Isak, her father, "looked very Jewish" Maria said, sealing his fate in her eyes. From old photos I could see that Marysia resembled her father. "I looked Jewish as a three-month-old baby. … That wasn't very helpful," she offered in her matter-of-fact manner.

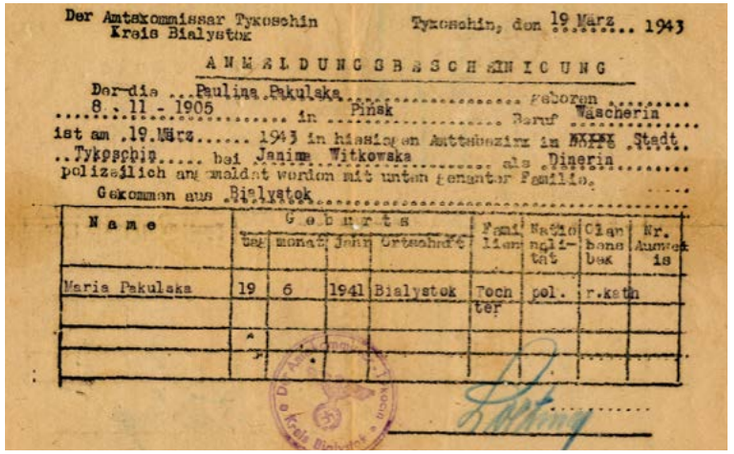
Isak Rozenstajn

Marysia's father disappeared in Białystok, never to be found, and the family presumed he was gunned down by the Germans, perhaps on the streets of Białystok, as were many Jews during that time. Friends in Białystok started commenting on Marysia's striking curly black hair, and this alarmed her mother. Neighbors told her she would be better off if she took shelter in the ghetto. In those days the ghetto was easy to get into and not so difficult to escape from. Many Jews who had nowhere else to go, fled to the ghetto at the time. They did not yet know that this presumed safe haven would soon come to be a conduit to Treblinka and almost certain death.

Bella had been a manual laborer in Warsaw before the war and was physically fit. She was assigned to a work detail outside the ghetto walls. There, through some communist friends, she became aware of Treblinka and the terrible fate of Jews in the ghetto, and somehow was able to arrange for "Aryan papers" for herself. She then escaped the ghetto with Marysia for nearby Tykocin, where she joined three other communist women who

had just taken shelter in a rented house near a windmill on the outskirts of the town. There were two sisters-in-law, Janina Grotowski Zawistowska and Janina Zawistowska, both Christian Poles, one of them a dentist, the other a teacher, as well as a Jew, a writer named Lena Selm. Their home was anything but a hideaway; indeed, it was a very public place, as the dentist was able to pursue her practice there with both locals and even the occupying German soldiers, frequently visiting to have their teeth cared for. As it turned out, harm came to the women not from the Germans, but from Polish fascists.

It was 1943. Bella Kaufman and her two-and-a-half-year-old daughter Marysia were living in Tykocin under her newly acquired Aryan papers, using the assumed name Paulina Pakulska. With her pitch-black hair, little Marysia carried a dangerously visible marker of what people presumed to be Jewish identity. Marysia's mother had her wear a tight cap with frills hanging down over her ears under the pretense that she had a chronic ear problem. The four women, two of them with daughters, lived together in the rented house on the outskirts of the town, and Bella was



Der Amtskommissar Tykocshin
Kreis Bialystok

Tykocshin, den 19 März 1943

ANMELDUNG BESCHEINIGUNG

Der-die Paulina Pakulska geboren
8.11.1905 in Pinsk Beruf Wascherin
ist am 19.März 1943 in hiesigen Amtsbezirk im Stadt
Tykocshin bei Janina Witkowska als Dienerin
polizeilich angemeldet worden mit unbestimmter Familie.
Gekommen aus Bialystok

Name	Geburts				Familien	Nationalität	Glaubensbek	Nr. Ausweis
	Tag	monat	Jahr	Ortsnahe				
Maria Pakulska	19	6	1941	Bialystok	Tochter	pol.	r.kath	

Marysia's mother's false German work papers.

ostensibly the house cleaner for them. The official German work permit issued to her recorded her occupation as *Wascherin*, or washerwoman. In November 1943, the three women who lived with Bella were assassinated by members of the extremist Polish anti-communist National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne or NSZ). Like other anti-communist organizations, the NSZ was known to have assassinated communists and other purported "enemies" of the Polish people.[29] Bella and her child and the daughter of one of the Polish women were unharmed. The three women are buried in the Tykocin Catholic cemetery.

I was told that it was possible at the time, under certain circumstances, for non-Catholics to be buried without a religious ceremony in a separate part of the cemetery.[30] Their extant gravestone in translation reads:

Janina Rutkowska-Zawistowska, doctor [dentist]
Janina Zawistowska, teacher
Lena Selm, writer
Died tragically 13.11.1943.

Locals alive at that time attribute Paulina/Bella's survival to the fact that the murderers knew her to be a *Wascherin* and, oddly, presumed that as such she could not possibly be a communist. It had been almost three years since all the Jews of Tykocin had been murdered. There were no longer any Jews living in the town at that time other than Bella and Lena Selm, as far as I know. The few survivors of the August 1941 massacre were on the run, either taking shelter on and off with gentiles in the vicinity when they could, surviving in the forest and in various hideaways, or fleeing and sheltering for a time in the Białystok ghetto until it was liquidated in November 1943.[31]

An excerpt of historical fiction by Bogusław Kosel from the exhibition catalogue*

In the spring of 1944, the atmosphere in the city was very tense. The feeling was that the Germans weren't going to win the war. We received messages coming from British radio broadcasts and, occasionally, from Soviet newspapers indicating that the Red Army would appear in our parts at any moment. Suddenly on 25 May 1944, something critical occurred. The whole town was on edge. Partisans had ambushed and fired at three German vehicles near Jeżewo. The German military police commander in Tykocin, Phillip Schweiger, was shot and killed. Everyone in the city was afraid of retaliation and the consequences that surely would follow.

On 27 May 1944, at dawn, German soldiers surrounded Tykocin and began to rush people to the market square. Trucks appeared and were loaded first with the men, and later with the women and older children. There was chaos and turmoil everywhere; shots could be heard from time to time–coming from the Germans who were chasing after those who tried to escape. Anyone who had a chance tried to hide from the enemy soldiers. While the next truck in line was being loaded, I took a few steps back and rushed towards Poświętna Street. I heard the whistling of bullets around me, but I ran without turning my head. I ran into one of the yards and hid in an open barn. There, I eventually fell asleep. When I awoke that evening things had calmed down in the town. My war was over. Two months later, the Russians entered Tykocin, but let someone else tell you about that.

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* "And the War Has Come, An Exhibition on the 80th Anniversary of the Outbreak of World War II," by B. Kosel and O. Skieterska, Tykocin Museum, 2019, https://tykocin1939.wixsite.com/1945.

A Spectacle of Revenge[32]

In May of every year, there is an open-air gathering in front of the Tykocin church, memorializing the arrest and sudden deportation of the local Christian Poles by the Germans on May 27, 1944. It is no coincidence that this ceremony about Christian suffering is set in front of the church on Czarniecki Square, the town's main square. Around 1,500 people in the area from outlying villages, including about 400 residents of the town of Tykocin itself, both women and men, were summarily rounded up and arrested by the German gendarmerie and SS troops that day, as it turns out, less than three months before the Russians were to enter the town on August 13. Only children, pregnant women, and the elderly were spared. Those arrested that day were taken to various concentration camps. One hundred and seven of the deportees died in the camps. I asked a local man how the townspeople generally relate to this highlighting of Polish suffering in a place so heavily marked for its horrendous Jewish suffering. His response is telling: "So much attention is directed at Jewish suffering. Of course, they did suffer disproportionately. But the descendants of the Poles from those days are still here in town, are alive. All the Jews are gone."

The memorial to the 1944 Polish victims of German oppression is given voice by their living descendants, in the form of a more localized, more grounded remembrance of the Poles who suffered at the hands of the Germans as compared with the memorial for the Jews, now long gone and without any living local representation. The numbers and percentages of Christians versus Jews who were killed during the war are incomparable. The Poles who died in the concentration camps did not even constitute ten percent of the gentile population of the town, whereas over ninety-five percent of the town's Jews were exterminated, echoing the radical disproportion of Jews versus gentiles killed during the

war in Poland as a whole. These disproportionate numbers by no means diminish the pain each of the "communities" suffered and, to varying degrees, continue to suffer.

The year was 1944. The war was not going well for the Germans. The Jews of Tykocin had been all but eliminated in August 1941, though there were presumably still a number of survivors on the run. But by that time, German attention was not focused on their "hunt" for Jewish survivors in hiding, the *Judenjagd*, as it was known in German.[33] In May of that year the local dynamic in Tykocin changed dramatically when the Polish underground, as it turns out mistakenly, assassinated the German gendarmerie commander of Tykocin, Lieutenant Philipp Schweiger, locally known as the "good German" because of his sympathy to the Polish cause, instead of their planned target, Erich Koch, infamous Gauleiter of the Nazi Party in East Prussia and Chief Civil administrator of Bezirk-Białystok, as that part of occupied Poland was named by the Germans. Koch was known to have been one of the cruelest, most heartless SS officers in the area, a person directly responsible for the murder of untold numbers of Jewish and Christian Poles. The assassination prompted the sudden assembly and deportation with some exceptions, of almost all the Christian adults of the town, an event that turned into a baleful theatrical-like operation and a public display of cruel retribution set in the town's central square in the open air for all to see. Until that event, local Christian Poles as a community had been spared the horrors of the German occupation as direct victims of deadly violence.

A large military truck drove into the center of the square, right in front of the church. On the bed of the truck lay the coffin of Lieutenant Schweiger, prominently displayed so that everyone would know the Germans' reason for the mass deportation. The square was surrounded by a temporary wire fence erected for the

deportation. Hundreds of men and women were arrested and corralled into the fenced-off area, and then loaded onto the waiting trucks. Mothers and fathers were separated from their children, many of whom gathered outside the fence, crying for their parents. When the trucks departed, most of the children were taken to the nearby church. The church reverberated with the wailing of innumerable children who had just lost their parents to a frightening and presumably deadly fate. Some children were taken in by relatives and neighbors. The remaining townspeople left no child unattended. The church was the "natural" gathering point of a congregation in deep pain, the pain of a people who were profoundly familiar with such suffering meted out to them by their powerful, invading, and conquering neighbors to the west and to the east over the centuries, and who had only a few years earlier witnessed the tragedy that befell their former Jewish neighbors. They knew what the Germans were capable of doing.

Philip Schweiger, the "good" German.

Having earlier fled to Tykocin because she was a Jew, now under her assumed Aryan identity, Bella was among the many local townspeople the Germans rounded up and deported to various concentration camps on May 27. Her daughter, Marysia, was left behind along with all the other children of the town.[34] Bella was herded into the square and onto the trucks along with the rest of the men and women of the town, all in shock and fearing the worst. Two-and-a-half-year-old Marysia was left to

her fate until Wanda Maliszewska, a nine-year old who lived in a house right at the edge of the square, saw her and remembered playing with her at the "undercover" communist dentist's place where Marysia and her mother had been living up until the deportation. Wanda led Marysia straight to her own home, and family members looked after the girl for a couple of days. She was a very cute child, and Wanda remembers embracing her as they slept together those few nights, "… we slept, the two of us … the little one cuddled so tight against me." Wanda was very disappointed when her mother agreed to give Marysia to a neighbor, the Białowarczuks, a childless couple. Wanda's family did not have room for another child in their small, already overcrowded house. Wanda had always wanted a little sister, a "doll-like playmate" as she described Marysia. The next day she walked Marysia to the nearby Białowarczuk home and "came back in tears."

While the adults in all likelihood understood that Marysia was Jewish, the children did not. Again, it was her hair, a giveaway for the adults but, though startling, was not a clear marker of a Jew for the children. In an interview, Wanda was asked if it occurred to her that Marysia was Jewish. She replied, "Jews from Tykocin were deported, actually, murdered, in 1941. I was five years old then. I did not know [about that at the time]. To me the word Jew did not mean anything."[35] No doubt, this was also because her family like most others, preferred silence about the fate of the town's Jews and told the little girl nothing. Her description is revealing with regard to how quickly knowledge of Jews had disappeared among children as they grew up in a Tykocin devoid of Jews and permeated with an ominous silence. If other elders remaining in the area after the deportation did indeed know that Marysia was Jewish, they kept silent about it and protected the little girl's life and those taking her into the bosom of their homes.

Marysia's mother was taken to the Ravensbrück concentration camp along with other female deportees, all Christians. Bella had suffered doubly: first as a Jew hiding under Aryan papers fearful of being discovered, then as a "Pole" for a Polish "crime" against the Germans.

Marysia survived the war, as miraculously, did her mother. Bella returned to Tykocin in 1945 at the end of the war, after having spent some time in Sweden in a refugee camp. Mother and daughter were reunited. The reunion was not easy. When I interviewed Marysia in her Washington, D.C. suburban home in 2019, she described the reunion:

> I must have been four or five. I was playing outside, and I went in, and there was this woman who looked awful. The Białowarczuks were not at home, only Mr. Białowarczuk's mother was there. His mother pointed to the woman and announced that she was my mother. I said, "What are you saying? I *have* a mother."

I do not have an exact date for Marysia's mother's arrival in Tykocin. She received checks from the Swedish authorities dated September 14 and 28, 1945, so her return probably was some time after that. In describing her mother at that time Maria said that, "She was in Sweden only for a short time, but it doesn't go away." When I asked *what* did not go away, she told me the "it" referred to the horrors of the concentration camp experience. When I interviewed her, Maria was certainly able to understand her mother's condition at that time, but as a four-year-old seeing such an apparition and being told that that person was her mother was a real shock. The Białowarczuks were very kind, she said, and asked Bella, her mother, to spend some time living with them to become reacquainted with her daughter. Altogether, Marysia lived with the Białowarczuks from May 1944 until the autumn of 1945 when her mother returned. Her stay with them was only a bit longer than a year, but the bond between her and the

Białowarczuks was very strong. After a few uncomfortable months, mother and daughter moved to Warsaw. Marysia was reluctant to leave the people she called mom and dad. I asked her whether she felt comfortable and accepted Bella as her mother at the end of those few months. "I accepted her. I don't think I had much choice," she replied once again in her matter-of-fact manner. A promise of summers in Tykocin somewhat assuaged her pain. This would not be her last loss of a "mother." Marysia would spend several summers with the Białowarczuks in bucolic Tykocin.

In 1948, Marysia's mother was killed in an automobile accident. Or so it appeared. Białowarczuk claims that it was not an accident at all, that she was intentionally killed in what was a political assassination. The NSZ once again? The death was never investigated. The new regime did not want to publicize anything that related to the activities of active anti-communist organizations. Gross notes the "… anti-communist underground's propensity for carrying out 'punishment,' including execution" long after the end of the war.[36] Soon after that tragic event Marysia was adopted by a family in Warsaw, the new father Jewish, the mother not. Both were communists and old friends of her mother, and Marysia assumed their surname. The father's Jewish identity was never spoken of in front of Marysia as was common in many postwar Jewish communist families in Poland. When asked as an adult about her family, Maria, with sardonic humor, often told people that she has had three mothers.

I asked Maria at what point she realized she was Jewish. There was a religion class in primary school those days, even in Communist Poland, she explained. It focused solely on the Catholic tradition. Her new parents removed her from the class. Was it because the father was Jewish, or because they were atheists, or both? She did not know. That too was never spoken of. The kids at school somehow sensed that she was Jewish, perhaps, once again, because of her "giveaway" hair, and they taunted her for that. All her friends at that time were, she believed, Catholic. It was then that she came to realize she was not entirely like the other girls, not a Catholic, that there was something different about her, that she was probably Jewish. At some point, she came to realize that all her parents' communist friends also happened to be Jewish. Maria remembers sharing her newfound identity with a school friend at the time, a friend who had also just come to realize that she too and her parents, and even *her* parent's friends, were also Jewish, Jewish atheists.

Maria, a.k.a. Marysia, grew up in Warsaw and was a very successful student. She eventually went on to earn a Ph.D. in physics at Warsaw University. In 1969 on the heels of the Polish antisemitic debacle of 1968, when the overwhelming majority of Poland's remaining 40,000 or so Jews were driven out of the country, she came to the realization that there was no longer any place in Poland for Poles of Jewish extraction such as herself, and decided to emigrate to the United States. There, she pursued her career as a professor of physics and eventually as the chair of the Department of Physics and Astronomy at George Mason University in the Washington, D.C. area. She was retired when I spoke with her. She died in 2023.

The Maliszewski family had sheltered Marysia in their home for the first couple of days after her mother was deported. The Białowarczuks looked after her until her mother returned at the end of the war. These simple events hardly seem contentious, but they *are* in the town—even to this day. The issue of local contention is whether Marysia was abandoned and left alone crying on the steps of the Maliszewski's porch until the Białowarczuks took her under their wings, or whether Wanda first took her to her own home where she was given shelter for a couple of days before the Białowarczuks began to look after

her. Two days. A seemingly minor issue. The issue, in one sense, is a personal one: whether the Maliszewski family are also to be recognized as Poles who felt compassion for the plight of a little Jewish girl in desperate need—read, Jews in general—or as the kind of Poles so often accused by outsiders of indifference to Jewish suffering. In 1992 Wacław Białowarczuk was recognized by Israel as Righteous among the Nations for his role in saving Marysia. The museum pamphlet issued for the fifty-fifth anniversary of the extermination of the Jews of the town relates Marysia's story, with the Białowarczuks presented as Polish heroes, a photograph of them receiving the award from the Israeli Ambassador to Poland at the end of the pamphlet.[37] Marysia always told the story of her rescue as it was related by the Białowarczuks: that she was left crying on the steps of the porch until they came for her. That had become her memory of the event.

Marysia's story can be seen as an allegory about one of the most contentious issues concerning Polish attitudes and behavior toward Jews during the war. Were Poles largely indifferent at best to Jewish suffering or did they attempt to do what they could to ameliorate that suffering by helping those in dire straits? The story of the rescue of Marysia is not one of Bad Pole, Good Pole. The evidence points to the compassion of both families, the Maliszewskis and the Białowarczuks, in saving Bella's little girl with curly black hair. Both the Maliszewski and the Białowarczuk families played essential roles in saving Marysia's life.

What are we to make of all of this? Marysia, under her adopted surname, Maria Dworzecka, related what she believed to be the truth of what happened to her. No doubt the Białowarczuks told her their version of the story of her being saved, probably also told others, so Maria must have heard it many times. After a time, children take the stories that parents tell them about what happened to them when they were very little as their very own memories, as what has become known as "postmemory." Maria told me that her first memory was of her mother pushing her away, telling her to distance herself from the adults herded behind the fence to be taken away by the Germans in May 1944. That certainly was a very traumatic experience for her and, similarly, for the other children. One does not easily forget things like that. In addition, she had to "meet" someone she was told was her real mother upon her return from Ravensbrück via Sweden in 1945, then leave the Białowarczuks with whom she was very close and move to Warsaw. In 1948 it appears that her mother is dead—very likely assassinated by local fascists. Trauma set upon trauma for a very little girl.

To return, once again, to the overriding issue with regard to Marysia we have been discussing, the narrative describing her being abandoned and left crying on the Maliszewski porch for two days until the Białowarczuks appears to fly in the face of witness accounts, and tells a story about Polish indifference to the plight of Jews when just the opposite was very likely true.

Maria i Anna

In 1987 Maria adopted a Polish girl as her small way of paying back those in Tykocin who took her in and cared for her during and after the war, as she explained to me. In 2008, when she was 67 years old, she had a documentary film, titled *Maria i Anna* [Maria and Anna] made about the extraordinary events of her life, events that took place sixty-four years before that date when she was not even three years old, events as she purportedly then experienced them.[38] It is unlikely that many of the things she relates are the direct product of the memory of a two-and-a-half-year-old child, perhaps other than the anguish she must have felt losing her mother in such a dramatic way. One might call Marysia's story

the "legitimating or foundational account" of how she came to be living in the Białowarczuk's home during the war. Many gentile families all over Poland took in and raised Jewish orphans, and many of those children lost connection with their former Jewish identity. Marysia would have no reason to doubt a story told to her and to others by two people who sheltered her and gave her love and support. It is very possible that in constructing this story they "simplified" the account, making what *they* did the focal point of Marysia's life at that time, and "elided" alternative accounts.

In the film, Maria compares those with the courage to help Jews or others in need during the war with those who do nothing. In the film the Białowarczuks are presented as heroic, righteous Poles who saved a little Jewish girl at great risk to themselves, while others, passive onlookers, do nothing but look. Willful neglect, it seems. Societies have very few heroes. Nevertheless, there are many unsung heroes, people whose good deeds are not known and who receive little praise for their actions in circumstances where who did what may be uncertain or distorted in "the fog of war."

Teatr

Writer Hanna Krall published an historical short story based on the Purimspiel and Marysia's rescue titled "Teatr" [Theater] in the magazine *Polityka* in March 1997. The story was reprinted in 1998 in a book of her short stories titled ***Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki*** [There is No River There Anymore].[39] The story is partially set in Tykocin during the war. It is, as Krall points out, about the "eternal battle between good and evil" as played out in that now iconic town where the Narew River has been diverted and has long ceased to carry the town's once important commerce to faraway places.

In the story, Krall describes the Purimspiel, set in the open air in front of the old synagogue with locals as extras dressed in "Jewish" costume. Krall's story also includes reference to the November Rising of 1830-31 during which time Jews and Christians, side by side, rebelled against the Russians**.** It was a strange thing to see, writes Krall about the Purimspiel in the short story; it was as if the Jews were back in town. "Teatr" contains other facts about wartime Tykocin, such as the destruction of the Jewish community, the looting of their property, and the 1944 deportation of Christian Poles to German concentration camps.

Krall weaves the story of Marysia and her mother in and around the Purim play. She describes a world in which Jews and gentiles often faced common oppressors: at one time Russian, at another, German. The murder of the German officer by the Polish underground is not mentioned in her story. We do not know why the deportation of the townspeople she describes has taken place. Her multi-layered story is an allegory focusing on the moral stance of Poles toward Jews during the war, the issue I just raised regarding the rescue of Marysia.

In Krall's story, in the early part of the nineteenth century, Poles and Jews shared in the glory of opposing the Russians, the age-old enemy of the Polish nation. Jews are not presented as aliens or as potentially traitorous, as was common in everyday discourse. Poles as a people are not presented as heartless and indifferent to Jewish suffering during the war. In the story, the Białowarczuk family assumes the role of virtuous, patriotic Poles, reinforcing the self-ascribed positive image of the Polish nation. In the process, Wanda's family, which took in Marysia right after her mother's deportation and her traumatic abandonment and sheltered her for two days until they passed her on to the Białowarczuks, is presented as symbolic of "the indifferent Pole." Though not mentioned by name in Krall's story, everyone in

Tykocin knows who the two families are supposed to be. The Białowarczuk version of the story was later taken up by a number of writers and filmmakers, and by the museum, and has become the "official" version, solidified into a virtually impenetrable canon.

Here is Krall's response to a letter about the issue sent to her by Alicja Matusiewicz, the elder sister of Wanda, the girl who took Marysia to the Matusiewicz porch on the day of the deportation in May 1944. The initial sentence concerns whether Marysia was sitting alone on the porch: "I wrote that Marysia was sitting on the porch because that was what Waclaw Białowarczuk told me and that is what was written in the booklet, "Zagłada Żydów Tykocina" [The Destruction of Tykocin Jews, published by the Museum in Tykocin in 1996]."[40] But Krall also recognizes the events as related by Wanda and her family stating that they took Marysia in and cared for her and later gave her to the Białowarczuks. So, there are two versions of the story, two stereotypes of the Pole during the war: Beneficent Pole and Indifferent (presumably antisemitic) Pole. In the letter Krall continues, "I cannot decide who is telling the truth and whose memory fails them. It is therefore my right and my duty to present both versions. . ."[41] Both versions, the two families, serve as metaphors, but the metaphors mask the complex realities of the behaviors of the actual families.

Is all the fuss over the present day meaning of what happened to a little Jewish girl and her mother in Tykocin in 1944 just a tempest in a teapot? Often big issues of national or international scope play out in the smallest ways at the local level, because small and large, micro and macro, are so often interconnected in multiple ways, one standing in for the other.

The Jews are Back

One evening in 2016, stepping out of the Villa Regent restaurant after dinner, I saw that the synagogue adjacent to it was all lit up. I had never seen lights on in the building at night. Then I noticed a number of men dressed in *kapotehs* and wearing *yarmulkes* and sporting sidelocks congregating outside the building. Was this yet another film set? Or were these men revenants, back from the dead, here to unsettle idyllic Tykocin? I stepped hesitantly into the lobby of the synagogue. There was a long table laid out with food and coffee for the film crew and the actors, who were standing around all dressed in old-fashioned Jewish costumes speaking Polish. The men really *looked* like Jews from the past come to life. They were standing around chatting with members of the crew and casually munching on (what surely were non-kosher) sandwiches. I was taken aback by the disjuncture. I asked one of the crew members what the film was about. I was told that it was something set in the interwar period. I asked if I could go inside and watch. They said yes, and were very welcoming.

In the synagogue itself I came across ten or fifteen Polish-speaking actors and extras in various stages of "Jewishness," getting dressed, walking around, talking to each other, or being given instructions by a person whom I presumed was the director. In afterthought, the scene recalled the backstage dressing in Jewish costumes I had seen in Brenner's film of the Purimspiel. I recognized one of the actors–the Jewish Pole who had read the Polish version of the talk I had just given at the old besmedresh museum building which I have included in Chapter VII. The actor who looked most Jewish to me was the local gentile who carves and sells figurines in front of the synagogue.

So, now and then the Jews were "back" in town for all to see, walking the streets, in the synagogue, sitting in the lobby of one of the hotels. They came for a brief moment and then

just disappeared. The ultra-Orthodox ritual slaughterers from London resting in the hotel lobby were dressed just like the movie extras. It was difficult to tell the difference between the two. Two Jewish restaurants in town run by gentiles displayed menorahs, mannequins in old-time Jewish costume, and framed photographs of bearded Orthodox Jews on their walls, presumably to authenticate the Jewishness of the establishments. There were performances of *Fiddler on the Roof* at the synagogue by the Warsaw Jewish Theater, with only one member of the cast "really" Jewish. There was the well-intentioned blond Polish singer at the seventy-fifth anniversary memorial singing old songs in Yiddish that she had memorized but did not understand, not aware that her well-intentioned but hyped take on old Yiddish songs at a time of profound mourning would be offensive to most of the Jews in the audience, many of whom walked out while she was in the middle of her performance. There was the carver of Jewish figurines, the "Lucky Jews," as they are known, sitting outside the synagogue selling his diminutive "Jews" on a Saturday, of all days, the very same man who in costume on the film set looked the most "Jewish" of all the actors, even more Jewish than the Polish Jew amongst them.

VII

REMEMBERING TYKOCIN

Reconciling Stories

I have tried to understand the often conflicting and contradictory perspectives with which Christian Poles and Jewish visitors view Tykocin's Jewish past both as anthropologist and descendant of local Jews. My intention from the start has been clear: to present, in as fair a manner as I could, the ways in which visiting Jews and Christians, locals and museum officials, perceive and publicly present the Jewish past and their long intercommunal relationship in Tykocin, viewed as a part and parcel of the larger Polish social and historical contexts from which they derive meaning. My observations about Tykocin culminate in this chapter with the text of a talk I gave at the synagogue-museum and the audience response to that talk. In my talk, I related both the story of my personal sojourn to the place from which my grandmother and many of my ancestors had come and a story about the ways in which, for most Jews, the town's catastrophic past continues to live on in the present.

In 2018, almost four years to the day after I first arrived in Tykocin, the local museum invited me to tell the story of my grandmother's and my family's connection to the town, and to share my perspective on the ways I viewed Tykocin's presentation of its Jewish past to its many visitors. I was honored by the invitation. As we have seen, Tykocin attracts many Polish Christian visitors as well as Jews from all parts of the world, especially from Israel, to its Jewish memory sites. Despite the large numbers of visitors, communication between Jewish visitors, even descendants of former Jewish townspeople, and locals has been disconcertingly limited. In this light, my invitation to publicly present my perspective on the town's Jewish past turned out to be a rare opportunity for Tykocin's townspeople to view their town through the lens of a dispassionate Jew with local roots.

Poster for my museum speech.

My talk was well received. A full Polish translation was read by Dariusz Szada-Borzyszkowski, Polish-Jewish actor well-known in Tykocin, whom we have previously encountered. The attendees, all local Poles, were totally engaged as he spoke. When he finished, I said a few words in English which were translated, and then asked for questions and comments from the audience. A modestly dressed man in his sixties sitting in the front row, a rather ordinary looking small-town sort of fellow, had been listening especially intently. He looked somewhat out of place amidst the better dressed crowd of listeners. Surprisingly, he was the first to rise from his seat and make a comment, thanking me profusely and, surprisingly, in halting English announced, "I would like to be a friend of yours and a friend of your people [he used the word nation]." He then stepped away from the audience, walked up to the podium and embraced me warmly in front of everyone. I was very moved.

Other listeners rose and expressed their appreciation of my being there. There was a question about my grandmother's emigration, that is, about the reasons all the Kurlander children but one were sent off to America. In answering the question, I could only relate what my grandmother and her sister Aunt Minnie had told the family, and that could be summed up in two

words: poverty and pogroms. The family was poor, though I don't know just *how* poor. The gentiles of the town were also mostly poor in those days. There was growing antisemitism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Jewish Pale. The reverberations from the Kishinev (then the capital of Russian Bessarabia, today's Moldova) pogrom of 1903, though far from Tykocin, were felt throughout the Jewish Pale of Settlement. Other nearby antisemitic incidents were presumably also factors. I reminded the audience that in 1906 there was a major pogrom in nearby Białystok in which many Jews were killed. Fear travels like sound at night.

Talking about antisemitism and emigration in old Poland brought me back to my early childhood, to the world into which I was born. That was the insular Jewish world, the world of Yiddishkeit of my grandparents in New York where, I explained, I had lived the first five years of my life. I wanted the audience to understand the ways in which the Old World, the world of places like Tykocin, carried over into the New, even for some of those of the second generation born in the New World, such as myself. There was our family's move in 1948 from "The City" to suburban New Jersey where we were one of few Jewish families in an overwhelmingly Christian neighborhood. We were the first members of our larger family to leave the Jewish world of New York City, to leave the security and familiarity of a community dominated by Jews, for the vast unknowns of *goyishe*, that is, gentile America. The neighbors to whom we felt closest and saw the most of in the community in which we lived were Christian, as were all the families but one on our street. For some reason, we never befriended that Jewish family. Their house was a blank in my mind; I never knew who those people were, never remember seeing any of them. At first, with some trepidation, later as though it was only normal and natural, my mother became best friend

with the gentile woman who lived in the house right next door to us. But along with emerging warmth and friendship across religious and ethnic lines, and in the midst of the inevitable and much desired assimilation into the postwar American way of life, there was also the persistent ancient curse of antisemitism in its New World setting.

As I related my childhood experience, the audience's ears perked up. I explained to them how moving to the United States from Tykocin, though a daunting journey halfway around the world, did not necessarily bring the "end" of old-world Jewish life to my family. The real "lived" transition began in 1948 with the move to suburbia. After the question-and-answer part of the talk was finished, a woman sitting near the front of the audience came up to me and told me how much she enjoyed my presentation. She told me that she was a candidate for mayor in the upcoming election and if elected would invite me to join her as an advisor! I never knew whether or not she was serious as I later learned that she had lost the election.

Sitting along the side of the room close to the podium, Maria Markiewicz, who other than her son Józef, knew me better than anyone else in Tykocin, rose and explained at length why she thought my presence in Tykocin and my contributing in this way were so important for her personally and for the town. In her own words:

> We are here at this gathering today, one which is so important for the future of Tykocin's Jewish heritage. This is a heritage not in the material sense of the word. We are here to begin to regain a natural continuity of being, simply by having Jewish descendants of old Tykocin families here with us in Tykocin. That continuity was violently ruptured, not only in the sense that the community perished, that the people themselves perished, that their material possessions are gone, that the Jewish neighborhood and their homes were almost entirely destroyed, but also in the sphere of memory, of remembering,

and as a result, something essential was tragically broken. In any case, when normal life does not continue on, it is only natural that memory suffers. So, I think that this gathering today is an especially important moment, and one that bodes well for the future. The fact that we are now talking about Alan's grandparents provides an opportunity for every one of us to be reminded of the history of their own family, their own grandparents. And so, it happens that my own family too had its emigrants; they too left Tykocin for the U.S., [around the same time as Alan's] and then some of them returned.

I was very moved at the way Maria welcomed me to the town of my ancestors, always repeatedly connecting the Jews and Christians as neighbors, past and now even present. My presence, almost as if I were a revenant of all past Jews, seemed, in her mind, to mend a broken chain of relationships going back centuries, relationships that were the ancient warp and woof of Tykocin society, of her hometown. In her words, my presence acquired a profound symbolic meaning larger than myself, and that affected me deeply.

Maria continued:

> There is a space somewhere, at the far side of time as [Alan] said, where those communities led a normal life, and I think that despite the tragedy that took place during the war that put an end to our centuries long common existence, that it may still be possible to move to another platform, that is, to move on to another time and space, and return to the past, so to speak, by rebuilding the present.
>
> After we had displayed the photographs of Alan's grandmother and great-grandmother and her old Russian passport at our Czarnieckiego Square 10 "133 Stories" exhibition, others of Jewish origin whose ancestors had emigrated from Tykocin began contacting us, people whose ancestors had left at about the same time as his grandmother, and they asked us to include their stories, the stories of their families and their photographs in the exhibition. A new platform is slowly beginning to be raised, one in which the Jewish inhabitants of Tykocin, the

> community that departed, will, in a sense, come alive again. In fact, in one way, we can say that they did not leave us because we can have someone like Alan here with us. I think this is a very important moment, and I sense that all of you share that view.

The point Maria Markiewicz made about the ways in which a connection with the past, now long gone, impacts on today's reality brings to mind William Faulkner's often quoted words about how the past is not dead; it is, indeed, not even past. As Maria reminds us, though, the past does vanish; it does not continue to exist if we have not intentionally made it a part of our present-day lives.

What is Remembered?

What is "remembered" when we remember the Jews of Tykocin? Almost nothing is actually *remembered* firsthand, since there is now almost no one alive to have done the remembering. And even if there were, their "remembering" would have been a construction prey to memory deterioration of over eighty years of time, continually tempered by the interests and perspectives of the ever-changing present. For those who attempt to memorialize the Jewish past in Tykocin the question we must ask of them is what of all the possible things from the past that could be memorialized have they chosen to present publicly at this time. This holds true for the museum and its buildings, its various activities, and its exhibitions. The museum's thought-provoking, "We the Jewish People Came to Tykocin Ages Ago," and the ongoing private exhibition "133 Stories" at the Markiewicz home on Czarniekiego Square 10, are forerunners of a concerted effort to memorialize the dead in the town itself. The Jewish past of Tykocin is also being shaped by the town's memorial ceremonies, the innumerable tour busses full of memory-site visitors who come and walk around the

town, by various commercial activities relating to Jews or Jewish life in the past, by all the tourism pamphlets and other written materials, by the many documentary films shot in and about the town, and by the feature films set in the town. The restaurants serving Jewish food, and the shops selling "Jewish" trinkets and the like, also bolster memory of Tykocin, whether representative or not, or intended as such or not. And then there is the placement of a plaque with the family names of all those murdered in August 1941, on August 25, 2021, on the eightieth anniversary of the slaughter. I shall return to the plaque at the end of this chapter.

Some of the local museum presentations, which I have seen on occasion over the past few years, carry highly charged, sometimes diametrically opposite meanings for locals and for Christian and Jewish visitors. That is to be expected. The exhibition of retrospectively executed postwar drawings of ghetto scenes portraying Jews in a nearby town in the late 1930s by Józef Charyton that I have discussed in Chapter IV is a case in point.

How will people learn that Polish Jews, one hundred years ago, even in a small town like Tykocin, were quite diverse in their lifestyles and cannot easily fit into a stereotyped mold, how the nearby city of Białystok was a dynamic cosmopolitan meeting-place of a multitude of ethnic groups and social classes? I suggest a visit to the POLIN Museum in Warsaw as the best place to begin. I would hope that the local museum in Tykocin, combined with the efforts of individuals from the local community, will continue its important work and that those who work there will be joined by descendants of the old Jewish community who could play a more active role in connecting with the living community of Tykocin.

The past or some version of it in constant flux is very much with us today, and as individuals and as a society we are constantly recreating alternative pasts as we change our needs and interests over time and encounter new information. Moreover,

as W. G. Sebald reminds us–as unlikely as his observation may seem–many of us, "have appointments to keep in the past … on the far side of time."

For Tykocin's Jews residing in the town just before the war, there was to be no future. Today, their past largely remains unknown. Try as we may, that past cannot be recaptured. It can only be assembled in a very limited and ever-changing way by Christian Poles and by Jews, as well as by others who choose to pay homage to the Jews who once lived in the town. Tykocin as a tourist destination and site of memorialization makes available a few fragments of that lost past, a past that is assembled in various, often competing, versions. In any case, when we cross to the "far side of time" we are not entering The Past, but rather find ourselves face-to-face with a numinous crucible at the threshold of past and present where we can assemble and mix time, place, context, and person with the imperfect tools of today and create a fragile alloy of now and then.

The 80th Anniversary Memorial Ceremony: Remembering the "Missing Half"

On August 23, 2021, I received an email message from Józef Markiewicz inviting me as a descendant of a local Jewish family to say a few words at the eightieth anniversary memorial ceremony for the murdered Jews of the town. The ceremony was to be held two days later on the twenty-fifth–eighty years to the day of the killing.

Józef told me that the ceremony was to be attended by the town mayor, the local museum director, the director of the Podlasie regional museum in Białystok, and other local and regional officials, as well as by a representative of the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw, and a rabbi from Warsaw. Józef said that

he would be there as well, representing the POLIN Museum. He offered to translate into Polish the remarks I would make and deliver them at the ceremony. Such a distinguished group of attendees at the town's annual memorial ceremony, until then held in the nearby forest at the killing and burial site, was highly unusual. I was present at the seventy-fifth memorial, which was attended by about sixty descendants of Tykocin Jewish families who had come from around the world to be there. The seventy-fifth memorial was held both at the killing site and in town, and was especially meaningful for the Jews attending, creating a memorable though fleeting community of Jews scattered around the world but bound by their common local roots. No official representatives of the local or regional authorities were present at the seventy-fifth anniversary ceremony.

The highlight of the eightieth memorial was the dedication, in the very center of the town adjacent to the synagogue, of a plaque constructed from layered sheets of iron on which were inscribed the family names of all the Jews murdered on August 25 and 26, 1941. The layered iron leaves were intentionally left to rust, and by the time of the ceremony, had begun shedding rust-

The plaque with names of all the Jewsish families murdered in 1941.

red "tears" which stained the white alcove, discoloring the wall in front of the plaque. Large, jagged boulders were set irregularly on the ground in front of the memorial, evoking inchoate feelings of anguish and pain. This is the first time since the Second World War that the totality of the Jewish victims of the Tykocin Holocaust were recognized and permanently memorialized by name within the town in which they once lived. This symbolic "homecoming" can be seen as an especially meaningful and inclusive step in the memorialization of the "missing half" of the town. This is what I had to say on the occasion:

> On August 25 and 26, 1941, half of the population of Tykocin was murdered by the occupying Germans. That half, approximately 2,000 people, consisted of Jews only. Whatever their Christian neighbors may have thought of them and of their sudden disappearance from their homes, shops, and the streets of the town, some mourning the loss, others perhaps pleased that the Jews were now gone, the emptiness of the town on the "day after" and the days to come after that, must have been a great shock. The tragedy of the murder of half of Tykocin's population is not just about the many Jewish lives destroyed then, though that is the tragedy in its most profound sense. The tragedy was, and still is, also about the destruction of the ancient human fabric of this town, its warp and weft, consisting of Christians and Jews living and working together in relative peace over hundreds of years. The first Jews set foot in Tykocin in 1522. Like the town's Christians who earlier founded and built the town over the centuries, the Jews of Tykocin were also to become permanent residents of Tykocin, a place also built and bonded together with centuries of their labor, their love, and their hopes for the future, a town which prospered with the combined labor of its Christian and Jewish peoples.
>
> As a descendant of a Tykocin Jewish family, I would like to express my deep gratitude to those responsible for placing this plaque bearing the names of the Jews of Tykocin murdered in August 1941 in the center of town where it rightly belongs. For the first time since the end of the war the last Jews of this

> town are to be publicly recognized and remembered in the place where they once lived, not just in the Łupochowo forest where they were murdered. With this noble deed you have, in a symbolic sense, brought them back home. This personal memorial is a profound gesture of goodwill and an important step toward a long-sought reconciliation of Jews and gentiles, past and present, in this society. Bringing their names back to Tykocin now allows those murdered to be properly mourned alongside their Jewish brethren and Christian neighbors, all now resting in peace in the town's two cemeteries. With their names displayed for all to see they are to be remembered as the individuals and families they once were. Let us hope that as time passes, we learn more about these people, about the lives of this "missing half" of Tykocin. Let us also hope that the town's Jewish cemetery, the sacred place of rest for generations upon generations of this town's Jewish residents, will in good time be restored in the name of that "missing half." This ode to Tykocin's missing half and to the town's destroyed Jewish-Polish world is, at the same time, an expression of my personal reckoning with that past as it continues to receive nurture and thrive in the numinous crucible of the present and the future.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, amidst a very positive spirit of remembrance was a voice evoking the other side of Poland, the Poland of extreme ethno-nationalism. Roman Czepe, Vice Administrative Officer (*Starosta*) of the Białystok District (*Powiat*) was called to the podium. He began by describing how moved he and his family had been on a personal visit to the memorial site in the Łopuchowo forest. He expressed concern about the politicization of history in Poland, then proceeded to give voice to history like a partisan politician. "We can only appeal, both to ourselves and to you Jews," he said, "not to mix history with politics, but instead to really try to get to pure history, to commemorate the victims." Czepe was disturbed that none of the memorial plaques indicated "who committed those crimes . . . It is a scandal." He then went on to present a blatantly false account of how the Jews first came to eastern Polish towns

such as Tykocin. He seems to be saying that the Jews arrived in the nineteenth century, relative newcomers to the region. Banished by the Tsar, "They had to leave Russia and suddenly millions came to us." That was a time when Poland was under Russian occupation, he noted. There was nothing the Poles could do about this exodus of Jews from Russia to Poland. That is the answer to the question he poses in the name of the people of Tykocin at that time: "Why are there so *many* of us?" Living together was so difficult during those poverty-stricken times, he holds. So, in the first instance, the Russians are to blame for the presence of Jews in eastern Poland. He then criticizes the POLIN Museum in Warsaw for not telling *that* history, "history the way I would like it," he informs the listeners. Serious scholarly history tells us that the first Jews arrived in Tykocin in 1522, that the present synagogue was constructed in 1642 and that there was a thriving Jewish population in the area from at least the mid-sixteenth century until 1941. Everyone knows that. It is true that Tykocin became impoverished in the nineteenth century, bypassed by the then new railway and the industrialization of places like Białystok.

Czepe describes how affected he has been by the thought of all those killed by the Germans at Łopuchowo in August 1941. We must remember all the victims buried there, he says, "the Polish and Jewish ones, all of them." But there were no Polish victims at Łopuchowo. The victims were all Jewish. Why does he insist on including Poles in this bizarre, distorted remembrance? Attendees told me that there was a lot of shuffling and some hissing to be heard coming from the participants as he spoke.

Czepe ended his speech by asking everyone to kneel and remember, remember that "we are connected by the word Amen." "We are connected by more!" shouted the Polish-Jewish actor, Dariusz Szada-Borzyszkowski, trying to sound a more positive note at the end of this distorted, divisive speech. "We are connected

by much more," Czepe retorts, "I assure you that we will never forget these crimes nor that beautiful, really beautiful history."

Who, among all the participants on that day when Tykocin was honoring its Jews, welcoming them back, so to speak, honoring them family name by family name in the center of the town, does Vice Administrative Officer Czepe represent with his words of Pure Polish History? Certainly not Mariusz Dudziński, the mayor of Tykocin, who, in a short, very moving speech tells the participants that "What happened on the 25th of August 1941 should never have happened," echoing Hanna Arendt's epigrammatic words from a video interview I watched at the Jewish Museum in Berlin in 2011. Dudziński refers to the Jews murdered at Łupochowo as "the inhabitants of Tykocin," not differentiating them from the Christian community as "Jews." This is very symbolically important. "These people also built Tykocin for years," he tells us. "We have to, and we *want* to commemorate and honor those people, so that the truth about what happened here is not lost." Janusz Sękowski, the director the Tykocin Museum, followed with the same sort of conciliatory, inclusive words. He tells the participants that the "memorial was funded solely with money given voluntarily over the past two years by visitors to this place." And he continues: "For almost five hundred years, half a millennium, the Jews of Tykocin shared in the historical development of our town with its castle on the Narew, contributing substantially to the social and economic life of the town." "They were our neighbors," a sentence of profound import in today's Poland.

The voices of the mayor and the director of the museum along with others working at the museum, and those of a number of local citizens seriously engaged in a number of social and political issues including the memorialization of the town's Jews, are some of the many voices of openness, inclusion, and good

will in Poland that have emerged alongside the dark, exclusionary sounds of ethno-nationalism that have dominated discourse in the country and many countries in Europe and throughout the world in recent years, and have influenced international public opinion about Poland and the Polish people.

Where, in the end, does Poland stand today in relation to "its" Jews? In many different places at the same time, to be sure. Much yet needs to be accounted for, to be remembered, to be settled, to be accepted, as well as to be put aside.

NOTES

Notes to Introduction

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3. Joanna Beata Michlic, "The Many Faces of Memories: How Do Jews and the Holocaust Matter in Postcommunist Poland?," in *Expanding Perspectives on the Holocaust in a Changing World*, eds. Hilary Earl and Karl A. Schleunes (Evanston, Ill.: Northwest University Press, 2014), 145.
4. The inclusive moniker bestowed by Józef Markiewicz on the descendants of the Jews of Tiktin/Tykocin.
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7. Shandler, *Shtetl*.
8. Italics added. See Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
9. W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (New York: Random House, 2001).
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14. Marek Kucia, Marta Duch-Dyngosz, and Mateusz Magierowski, "Anti-Semitism in Poland: Survey Results and a Qualitative Study of Catholic Communities," *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 1 (2014): 8-36. doi:10.1080/00905992.2013.830601.
15. Joanna Beata Michlic, "'The Many Faces of Memories': How do Jews and the Holocaust Matter in Post-Communist Poland?," in *Expanding Perspectives on the Holocaust in a Changing World*, eds. H. Earl and K.A. Schuenes (Evanston, Ill.: Northwest University Press, 2014).
16. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir and Avner Greenberg, "The Unrighteous Righteous and the Righteous Unrighteous," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 24, no. 1 (2010): 11-63.
17. Depending upon context I refer to the old Tykocin synagogue as synagogue, museum, or synagogue-museum, all terms referring to the same place.
18. *Austerlitz*, 258.

Notes to Chapter I

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9. Rosman, "Categorically Jewish,"14.
10. For the POLIN Museum perspective see Adam Teller and Igor Kąkolewski, "Paradisus Iudaeorum, 1569-1648," in *Polin: 1000 Year History of Polish Jews*, eds. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Antony Polonsky (Warsaw: Museum of the History of Polish Jews, 2014), 87-127; and for critical perspectives on the museum see Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Iwa Nawrocki, eds., *Poland and Polin: New Interpretations in Polish-Jewish Studies* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2016).
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13. Heiko Hauman, *A History of East European Jews* (Budapest: Central European Press, 2002), 176
14. Malgorzata Choinska, "Tykocin w czasie powstania stzcyniowego" [Tykocin at the time of the January Uprising], *Studia Podlaskie* 16 (2006): 9-40.
15. Henry Morgenthau, "Appendix: Report of the Mission of the United States to Poland," in *All in a Life-Time* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1922), 405-437.
16. Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present* (Boston: Norton, 2007).
17. "Fixes Blame for Polish Pogroms: Morgenthau puts it on Polish Troops but Finds Extenuating Circumstances," *New York Times*, January 19, 1920.
18. Philippe Sands, *East West Street: On the Origins of Genocide and Crimes against Humanity* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2016).
19. Morgenthau, "Report."
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Muzeum Podlaskie, *Zagłada zydów Tykocina W 55 rocznicę* [The list of the murdered Tykocin Jews on the 55th anniversary of extermination] (Białystok-Tykocin: Muzeum w Tykocinie Oddział Museum Okręgowego w Białymstoku, 1996), pamphlet.
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25. Shandler, *Shtetl*.
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(https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tykocin).

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